

Pricewaterhouse Coopers gets PM nod to run Agrani Bank

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia on Wednesday approved the appointment of Pricewaterhouse Coopers of Hong Kong as consulting firm to run Agrani Bank management.

The contract between the private firm and the government will be signed very soon, said sources.

By that time, Pricewaterhouse Coopers will have to submit its work plan, financial package and other plans to run the bank. The firm is expected to take over the bank from March 1.

Earlier on December 8, the cabinet purchase committee approved a three-year budget of Tk 36 crore for the firm.

This is first time a nationalised bank will be placed under a private management under the government's reform programmes.

Agrani Bank has 872 branches with over 12,000 staff with a host of problems including non-performing asset of 51 per cent (as per International Accounting Standard), militant trade unionism and top-heavy administration.

The firm will have to work for minimising the bank's operating losses, curtailing new lending excepting to good borrowers and checking corruption.

Anlima Yarn Dyeing okays 5pc dividend

Anlima Yarn Dyeing Ltd has approved a 5 per cent dividend for the shareholders for the year 2002-03.

The dividend was okayed at the 8th annual general meeting of the company held at its factory premises at Karnapara in Savar on Wednesday, says a press release.

The meeting also approved the annual accounts and directors' report.

Chairman and Managing Director of the company Mahmudul Hoque briefed the shareholders about the performance of the company for the year 2002-2003.

A large number of shareholders attended the meeting.

The company earned a gross profit of Tk 48.85 million and a net profit of Tk 8.75 million during the year 2002-2003.

The company which has entered into sixth year of its commercial operation is one of the best year dyeing plants exporting 100 per cent of its output through knitting and weaving industries of the country.

The company is about to set up a knitting, dyeing, finishing and garments unit which will help utilise the existing capacity.

New chairman of MIDAS

Professor Hafiz GA Siddiqi, vice-chancellor of North South University, has been elected chairman of Micro Industries Development Assistance and Services (MIDAS).

He was elected at a meeting of the board of directors of the company held in Dhaka recently, says a press release.

Siddiqi is the chairman of the Institute of Management Consultants Bangladesh and former director of the Institute of Business Administration (IBA), University of Dhaka.

He has all along been associated with research and development organisations as well as educational institutions.

JOBS training course ends

A 7-day training course on 'entrepreneurship development and business management' for the potential entrepreneurs of Mirpur Benarashi Palli has ended.

JOBS Project, funded by USAID Bangladesh and implemented by the IRIS Centre at the University of Maryland, conducted the course from December 8 to December 15, 2003, in Dhaka recently, says a press release.

The entrepreneurs earlier received a two-month skill development 'training on designing, colour combination and quality improvement of Benarashi saree'.

The training was imparted by an Indian facilitator in collaboration with JOBS Project.

S M Shahidullah, manager training, and Mafuza Alam, deputy manager training of JOBS Project, conducted the course.

Ship-breakers set for a slump

Price of old ships goes up 50pc in two months

NURUL ALAM, Ctg

The ship-breaking industry has been threatened with the decline in import of old scrap ships for the last two months due to price hike in the international market.

About 80 per cent of the total 32 ship-breaking units at Sitakunda has become inoperative while the others are now engaged in breaking vessels imported long before.

The crisis in ship-breaking industry also hit the re-rolling mills, which mainly use raw materials from the scrapped ships to manufacture rods and corrugated sheets.

The price of old ships has gone up by over 50 per cent in the last two months, sources in the ship-breaking industry said. Now these ships are sold at over 300 US dollars per ton, which was below 200

dollars two months ago.

"We cannot compete in the international market for this unusual price hike," said Kabir Khan, secretary of Bangladesh Ship Breakers Association (BSBA). "Moreover, import duty on scrap ships is also high," he added.

Khan said only three small ships have been imported for scrapping after the price increase. "Usually, on average ten vessels are brought from abroad per month. But now our ship breakers are losing interest to import old ships."

Anam Chowdhury, a beaching captain engaged by ship-breakers at Sitakunda said, "Now I don't find ships for beaching in the yards most of which remain idle."

"With the suspension of ship breaking works, huge workforce in this highly labour intensive industry fell unemployed," he added.

The ship-breaking industry employs about three lakh labourers in 32 units on the Sitakunda coast. About 10 lakh people directly or indirectly depend on this sector, association sources said.

