Banks roll out Tk 3b loan to hide traders

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Commercial banks splashed out Tk 3 billion in loans to leather traders from Thursday to procure hide during the Eid-ul-Azha.

Four nationalised commercial banks (NCBs) have sanctioned Tk 1.97 billion this year against Tk 1.72 billion of last year. Each year, the NCBs provide about 70 percent of the total loans for the

Private commercial banks and other specialised banks have sanctioned the rest of the amount.

However, hide traders have urged the finance minister to reduce the interest rate on the loan. They also complained to the minister about a plethora of prob-

Following the complaint, the finance ministry has sent a letter to all state-owned banks to make

REUTERS, New Delhi

India will sell diesel to Myanmar

by August and is in talks to buy gas

from the country, Indian

Petroleum Secretary BK

India, which has a surplus refining capacity and exports refined products, has also offered

to revamp Myanmar's refineries

and train its technical personnel,

he told reporters after a meeting of

oil ministers and officials of the

has agreed they will buy diesel

from India. Initially it will be small

quantities, then it will be

later told reporters Myanmar

required five million tonnes of

diesel a year and India was willing

Chaturvedi said diesel would

initially be transported by road

from the 60,000 bpd Numaligarh

refinery, but later a pipeline would

to give whatever amount its neigh-

increased," he said.

bour required.

"The Myanmar government

Indian Oil Minister Ram Naik

Chaturvedi said Thursday.

This year, Sonali Bank will disburse Tk 127.5 million at 9 percent interest rate to purchase hide, according to sources.

Another NCB, Janata Bank, will sanction Tk 500 million at 11 percent interest rate. The bank provided Tk 410 million at 13 percent rate last year

Agrani Bank will disburse Tk 850 million at 12 percent interest rate this year against Tk 700 mil-

Rupali Bank will provide Tk 500 million loans to the hide traders at 9 percent interest rate this year. The amount was Tk 460 million

This year, the NCBs are taking cautionary measures, as the amount of loans defaulted is said to be huge. Earlier, Bangladesh Bank (BB) prepared guidelines for

India may import gas

Says it will sell diesel to its SE Asian neighbour

The refinery, a subsidiary of

Bharat Petroleum Corp Ltd, is

located in Assam state bordering

sumed in Assam and adjoining

areas and part of the rest, cur-

rently sold in other parts of India,

can be exported, Chaturvedi said.

Numaligarh refinery would visit

Myanmar next month to work out

Lun Thi said the volume of diesel

imported from India would "grad-

ually become bigger and bigger."

Myanmar's energy minister

He said Myanmar was keen to

"Our mission is to find a market

for a gas that we have recently

discovered. We find India as a big

market and also a very important

partner for us in the future," Thi

said earlier this month it made a

major gas discovery of up to six

trillion cubic feet in Myanmar and

Daewoo International Corp

the technical details.

sell natural gas to India.

He said officials from the

One third of its output is con-

be built if it was feasible.

from Myanmar

A Rupali Bank official said they will provide loans according to the central bank guidelines. He said those who are not 'habitual defaulters' may also avail themselves of the loan facility this

There are a few traders who cannot repay loans for understandable reasons, the official added. In that case, the bank takes steps to renew those loans and they have so far renewed such loans worth Tk

"This year the bank has decided to disburse loans only to those who cleared their last year's loans," an Agrani Bank official told The Daily Star.

He said amount of loan will depend on the export and production capacity of the clients.

expected to find another 12 tcf in

500 million cubic feet but

production might be higher.

Myanmar's energy minister said

production could be very huge

too. For a reserve of such a scale it

could be at least one to 1.5 billion

Daewoo's partner in the A-1 block,

is studying the feasibility of build-

ing a gas pipeline from Myanmar

India is considering a sub-sea

pipeline or an on-land pipe either

through northeastern India or

across Bangladesh, which is a

shorter route to the gas market in

how soon can we take the gas to

feet or 65 million cubic metres of

gas a day, barely half the demand

and imports 70 per cent of its

"We discussed how much and

India produces 2.3 billion cubic

to India, Chaturvedi said.

