

## Bank Asia opens 15th branch at Ashulia

Bank Asia Limited opened its 15th branch at Ashulia in Dhaka yesterday.

M Syeduzzaman, chairman of the bank, inaugurated the branch as chief guest, says a press release.

A Rouf Chowdhury, vice-chairman; Arifur Rahman Sinha and Md Shafiqul Chowdhury, directors; Syed Anisul Huq, president and managing director of the bank; and KSA Ansari, branch manager, were also present.

Speaking at the function, Chairman M Syeduzzaman said adoption of latest technologies in running the bank and efficient management have helped Bank Asia to reach at this level.

Vice-chairman Rouf Chowdhury highlighted recently launched SMS (short message service) banking and internet banking services of Bank Asia.

## Transcom Beverages gets award from Pepsico

Transcom Beverages Limited, franchisee for Pepsico International in Bangladesh, has received an international award, 'Blockbuster of the year 2003' for its performance in 7 Up, a brand owned by Pepsico International.

Khurshid Irfan Chowdhury, general manager (Sales), Transcom Beverages, received the award from Tanmaya Vats, executive director, Market Operations of India Business Unit, Pepsico, on Tuesday, says a press release.

Among others, Latifur Rahman, chairman of Transcom Group; Saifur Rahman and Atiqur Rahman, Transcom directors; Venkat Shankar, executive director, Eastern Market Unit of Pepsico India Anish Roy, country manager, Pepsico Bangladesh; and GQ Chowdhury, executive director of Transcom Beverages; were present at the function.

Commenting on the award, Vats said, "The Award is a testimony to the dedication of the Transcom team and the excellent work they have done in the market place to make 7 Up a clear leader in the lemon segment in Bangladesh."

## StanChart holds workshop on anti-money laundering

Standard Chartered Bank organised an anti-money laundering workshop recently in Sylhet.

A number of 50 officials representing branches of commercial banks in Sylhet and also officials of Bangladesh Bank, Sylhet branch attended the workshop, says a press release.

Harunur Rashid Chowdhury of Bangladesh Bank highlighted on key regulations and compliance issues of the central bank.

Chowdhury MAQ Sarwar, head of Legal & Compliance, Standard Chartered Bank, conducted the workshop.

## India's largest private airline to start flights to Nepal

AFP, New Delhi

India's largest private airline Jet Airways will start flights to Nepal and also likely to Bangladesh after launching its international service in Sri Lanka, company officials said Wednesday.

Jet Airways will start daily flights from May 14 between New Delhi and Kathmandu, a route now serviced only by state-run Indian and Nepalese carriers, a company spokesman said.

A company official said Jet Airways was also likely to begin a daily service to the Bangladeshi capital Dhaka in June or July.

The new flights will change to commercial strategy of Jet Airways which was until now focused on domestic routes.

Jet and India's second largest private airline, Sahara, launched international flights to Colombo in March after the Indian government gave them permission to fly to neighbouring countries.

Private airlines were launched as part of India's shift to a market economy which began in 1991 but they were initially not allowed to fly overseas.

# Trade licence holders to submit tax returns

## Govt making it mandatory from next fiscal

### STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The government will make it compulsory for trade licence holders in all city corporations and municipalities to submit their income tax returns from the next fiscal.

"In future, we will consider making it mandatory for every citizen to submit income tax return," Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman said yesterday as the recommendation came from businessmen.

The minister was speaking at a meeting of the consultative committee of the National Board of Revenue.

At the meeting organised jointly by the NBR and the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) in Dhaka, Saifur said, "The tax-GDP ratio in Bangladesh is very poor. But we need higher ratio to ensure government support in developing infrastructure for business."

He also pointed out that all developed countries including the US made it mandatory for all citizens to submit income tax returns.

At the meeting, FBCCI President Abdul Awal Mintoo presented a set of 520 recommendations on tax,

duties, excise and import duties, which the apex trade body received from the country's chambers and trade associations.

Assuring the businessmen of implementing the recommendations, Saifur said, "The overall development depends not only on state of economy but also on other social elements. Unfortunately, the country's confrontational politics is affecting business. Therefore, it is not possible to address all issues through budgetary measures."