Several hundred shops sprung up around the ship breaking yards to sell goods and accessories, including generators, toiletries, furniture and cables, collected from the scrapped ships.

Industry sources said with the rise in freight charges across the globe most of the shipping companies are now pressing their old vessels into the commercial operation after repairing them instead of selling them.

As a result, there has been a shortage of scrap vessels in the global markets, said Captain Habibur Rahman, a nautical surveyor of Mercantile Marine

Department

Old vessels, especially oil tankers, are usually imported from different ports in the Gulf and Singapore.

Meanwhile, about 70 per cent of the re-rolling mills using raw materials from the ship-breaking industries, have been forced to suspend operation due to lack of scraps.

"Thousands of our workers are now unemployed while the development works are also being disrupted," said Abu Bakar, vice president of Re-rolling Mills Association.

Ship-breaking units supply about one million tons of scraps annually and the government earns Tk 600 crore revenue from this sector, association sources said.

AMCL-Pran declares 24pc dividend

Agricultural Marketing Company Limited (AMCL)-Pran has declared a 24 per cent dividend for its shareholders for 2002-03.

The declaration was made at the company's 18th annual general meeting held in Dhaka on Wednesday, says a press release.

The pre-tax net profit of the company increased from Tk 43.41 million in 2001-02 to Tk 44.39 million in 2002-03 while gross sales went up from Tk 789 million to Tk 840 million, registering an increase of 6.46 per cent, the AGM was told.

The gross profit increased to Tk 196.04 million in 2002-03 as against Tk 182.64 million of last fiscal.

Lt Col (Retd) Mahtabuddin Ahmed, chairman of the company, presided over the meeting.

Among others, Ahsan Khan Chowdhury, deputy managing director of the company, Akhter Imam, director, Md Eleas Mridha, executive director, and Pradi Kar Chowdhury, director (Business Development), attended the meeting.

UPS Asia Pacific regional official visits Dhaka

Manager-Service Contractors, South Asia Pacific Region of United Parcel Service (UPS) Naem Butt visited Dhaka recently to hold a strategic meeting with Air Alliance Limited (AAL), service partner of UPS in Bangladesh.

Butt met AAL Chairman Abdul Mannan, Managing Director Rezaul Rahman, Chief Executive Officer Atif Rahman in Dhaka to discuss growth initiatives for the coming years, says a press release.

Training and other human resource development issues were also discussed in the meeting.

UPS is a leading express package delivery company in the world established in 1907.

Businesses seek bank clearing house facility at Benapole

BSS, Benapole

Clearing and forwarding agents and other business people here laid stress on opening of a 'bank clearing house facility' at local Sonali Bank to facilitate easy transfer of money from other banks on business account.

Speaking to a FBCCI delegation led by its President Abdul Awal Mintoo recently en-route to Kolkata, they said as Sonali Bank is giving the treasury service facility for the government, a local clearing house would help avoid risk of carrying cash and waste of time in releasing goods.

They also emphasised the need for expanding and improving the infrastructure of the land port while much of its handling capacity and revenue potentials remained compromised from informal cross border trade.

According to local business sources, at least 30 major smuggling cross points, besides as many small others are operating around this major land port that takes the load of about 80 per cent of imports by road from India.

The local sources explained the operation of some major routes saying their merchandise come to the main Jessore-Benapole road at different collection points for final transportation to Dhaka.



PHOTO: STAR

Visitors look at a high-rise building model at a stall at the housing fair at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel. The four-day exposition organised by Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh (Rehab) will remain open to public from 9am to 8pm till tomorrow.

Discounts, gifts add spices to Rehab fair

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Land developers, building material suppliers and financial institutions have come up with discount, gifts and special offers at the Rehab Housing Fair 2003 that began at the Dhaka Sheraton Hotel on Wednesday.

They also arranged raffle draws with attractive prizes for the customers who will make booking of plots, apartments, shops or commercial spaces at the fair.

Brac Concord Lands Ltd makes a business promotion offer for their customers. "We are giving prize bonds worth Tk 7,500 as gift for every single booking of a plot from any of our projects," said an official of the company.

The company will also arrange a raffle draw at the end of the fair to give a special prize to one of the clients who will purchase the company's plot during the fair.