"The reserve is very big and

State-run GAIL India Ltd,

It estimated a daily output of

the same area.

cubic feet a day.

northern India

India," Thi said.

crude oil requirement

Lanka to offset price rises with cut in duties

REUTERS, Colombo

Sri Lanka will reduce customs duties on a range of essential goods to offset rising import prices and keep the cost of living in check, Finance Minister KN Choksy said

Choksy estimated the cost of absorbing price increases -- mostly due to higher international petro-leum and what prices -- at two billion rupees (\$ 20.38 million), and acknowledged the measures would be difficult for the government.

"This will be a great strain on revenues. I do not want to increase the budget deficit, but we have taken this decision to offset the impact on the common man, Choksy told a news conference.

He said the budget deficit targets of 7.8 percent of GDP for 2003 and 6.8 percent 2004 would not be revised, adding he hoped continuing economic expansion would offset the increased spending.

Inflation fell to 6.3 percent in the year through December, from 6.8 percent in the year through November, but the central bank has warned the higher petroleum prices and a widespread drought in the island could add to inflationary

As well as the price reductions for essential food items such as milk powder and dried fish, Choksy announced a value-added tax exemption on consumption of up to 40 units of electricity per month from 30 units previously.

Japanese banks make progress in cutting bad loans: FSA

AFP, Tokyo

Japanese banks continued to reduce bad debts in the six months to September last year due to better efforts in corporate restructuring, the government said Friday.

The Financial Services Agency said non-performing loans held by Japanese banks fell to 31.6 trillion yen (298.1 billion dollars), down 3.7 trillion yen from the end of March

Japanese banks "managed to reduce the amount of healthy debts becoming accounts that require close monitoring. Under this category, better corporate restructuring operations and improving business climate helped some debts to become healthy accounts," the agency said in a

Banks also collectively reduced the amount of debts to firms in danger of collapsing, the agency said, adding many managed to bring these debts off their balance sheets by writing them off.

Other African mobile phone

service providers such as

Tanzania[†]a Celtel, Vodacom,

Mobitel and Zantel as well as

Uganda's MTN, UTL and Celtel

Uganda have joined forces to

ensure the schemes success. They

have agreed to offer reciprocal

stolen phones blacklisting services

The European and African examples of regulatory reforms

may not sensitise our government

functionaries. However, you

should persuade them visiting the

website of Telecom Regulatory Authority of India. They have

outlined the problems and solu-

tions to mobile phone theft for

public consultation. In early

anuary, the Indian regulator

invited email responses. The dead-

line for sending the responses ends

Apparently, the trading of stolen

mobile phones will be stopped in

India very soon. But that will not

wipe the Indian mobile phone

thieves out of their business. After all

Bangladesh has been the safe haven of

Indian contraband. Used Indian

mobile handsets will be just another

The South Asian GSM operators

should build a common database on

on their networks.

Buying frenzy buoys up DITF through oval-shaped lump of

Weekend visitors stream into Dhaka International Trade Fair at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in Dhaka yesterday. Organisers reported a new high in terms of turnout

M ABDUR RAHIM

Frenzied buying buoyed up Dhaka International Trade Fair (DITF) yesterday, just two days to the annual trade extravaganza's coming to a close, with organisers claiming about 50,000 people flocked to the fair on the weekend.

Traders said they recorded their highest sale yesterday, the last Friday before the Eid-ul-Azha on Monday. "Though the number of visitors are not as high as it was on other Fridays, sale still soared as most of them really came to buy," a salesman at an Iranian stall said.

"Sale usually picks in the dying days of the fair as sellers offer extra discount to clear stock," he said.

The sales outlets were crammed with crowd lining up in long queues outside the venue at Shere-Bangla Nagar. Police and the organisers had a torrid time dealing with the rush in and around the venue, in a parody of predictions by many stall owners halfway into the fair that it will be a flop this year.

and sale so far during the month-long annual trade exposition ending tomorrow.

"We are happy with the sale and promotional aspects of our products. Business was dull in the beginning but the sale over the last couple of days especially today helped us to recover," said Emdadur Rahman, an official of Satranji, which has earned a name for its carpet made of wool and jute.

The Satranji carpet series starts from Tk 800. It also sells stool made of bamboo and synthetic and other household products.

"I usually walk around [the outlets] in the beginning and buy at

An official of the Export Promotion Bureau, organiser of the exposition, said the fair has been a success having the highest number of countries and outlets since the annual trade event was launched 10 years ago.

