

Remittance clocks 11pc growth in 8 months

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

As the recent devaluation of local currency encouraged non-resident Bangladeshis (NRBs) to send money back home, remittance flow grew by around 11 percent during July-February period of the current financial year.

The amount sent by Bangladeshis living abroad jumped to \$331.7 million in February this year from \$256.3 million in the same month last year, posting a massive 29.43 per cent growth.

As a result, remittance amounted to \$2426 million in the first eight months of the 2004-05 fiscal, which was \$2191.44 million during the same period of last fiscal, according to Bangladesh Bank statistics.

"The remitters are now getting much better rate than they did two months back, which is one of the reasons behind this jump in the overall flow," said a banker of Sonali Bank head office.

The increased flow has also helped push the foreign exchange reserves up, amounting to \$3234.38 million as on Sunday.

Central bank Governor Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed on Saturday said present foreign exchange reserve can meet import costs of less than three months.

Present reserve situation is not very comfortable, he said. "But we are trying to increase the reserve," the governor told journalists.

According to Export Promotion Bureau statistics, exports grew by 10.51 percent amounting to \$4785 million during July-January period of the current financial year.

On the other hand, imports rose by 26.65 percent in the first six months of the current fiscal year, according to central bank statistics. Opening of L/Cs in the first half of this fiscal grew by 24.7 percent, which was 15.36 percent during the same period of last financial year.

"Remittance flow and export did not grow in the first half of the current financial year and it is creating a pressure on foreign exchange reserve," said a top official of the central bank.

The import payment has increased and there is a high demand for dollar, he said, adding that the rising oil price is also forcing Bangladesh to spend more dollars.

The foreign exchange market in recent days faced strong US dollar. Different banks sold green-back ranging between Tk63.95 and Tk 64 yesterday.

The target for remittance income for the current financial year is \$3620 million while the income was \$3371.97 million in the 2003-04 financial year.

The nationalised commercial banks (NCBs) are opening exchange houses in important foreign cities to encourage NRBs to send money through banks.

Pre-feasibility study on Tata's \$2b investment almost ready

UNB, Dhaka

Within five months of signing an expression of interest with the authorities here, Tata, the Indian industrial giant, is almost ready with a pre-feasibility study for investing nearly US\$2 billion in three huge projects in Bangladesh.

"We are nearly over and done with our pre-feasibility study on the proposed industrial projects in Bangladesh... the study should be ready by the end of this month or next," a top executive of the Tata group told the news agency in an interview in Jamshedpur, India, on Friday.

A state-of-the-art annual 2.4 million ton capacity steel plant, costing nearly US\$1 billion, would be the flagship of Tata's proposed industrial ventures in Bangladesh, which would include a 1,000-MW power plant (US\$600 million) and a one million ton capacity fertilizer plant (US\$400 million).

"At first glance, the projects look feasible... we think we can make them happening," said the official who wanted not to be named. The three Tata projects would provide employment to more than 8,000 Bangladeshis.

"But there are other studies to be done. After the pre-feasibility round, we have to undertake the actual feasibility study, environment impact study, etc. before embarking on implementation of the projects. It would take one to one-and-a-half year to start the work," he indicated.

The Tata executive said there was no hurry in embarking on the projects without looking into the pros and cons and hoped they would see through the proposed ventures in Bangladesh, "a country close to our frontiers and a nation having so close historical and cultural affinity with us."

ATAB POLLS

Muhaimin-led panel reelected

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All twenty-nine candidates belonging to incumbent President MA Muhaimin Saleh-led panel were elected unopposed in the biennial polls of Association of Travel Agents of Bangladesh (Atab).

Candidates of three zonal committees of the association for 2005-2007 term were also elected uncontested. Kazi Kamal Ahmed, the Atab election commissioner, said this while announcing the results at a press conference in Dhaka yesterday.

He said 12 candidates of the executive committee and four candidates of the zonal committees withdrew their nominations on March 3.

The election was scheduled for March 24. "Since there were no rivals, candidates are declared elected," Ahmed said. This means that incumbent President of Atab MA Muhaimin Saleh will get a second term.

The newly elected executive committee members will elect 15-member office bearer of the association on March 31, he informed the newsmen.

Galaxy Holidays made GSA of Hyatt Regency Kolkata

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Hyatt Regency of Kolkata, a five-star chain hotel, has appointed Galaxy Holidays, a local travel operator, its general sales agent in Bangladesh to promote its hospitality services.

Galaxy Holidays and US-based Hyatt Regency have already signed an agreement to this effect, said Ahmed Yusuf Walid, president and CEO of Galaxy Holidays.

Bangladeshi travellers willing to visit Kolkata can easily confirm their booking for accommodation in the Hyatt Hotel through Galaxy Holidays in Dhaka, he said yesterday at a press conference in Dhaka.

Speaking at the press conference Amit Nag, director (marketing) of Hyatt Regency Kolkata, said, "We have teamed up to offer accommodation facilities to Bangladeshi tourists in India with a view to promoting tourism in the subcontinent."

Hyatt Regency, Kolkata has offered special packages with room accommodation at \$90 to \$250, which will remain valid up to the end of this year. The packages include breakfast, airport transfer facilities, mineral water in room and use of gym and swimming pool, he added.