Rangs Properties Ltd, a sister concern of Rangs Group, is offering the clients a special gift. "We're giving one 21-inch colour televi-

sion to customers for each booking of flat or showroom," said Masud Sajjad, senior executive (sales) of Rangs Properties Limited.

East West Property Development (Pvt) Limited, a concern of Bashundhara Group, has announced special offers that include a 21-inch colour television as gift for booking every plot or flat, and a raffle draw. The first prize in the draw is a new car.

Sheltech is offering special discount of Tk 50,000 to Tk 150,000 on apartments. "Our apartments are located at Dhanmondi, Banani, Uttara, Gulshan, Mirpur, Paribagh, Mohammadpur and Green Road," said Mushfiqur Rahman Khan, manager of Sheltech.

Navana Real Estate Ltd, Building Technology & Ideas Ltd, Ideal Home Builders Limited, Russel Lodge Holdings Ltd, Metro Makers and Developers Limited, Amin Mohammad Lands Development, Northern Foundation Limited, Queens Garden and Tropical Homes Limited are also offering gifts and

discounts.

Apart from the developers and building material providers the participating financial institutions have also announced reduced rate of interest on home loans.

National Housing Finance and Investments Limited, Industrial Development Leasing Company of Bangladesh Limited (IDLC) and Delta Brac Housing Finance Corporation Ltd (DBH) are offering housing loans at 14.25 per cent interest rate at the fair, down from 14.75 per cent, 14.90 per cent and 15 per cent they normally charge.

The entry fee at the four-day fair organised by Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh (Rehab) has been fixed at Tk 10 per person and the entire gate money will be distributed among the distressed people.

Fair organisers are also arranging raffle draws on every hour's ticket purchase and Shah Cement is offering gifts for three winners of every draw.

Huge crowd flocks to housing exposition

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Prospective buyers and enthusiastic people flocked to the Rehab Housing Fair 2003 yesterday, the second day of the four-day exhibition, at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel.

The exhibitors were found busy talking to the visitors giving details about the apartments, housing projects, plots and commercial spaces available for sale.

The developers are showcasing building models and housing plans at the fair to inform the customers of their location, size, price and other features.

Many participating firms are screening advertisements of their products on television monitors at their stalls to attract customers.

A total of 58 developers, 10 building material suppliers and three financial institutions are taking part in the third edition of the fair that began on Wednesday.

Real Estate and Housing

Association of Bangladesh (Rehab) organised the fair offering the people a wide range of choices under a single roof.

The visitors are showing keen interest in collecting information about plots, flats, shops and commercial spaces offered by participating companies.

"We are participating at the show to introduce customers with our projects located in different areas in Dhaka," said Rafiqul Islam, sales and marketing executive of Building Technology and Ideas Ltd.

Visitors are also gathering at the stalls of Delta Brac Housing Finance Corporation Ltd (DBH), Industrial Development Leasing Company of Bangladesh Limited (IDLC) and National Housing Finance and Investments Limited who provide house building loans.

Although these financial institutions are offering reduced interest rates at the fair, visitors expressed their dissatisfaction over

the high rate of interest on housing loans.

"The rate is still extremely high. It should be cut down," Minhaz Uddin, a businessman from the city's Mirpur area, told The Daily Star at the fair venue.

When asked, officials of those financial intuitions said they are non-banking institutions and they have to depend on banks to fix the interest rates.

Apart from plots and lands, people are also visiting different stalls that are showcasing building materials. A total of ten building material providers put paints, ceramics, water tanks and aluminium on display at the fair.

Amin Mohammad Group, Concord Real Estate and Building Products Ltd, East West Property Development (Pvt) Ltd and Jamuna Builders Limited are the co-sponsors of the fair which will remain open to public from 9am to 8pm till Saturday.



PHOTO: AMCL-PRAN

Agricultural Marketing Company Limited Chairman Lt. Col (Retd) Mahtabuddin Ahmed presides over the 18th annual general meeting (AGM) of the company held in Dhaka on Wednesday. Among others, Ahsan Khan Chowdhury, deputy managing director of the company, Eleas Mridha, executive director (PRAN), Pradi Kar Chowdhury, director (Business Development), and Akhter Imam, director, were present.