"We have done everything to offer best services to the visitors and participants alike. [And] We have received few complaints from

Buyers are mostly crowding stalls selling household products, including electronics and furni-

Crystal salt lamps displayed at an allied product stall caught the imagination of the crowd. The mineral salt. The large one costs Tk 1,000 and small one Tk 750. People are showing keen interest on electronics and furniture.

Singer, Electra International, Rangs Electronics, Transcom Electronics, Rangs Industries, Electro Mart, Hayes&Haer and Limo Electronics have offered special discounts.

Otobi, Navana, Partex, Akhtar, Gold Teak, Mitsumaru and Koncept Furniture are also offering 7.5 to 20 percent discounts.

Commerce Minister Amin Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury and Health and Family Welfare Minister Khondakar Mosharraf Hossain will be present at the closing ceremony scheduled for a

Pakistan-made product works as dim lamp. It diffuses light passed the fag end to get the best bargain," said Imtiaz Ahmed, a buyer from

New DMDs of **NCC Bank**





Nurul Amin

Md Nurul Amin and Kazi Md Shafiqur Rahman have been made deputy managing directors of National Credit and Commerce (NCC) Bank Limited.

Prior to their new assignments, they were serving as senior executive vice-presidents of the bank, savs a press release

Amin started his banking career as senior officer in Janata Bank in 1977 and joined NCC Bank (Erstwhile NCL) in 1985.

Rahman also started his banking career as senior officer in 1973. He joined NCC Bank in 1999 as executive vice-president.

Novartis plans counterbid for Aventis

Swiss pharmaceutical giant Novartis is considering making a counterbid for French-German drugs group Aventis, which is the target of a hostile offer from French rival Sanofi Sythelabo, the Wall Street Journal Europe reported

Citing people familiar with the situation, the newspaper said Novartis had hired investment bankers to see if a deal was worth pursuing. Novartis declined to comment, the paper said. Aventis rejected Sanofi's 46-

billion-euro (57-billion-dollar) hostile bid earlier this week, with Aventis chief executive Igor Landau saying the offer would only be interesting if it were raised 40-50

Landau said Friday in an interview in French business newspaper Les Echos that he was constantly "evaluating the interest to Aventis" of possible tie-ups.

But he once again rejected Sanofi's offer, saying it was "dangerous on an industrial level, dangerous for development and dangerous on a social level (for employment)".

Bird flu onslaught

Asian travel industry holding out

 $\pmb{AFP,} \textit{Singapore}$

Asia's travel sector is surviving the initial onslaught of the bird flu epidemic, with bookings remaining solid and airports still bustling with travellers, industry players and analysts said.

As the avian influenza spread across the region, comparisons are being drawn with the pneumonialike Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (Sars) virus, whose rampage in the first half of 2003 emptied airplanes and hotels in East Asia.

But industry players and analysts said travellers were not shunning the region this time because unlike Sars, it has not been proven that bird flu can be transmitted through human contact.

Lessons learnt from the Sars outbreak, such as more transpar-

ency in disclosing information and closer cooperation among governments, airlines and health authorities, have also helped to prevent Don Birch, chief executive of

Asia's biggest air ticketing and reservation firm, Abacus, said there had been no cancellations among those who have already reserved flights and booking patterns remain robust. "I've got the numbers... and

there is nothing in there to suggest a difference in booking patterns, he told AFP.

"The issue here is to not overreact, not being irrational unlike

we were during Sars.' Birch said the absence of scientific evidence that bird flu, which

has killed at least 10 people, could be spread between humans had limited its impact.

Humans have so far only caught the deadly H5N1 strain of bird flu through contact with infected birds or their droppings, health authorities have said. ZUJI, Asia's most comprehensive online travel portal, also said

booking levels had remained steady "ZUJI has not noted any negative impact on the total number flights booked on ZUJI sites, indi-

cating that while there is a cautious approach to travel, people are stil travelling in high numbers," chief executive Scott Blume told AFP.

However, there seemed to be some "geographic realignment of preferred destinations" with a 20 percent drop in online searches for lights between Singapore and Thailand, one of the countries hit by the avian disease, he said.

US textile industry presses candidates to restrict China

REUTERS, Washington

US textile industry leaders kicked off a voter registration campaign Thursday aimed at rallying textile workers to support candidates in this year's presidential campaign who would restrict China trade.

The drive to "get every single textile and fiber worker registered to vote" was launched in South Carolina, one of seven states due to vote in primaries and caucuses on Tuesday to select the Democratic Party candidate to battle Republican President George W Bush in November.