Transit facility for landlocked states tops WTO talks in Kenya

Altat says on return from mini-ministerial meet

UNB, Dhaka

Trade ministers from WTO member countries stressed the need for providing landlocked countries with transit facilities through other countries to transport goods and improve trade, Commerce Minister Altat Hossain Chowdhury told reporters in Dhaka yesterday on return from the mini ministerial meeting in Kenya.

For example, if Nepal and Bhutan want to transport goods to and from Bangladesh, they need transit facilities through 'another' country, explained Altat.

The trade leaders also emphasised another trade facilitation measure, as declared in the "July

Package" that it would not be binding on the member nations of LDCs to develop their trade infrastructure unless and until they get assistance from the developed and developing countries, the minister said.

However, those countries have to carry out improvement programmes that can be done without help from outside, he added.

The two-day ministerial meeting was held in March 3-4 in the port city of Mombasa in Kenya as part of a series of meetings and negotiations among the member nations of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) before the next WTO Ministerial scheduled for December this year in Hong Kong.

He said the meeting focused on

agriculture subsidy, for which the developed and developing countries as well as the LDC's are concerned for the interest of farmers.

They stressed the need for considering handling charges for agriculture transportation as well as subsidy for fuel oil to run irrigation pumps, Hossain added.

The minister said the meeting also discussed the Mode-4 issue, which calls for temporary movement of persons. Besides, issues covering market access, non-agricultural market access and different services were also discussed in the meeting, he said.

Navana CNG, StanChart launch joint campaign

Navana CNG Ltd, a concern of Navana Group, has recently signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Standard Chartered Bank to launch a joint business promotional campaign.

Under the MoU, Standard Chartered cardholders will enjoy zero percent interest for six months (through InstaBuys) on the CNG conversion packages of Navana CNG. The packages include upgrading of existing manual tuning CNG vehicles to computerised tuning free system.

Monwarul Islam, director of Navana Group, and Geetanka Dutt, manager (Card Division) of Standard Chartered Bank, signed the MoU on behalf of their organisations in Dhaka, says a press release.

InstaBuys is a programme of Standard Chartered to make instant purchase with credit cards and pay in monthly installments without any processing fee.

The offer is available at any Navana CNG conversion workshop in Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet and will be valid until August, 2005.

Novartis to launch new drug

Sandoz Business Unit of Novartis (Bangladesh) Ltd will soon launch a new anti-hypersensitive drug- Mitosan- for the treatment of blood pressure and some other co-existing diseases.

Ashfaqur-Rahman, managing director of Novartis (Bangladesh), announced the launching of Mitosan at a function in Dhaka recently. Enayet Ullah Khan, head of Portfolio Management of the company, among others, were present at the function, says a press release.

Novartis is engaged in manufacturing pharmaceuticals and consumer health products worldwide with headquarters in Basel, Switzerland. The company has been working in Bangladesh since 1973.

Qatar Airways to fly to Tunis, Algiers from May

Qatar Airways has announced a new flight schedule to North African cities of Tunis and Algiers from May 2.

The airline will operate three non-stop weekly flights from its operational hub of Doha to the capital of Tunisia and to Algiers, the capital of Algeria.

Qatar Airways plans to use an Airbus A319 configured in business and economy class and an A300 with a configuration of first, business and economy class on both routes, says a press release.



PHOTO: CYBER SCHOOLS BANGLADESH

US Ambassador to Bangladesh Harry K Thomas visits Internet Learning Center (ILC) after inauguration in Dhaka yesterday.

ICT-backed education key to boosting business

US envoy says at launch of Internet Learning Centre in Dhaka

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Business in Bangladesh will not be competitive unless modern education is supported by information and communication technology, Harry K Thomas, US ambassador in Dhaka, told a function yesterday.

"Education facilitated by digital technologies is vital for Bangladeshis," said Thomas speaking as chief guest at the launching ceremony of Internet Learning Centre (ILC) at Underprivileged Children's Educational Programs (Ucep) in Dhaka.

Professor Jamilur Reza Chowdhury, vice-chancellor of Brac University, Frank Fodstad, deputy managing director of GrameenPhone, S Shapir Khasru, chairperson of Cyber Schools in Bangladesh, and M Mokammel Haque, chairperson of Ucep, also spoke at the function.

The US ambassador said Bangladesh has tremendous business potential. "When I go outside Dhaka and talk to different business people, they remind me how much business potential this country has. I find that modern education backed by ICT is almost non-existent outside Dhaka," he observed adding business people

want to make it happen.

Lack of proficiency in English language and scarcity of computer schools are some of the reasons that obstruct development of modern education, he explained.

Speaking at the function, Jamilur Reza Chowdhury said though Bangladesh had first Internet connection in 1996, the

infrastructure is still poor to offer expansion of cyber education.

Frank Fodstad said this project will take time to yield result. "It will be a very long journey and we need to be patient to see the outcome," he said hoping corporate houses will join and support to achieve the much needed expansion in this field.

Emirates ups cargo flight to Gothenburg, Hong Kong

Emirates Skycargo has announced additional freighter services on its Dubai-Gothenburg and Dubai-Hong Kong routes from March 29, 2005.

In the new schedule, Emirates Skycargo will fly to Gothenburg on every Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday five times a week and to Hong Kong on every Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday nine times a week in partnership with SAS Cargo, says a press release.

Presently, Emirates Skycargo carries toys, fabrics and hi-tech components from Hong Kong and finished telecom products, pharmaceuticals and vehicle spare parts from Gothenburg in its Boeing 747-400F freighters.