Saarc trade fair from tomorrow in Dhaka

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

A five-day Saarc trade fair begins in Dhaka tomorrow aiming at expanding intra-regional trade among the seven Saarc countries.

Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury will inaugurate the fifth edition of the fair at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre.

Indian State Minister for Commerce and Industry S Mookherjee and Bangladesh Commerce Ministry Advisor Barkat Ullah Bulu, Saarc Secretary General OAMA Rahim and Bangladesh Commerce Secretary Suhel Ahmed will attend the inaugural ceremony.

Excepting the Maldives, all other Saarc countries will take part in the show to display a wide range of products and services available.

"The fair will provide a unique scope for the South Asian nations to explore their export opportunities in other countries in the region," Mahmud Reza Khan, director (information) of the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB), told The Daily Star.

According to available statistics, the share of Saarc countries in global trade is only 3.4 per cent, which is very much lower than that of other regional blocs like Association for Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) and EU.

According to Khan, Indian companies will showcase engineering items, auto parts, pneumatic and hydraulic components, pharmaceutical, packaging, battery separators, iron and steel items, industrial products, stone items, woolen items, handlooms, sarees, textiles, handicrafts and food items.

A total of 10 companies from Sri Lanka will participate in the show to exhibit chemical products, agricultural items, sports goods, tires, three wheeler, herbal products, footwear, coconut oil, water pumps, chocolates and confectioneries.

Some 10 Bhutanese companies will display agro-products, woodcrafts, fruits, seeds, herbal medicine and hardboards.

Pakistani enterprises will showcase handicrafts, furniture, textile fabrics, bed sheets, herbal prod-

ucts, prayer mats, spices, pickles, table and trolley sets, pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, handicrafts, leather goods and sports items.

Companies from Nepal will exhibit pashmina (fur) products, wooden crafts, handmade paper products, textile items, cotton bags, handicrafts, herbal tea and betel-nuts at the fair.

Some 20 Indian companies have also confirmed their participation at the exposition.

A good number of leading Bangladeshi companies will take part in the event, Khan said.

According to the EPB, Bangladesh exported goods worth \$1.44 million to Bhutan, \$84.07 million to India, \$0.36 million to Nepal, \$31.5 million to Pakistan and \$3.75 million to Sri Lanka in 2002-03 fiscal year.

On the other hand, Bangladesh imported goods valued at \$3.8 million from Bhutan, \$1001 million from India, \$3.3 million from Nepal, \$66.66 million from Pakistan and \$6.05 million from Sri Lanka the same year.

Saarc meeting on free trade ends with reasonable progress

AFP, Islamabad

Commerce officials of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) concluded a two-day meeting Wednesday with "reasonable progress" made on a draft free trade agreement, state media reported.

The South Asian Free Trade Agreement will allow concessional trade among the member states.

"There are still many differences among the member states in the way of evolving consensus on the (South Asian Free Trade Agreement)," the Associated Press of Pakistan said, quoting official sources ahead of a full meeting of the regional grouping.

Saarc, which was founded in 1985 and groups Bangladesh,

Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, will meet for a three-day summit scheduled from January 4 in Islamabad.

Anti-dumping measures, quota safeguards, concessions and the draft agreement's time frame remain unresolved issues, the agency said.

South Asian leaders have long called for a free trade deal but the proposal has gone nowhere amid constant friction between India and Pakistan, the region's two largest member countries.

The nuclear-armed neighbours have moved in recent months to mend ties and Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has confirmed he will attend the Islamabad summit, which is being held a year behind schedule.

Citigroup named in top 10 ranking of FEER

Citigroup has climbed the top 10 multinational companies in Asia in the latest ranking from the Far Eastern Economic Review's (FEER) survey of Asia's leading 200 companies.

The new survey ranked Citigroup, the holding company of Citibank NA, 10th after Microsoft, Nokia, Toyota, Intel, Coca-Cola, Sony, IBM, GE and Nike, says a press release.

The company has also been ranked the leading bank in Asia for the last eleven years. This year it climbed six places in its overall ranking.

ACNielsen conducted the survey, which had almost 3,000 respondents. The Review 200 is made up of Asia's top 80 multinational companies and the 10 top companies in 12 major Asian markets.

This latest accolade follows recognition from a number of third parties including Euromoney and Finance Asia.