"This industry is prepared to work hard on behalf of any candidate that makes an ironclad commitment on maintaining quotas on imports from China," Allen Gant, president of Glen Raven, a North Carolina textile firm, said in a

The US textile and apparel sector has lost 323,000 jobs since the last presidential election in 2000, but still employs about 772,000 people, industry groups said. The figures rises to about 1 million people when related sectors are included.

Larry Sabato, a professor of politics at the University of Virginia, said voter registration campaigns were notoriously expensive and "almost always fail to achieve their goals."

"It takes so much effort just to register a relative handful of people and then many of them don't even show up at the polls to vote,"

Sabato said. Even so, the textile industry effort could have some effect politi-cally, "just because of the threat,"

already imposed emergency import restrictions on bras, dressing gowns and knit fabrics from China in response to industry pressure.

It says the one-year quotas are legal under terms of Beijing's entry into the World Trade Organization, which allows countries to restrict Chinese textiles temporarily in response to a surge.

The US textile industry plans to take full advantage of that provision and push for more "safe-guard" actions in the months and years ahead.

"Workers in this country are sick and tired of seeing the work for-merly done in US plants head out the door and over to China," said Jim Chestnutt, chairman of the American Textile Manufacturers

Mobile phone theft: How to prevent it



Global System for Mobile or GSM has become the dominant technol-GrameenPhone, AKTEL and Sheba use GSM technology in their net-

If you subscribe to a new connection, you get a small electronic card called SIM or subscribers identification module. All your account details are stored in the SIM. Then you buy a preferred handset and insert the SIM card into it. The connection is on.

This feature of GSM provides you the freedom of choosing any handsets anytime, anywhere. But such a noble feature of liberty may turn into a nightmare. If you lose (God forbid) your mobile phone, there is every possibility that someone else is using that. Therefore, you immediately ask the operator to cancel your SIM.

Then you go to your operator, pay Tk 575 and get another SIM. Now you buy a new handset. Wow, it is so cheap! Well, it is certainly not an authorised dealer and you are, very much likely, buying a stolen and used handset. Oh no, he says it is imported. Of course it is imported but must be a stolen phone from overseas.

You do probably not like what I am saying. Please ask for the warranty of your preferred phone and you will be refused. Now you will go to an authorised dealer and legitimately buy a genuine phone like a good citizen.

You must be wondering about the phone you had lost. Regrettably your that very phone has been traded in the black market. You feel bad. Because what's the use of being a lonesome good guy while number in their networks. Now nobody will ever be able to use that stolen or lost handset in Bangladesh. If anyone tries, the SIM of that person must be cancelled as a penalty of conniving with the black market. Such measure could be

implemented very easily.

But the real problem is somewhere else. The pirates have succeeded to break the IMEI code and re-programme the handsets. In the UK, a law, Mobile Phones Repro-

PASSWORD

GrameenPhone, AKTEL and Sheba must maintain a database of their subscribers' IMEI code in respective network. Soon after receiving the report of stolen or lost handset, the operators immediately block that handset's IMEI number in their networks. Now nobody will ever be able to use that stolen or lost handset in Bangladesh. If anyone tries, the SIM of that person must be cancelled as a penalty of conniving with the black market. Such measure could be implemented very easily.

the others don't care? Trust me, you can do a lot.

If anyone dials *#06# on any GSM handset and a number will be displayed. This is called International Mobile Equipment Identity or IMEI number. Every GSM handset has a unique IMEI code.

GrameenPhone, AKTEL and Sheba must maintain a database of their subscribers' IMEI code in respective network. Soon after receiving the report of stolen or lost handset, the operators immediately block that handset's IMEI

to prevent the mobile handset reprogramming. France, Germany, Greece, Spain and other European countries are contemplating to introduce very harsh anti reprogramming of mobile handsets Kenyan mobile phone operators

Safaricom and Kencell -- have launched a service to block the IMEI serial numbers of stolen handsets. It will be jointly operated by these two firms and the respective police authorities.

handsets with the Central Equipgramming Act 2002, has been made

ment Identifying Register (CEIR) at Dublin, Ireland. This would mean that once a customer reports its phone being stolen or lost, that phone would be blocked from using across the globe. This would make the stolen mobile phones unattractive to the black market. Such step should be initiated at the Saarc level to protect the telecoms future of

The writer is a telecoms analyst