On the issue of law and order and good governance, he noted the government has to consider both pleasant and unpleasant measures.

If some people go berserk on roads and the government does not take measures against them it is viewed as failure on the part of the government, the minister said. "And when we take hard measures against these, there are uproars," he added.

Focusing on problems faced by NBR officials, the finance minister said, "They often do not get good lawyers to resolve cases. The Attorney General's Office also does not co-operate with the NBR rather it serves Law Minister Moudud

Ahmed."

The finance minister also said he is not in favour of issuing SRO (statutory regulatory order), but the situation forces the government to do this.

The FBCCI chief told the finance minister that inefficiency, corruption, bureaucratic tangles, poor governance and lack of transparency have slowed down the economic pace.

Mintoo urged political parties to become tolerant to one other to help establish good governance.

He also urged the minister to form an economic competitiveness commission which will help Bangladesh identify its hurdles to become competitive in the international market.

The meeting was also addressed by state ministers for finance and planning Shah Mohammed Abul Hossain and Anwarul Kabir Talukdar, International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) Bangladesh chapter President Mahbubur Rahman and president of Bangladesh Garment Exporters and Manufacturers Association Anisul Huq.

## Newly elected BKMEA leaders meet textiles minister

Newly elected executive committee members of Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers & Exporters Association (BKMEA) called on Textiles Minister Abdul Matin Chowdhury at his residence on Tuesday.

During the meeting, the BKMEA leaders discussed with the minister various problems facing the knitwear sector, says a press release.

BKMEA President Fazlul Haque, 1st Vice-president Habibur Rahman, 2nd Vice-president Abu Ahmed Siddique, 3rd Vice-president Abdur Rashid and members AKM Zahidul Haque Bhuiyan, Abdur Razzak, GM Haider Ali, SK Haider Ali, Shamsul Haque, GM Faruq, Syed Amjad Hossain, Masuduzzaman, Fazle Shamim Ahsan, Hasan Murad and Monir Hossain were present.

## Emirates opens new air traffic management training facility

Emirates has opened air traffic management training facility recently for aviation training at Emirates Aviation College.

Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al-Maktoum, chairman of Emirates, inaugurated the facility, says a press release.

Representatives of civil aviation authorities from Kuwait, Bahrain, and Pakistan were also present at the function.

The air traffic management training department offers a wide range of training programmes from standardised air traffic control courses to specialised advanced courses.

The department is a part of the aerospace and academic studies wing of the Emirates Aviation College.

## Canada powers ahead on cheap AIDS drugs for poor countries

AFP, Ottawa

Canada on Tuesday moved to the verge of becoming the first country to honor a WTO pledge to get cheap generic drugs to HIV/AIDS sufferers in the developing world, with a crucial vote in parliament.

The House of Commons voted unanimously to allow the government to order the over-riding of patents held by drug companies to allow cheaper generic drugs to reach sufferers in the world's poorest nations.

The House voted 229 to 0 in favour of the legislation, leaving just the upper house Senate to approve the bill, probably this week.

The swift -- and unopposed -- passage of the bill in the House of Commons on Tuesday follows a compromise by the government last month.

Under pressure from its own backbenchers as well as the opposition, the government agreed to make it easier than previously planned to over-rule patents, especially for drugs combating such diseases as HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis, both of which are rampant in many parts of Africa and Asia.

## Don't spare sugar in Thai trade pact: US business

REUTERS, Washington

US business leaders urged the White House Tuesday not to weaken a proposed free trade agreement with Thailand by sparing the politically sensitive US sugar sector from tariff cuts.

"Excluding sugar from the US-Thailand FTA would likely have devastating consequences on the overall ambition of the agreement," Sarah Thorn, director of international trade for the Grocery Manufacturers of America, told the US International Trade Commission.

The Bush administration excluded sugar from a free trade pact with Australia earlier this year and provided only a slight opportunity for five Central American nations to ship more sugar in another pact.

The deals revealed the White House's reluctance to take on the powerful sugar lobby ahead of this year's presidential and congressional elections.

# BGMEA seeks separate labour code for RMG

### STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Garment manufacturers and exporters yesterday urged the government to formulate a separate labour code for readymade garment (RMG) sector.

Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) made the request when a delegation led by BGMEA President Anisul Huq met State Minister for Labour and Employment Amanullah Aman at the latter's office.

Huq said BGMEA has prepared a comprehensive code of conduct for RMG sector in compliance with the requirements of international buy-

ers and labour leaders in the sector have already endorsed the code.

He requested the state minister to approve the code of conduct at the next meeting of the tripartite committee of government, garment owners and workers representatives. "We have already taken the opinion of ILO about the code," he said.

Huq said after phasing out of the quota system in 2005, different compliance issues will come up as major non-tariff barriers to the industry.

The BGMEA leaders told the minister that in 1994 the government had drafted a labour code after having discussions with the labour leaders and factory owners. But the

draft is yet to be placed in the parliament and the cabinet.

The state minister said his ministry will consider the issues raised by BGMEA and take necessary steps to resolve the problems in RMG sector.

The delegation included, among others, BGMEA first Vice-president Md Abdus Salam, Vice-president (finance) Anwar-ul-Alam Chowdhury, Director Lutfur Rahman Matin, Chairman of BGMEA Standing Committee on Labour Harun-or-Rashid, Labour Arbitration Committee Chairman Shahadat Hossain Chowdhury and BGMEA Compliance Consultant Barrister JK Jabbar.



Chris Maloy, chief executive officer of CityCell, announces the launch of cash card, which will enable post-paid subscribers to pay their bills in a hassle free way, at a press conference in Dhaka yesterday. Intekhab Mahmud, head of Marketing and Sales, and Shaikat Mahmud, media consultant of CityCell, are also seen.

# Asia surges with FDI, US tops in competitiveness

## Says 2004 World Competitiveness Yearbook

AFP, Geneva

The United States has reinforced its position as the most competitive economy in the world thanks to growing investment by US firms abroad, according to the 2004 World Competitiveness Yearbook released by the Swiss business school IMD on Tuesday.

Singapore jumped two slots to second place in the annual rankings of national business and economic efficiency, as Asia emerged as "a dominant force in world competitiveness," IMD said in its report.

That competitiveness is partly fuelled by western money, with Asia attracting 60 percent of US private sector investment in developing countries, the report indicated.

"For every dollar invested in the

United States, four dollars are invested by American enterprises abroad," said the report's editor, IMD economist Stephane Garelli.

"Competitiveness has so far thrived on exploiting low cost opportunities around the world," he added.

Garelli pointed to the growing US budget deficit -- fuelled by tax rebates and war spending -- as a bigger threat than outsourcing or its trade deficit.

China's Zhejiang region, ranked 19th, and India, 34, were the fastest rising areas in the 2004 report.

They shot up the rankings by 16 and 19 places respectively by tapping into offshore investment from traditional western economic pillars seeking lower costs.

But Garelli also pointed out that countries in Asia, as well as in eastern Europe, had also started to develop their own industries as a "new breed

of competitors" in their own right.

"They will assail western markets, just as Japan did before, but on a much wider scale," he added.

India has become "a magnet for services" not only by attracting outsourced administrative services, but also by developing the competitiveness of its own software, entertainment and financial services, according to IMD.

It estimated that two million jobs in financial services will be relocated to India from industrialised countries within the next four years.

China's roaring growth has turned it into the world's fourth largest exporter just behind the US, Japan and Germany but ahead of France, with a stock of more than 400 billion dollars of foreign investment in the manufacturing industry



Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman (centre) speaks at the 25th consultative committee meeting of the National Board of Revenue (NBR) jointly organised by the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) and the NBR in Dhaka yesterday. State Minister for Finance and Planning Anwarul Kabir Talukdar (left) and FBCCI President Abdul Awal Mintoo are also seen.

# 'Ctg port needs improved security to avert boycott by international buyers'

## Steps taken to comply with shipping code by deadline: Minister

### STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Chittagong Port must have required facilities and adequate security to avert a possible boycott by international buyers, a chamber leader said yesterday.

"Buyer countries are threatening to carry out export-import business with Bangladesh through a third country if Chittagong Port fails to meet the requirements in the next two months," Bangladesh Chamber of Industries (BCI) President AK Azad said.

Shipping Minister Akbar Hossain, however, said necessary measures have already been taken to fulfill the requirements.

Azad referred to the July 1, 2004 deadline for implementing the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code ratified by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and said Chittagong Port must comply with the code.

Speaking at a discussion on 'Role of port in the economic development of Bangladesh' organised by BCI in Dhaka, Azad said Chittagong Port is rated by IMO as the world's second most 'risky' port.

"There is a deep-rooted conspiracy to make Chittagong Port risky and unusable. Now a move is on to blacklist the port. So, the government should take steps immediately to foil to move," the chamber leader said.

Shipping Minister Akbar Hossain while taking part in the discussion said Chittagong Port has no chance to be blacklisted as necessary measures have already been taken to fulfill the ISPS Code before the deadline.

The code ratified by IMO in December 2002 will be effective from July 1 this year, before which all seaports and ocean-going ships will have to comply with the security provisions under the code to avoid the blacklist.

Describing the measures taken to enhance port security, the shipping minister said scanning machines are being installed in the port while the ministry has proposed to procure two new vessels for the coast guards.

About the port's capacity development he said the port is being modernised with the procurement of gantry cranes and other equipment.

The minister said many problems of the ports have been addressed during the last two years and the existing problems would be solved soon.

Ismail Zabiullah, secretary of Shipping Ministry, Abdul Matlub Ahmad, chairman of Nitel Group, AM Subid Ali, former president of BCI, and Badruzzaman Khan Khasru, vice-president of BCI, also spoke at the meeting.

# CityCell introduces 'cash card' for easy bill payment

### STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Subscribers of post-paid CityCell phones can now pay their bills in a hassle free way as the operator has introduced a cash card for paying bills without going to bank.

Purchasing the cash card, the customers can pay their monthly bills by just pressing buttons on their cellphone sets to ensure the bill amount is deposited to the account.

Cash cards of Tk 1,000, Tk 1,500 and Tk 2,000 denominations are available at all the CityCell outlets across the country.

Presenting the card at a press conference in Dhaka yesterday, Intekhab Mahmud, head of Marketing and Sales of CityCell, said subscribers now do not need to wait for receiving the bill, nor do they have to stand in the queue for bill payment.

The more convenient bill payment system will be useful especially for the customers living in remote places and the busy subscribers, who hardly get time to go to a bank or CityCell office every month for paying bills, he said.

The process of bill payment through CityCell cash card is very simple and it is printed on the back of the card, Mahmud said.

Speaking at the press conference, CityCell Chief Executive Officer Chris Maloy said the company will invest \$70 million this year for network expansion.

He said CityCell will introduce RUIIM-based CDMA (code division multiple access) handsets in the market next month.

"This will enable users to change sets without changing their cellphone number," Maloy told The Daily Star after the press conference.

The RUIIM (removable user identity module) card is similar to SIM (subscriber identity module) card but it is compatible with CDMA phones while SIM is compatible with GSM (global system for mobile communications) phones.

## Rodrigo Rato elected new IMF chief

REUTERS, Washington

The International Monetary Fund Tuesday elected Spanish former economy minister Rodrigo Rato as its new managing director that maintains the tradition of a European heading the 184-nation global lender.

Rato was picked in a two-stage vote by the IMF's 24-member executive board, including a secret straw poll that produced a majority in favour of the Spaniard, the fund said.

Rato, 55, succeeds Horst Koehler, who resigned in March to bid for the German presidency. He is expected to hold a news conference in Madrid on Wednesday.

His appointment is considered a triumph for the political status quo over change sought by developing countries that want to end the 60-year custom of putting a European in charge of the IMF.

IMF directors said Rato's selection was a "done deal" before Tuesday's vote despite the nomination of a second candidate, Mohamed El-Erian, a former senior IMF official.



M Syeduzzaman, chairman of Bank Asia Limited, inaugurates the 15th branch of the bank at Ashulia, Savar in Dhaka yesterday. Among others, A Rouf Chowdhury, vice-chairman; Arifur Rahman Sinha and Md Shafiqul Chowdhury, directors; and Syed Anisul Huq, president and managing director of the bank; are also seen in the picture.