

Emirates plans to increase flights in Dhaka

Dubai see more tourists from Bangladesh

MONJUR MAHMUD, back from Dubai

Emirates, the world's fastest-growing Dubai-based intercontinental airline, will increase its number of flights in Dhaka as it found Bangladesh a profitable market.

"We have 13 flights a week with Dhaka having 80 to 90 percent load. So, definitely there is a room for increasing the flights," Nabil Sultan, senior vice president (Commercial Operations) of Emirates told The Daily Star.

Bangladesh market has huge potential and the growth is quite substantial there, he observed adding that negotiation is going on to increase the number of Emirates' flights to Dhaka.

Steps will be taken to facilitate visas for Bangladeshi tourists so

that they can go to Dubai with family members and it would give a boost to the Emirates also, explained Sultan, who is responsible for West Asia and Indian Ocean region.

"Very competitive package will be offered to attract more tourists from Bangladesh in the coming months and rooms at US\$ 37 will be made available on sharing basis."

Dubai is also developing a global standard flower hub from where traders will be able to export flowers to other countries, he added. "We have free zones in the airport and Jabel Ali, an exclusive zone being implemented for the tourists."

Emirates is one of the five most profitable and among the 20 largest operators. It currently operates nine flights per week from Dhaka to Dubai and four from Dhaka to Kuala Lumpur.

The airline posted a record-breaking net profit of US\$708 million for the financial year ended on March 31, 2005, marking a 49 percent rise over the previous year. It carried a total of 12.5 million passengers during this financial year, an increase of almost 2.1 million passengers than those of the year before.

With 90 new aircraft in the pipeline, the airline expects its fleet to continue expanding at the rate of at least one new aircraft per month for the rest of this decade and is on course for a 130 plus fleet by 2012.

"All our routes are profitable and we will operate in those destinations from where we can make money. We see more passengers in the days coming," said Emirates Chairman Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al-Maktoum, announcing the

annual financial performance of the airline in Dubai recently.

Now Dubai has 45,000 rooms to accommodate tourists and the number is expected to grow to 95,000 in the next five years, the chairman explained. "The growth we saw in the region was very attractive and there is no reason we will slow down."

The airline has just taken delivery of its fleets of 30 new Boeing 777-300 and it was the first to order the revolutionary A380-800 double-decker.

The arrival of the Emirates' first Airbus A380-800 in October 2006 will be a major milestone for the airline. For the first time, it will be able to transport more than 500 passengers in a single aircraft.

Onetel to use GP fiber optics network

GrameenPhone Ltd will provide transmission facility through its fiber optics network for Onetel Communications Ltd, a private fixed-phone operator, which is licensed to offer services in the northern districts of Bangladesh.

An agreement to this effect was signed recently between the two companies, says a press release.

AMM Yahya, director, Fiber Optics Network of GrameenPhone, and AR Saber, chief executive officer of Onetel, signed the deal on behalf of their organisations.

The deal will enable Onetel, which is planning to start operation by July this year, to use eight E1 channels in GP-BR optical fiber to expand its network, the release added.

Thai PM slams industrial 'cartels' amid Japan trade talks

AFP, Bangkok

Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra on Friday dismissed local business leaders critical of ongoing free trade negotiations with Japan, calling them "cartels" afraid of foreign competition.

"They cannot maintain the status quo as cartel businesses living day by day, calling for assistance from the government when they're bankrupt," Thaksin told reporters before meeting Japan's economy minister.

"The real problem is that they have to change... They cannot stay put and hope for high tariffs to protect them as they sell overpriced goods to consumers who stand to lose," he added.

Thaksin spoke before meeting Japanese Economy Minister Shoichi Nakagawa, who is here for two days of high-level talks, including on the free trade deal.

Somkid Jatusripitak, Thailand's deputy prime minister and finance minister, declined to reveal what was discussed in his earlier meeting with Nakagawa, but said he was hopeful for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) deal by July.

Thailand and Japan have held seven rounds of talks since February 2004, according to Thailand's Department of Trade Negotiations.

Japan, Thailand's second largest export market after the United States, wants tariffs abolished on Thailand's steel and automotive parts imports.



A considerable number of buyers and sellers of used cars meet at Car Haat, a marketplace for second-hand cars, on Manik Mia Avenue in Dhaka every Friday.

Air Deccan to launch rupee 1 ticket to rope in travellers

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Believe it or not, India's domestic low-cost airline Air Deccan has announced fares of one rupee on its flights.

Four passengers per flight will be entitled to the fares if they book their tickets three months in advance, according to Air Deccan Managing Director G R Gopinath.

"In a few days, we will launch the one rupee ticket booked either through internet or our offices and agents," he told reporters in Bangalore, the headquarters of the airline.

Gopinath, however, said tax and airport security charges would bring the total cost of the ticket to Rs 222. Air Deccan, launched in 2003, has tickets beginning from Rs 500.

On every Airbus of the airlines, 40 seats are reserved for passengers paying Rs 500, Gopinath said. The announcement of rupee one ticket came ahead of the launch of another budget airline Kingfisher Airlines, owned by liquor baron Vijay Mallya, this weekend. India's private low-cost airlines have fashioned themselves on Ryanair and easyJet of Britain and offer 30 to 40 percent cheaper tickets than full-service Indian air carriers.

There has been intense competition among emerging low-cost airlines to grab a slice of the burgeoning domestic civil aviation market, particularly to rope in the budget travellers. The domestic civil aviation market has so far been dominated by three to four airlines in public and private sectors.

S'pore, Indonesia to hold joint investment promotions in Japan

AFP, Singapore

Singapore and Indonesia intend to undertake a joint mission to Japan to promote investment opportunities in the two Southeast Asian countries, the city-state's trade minister said Thursday.

Trade Minister Lim Hng Kiang said officials from both nations were working on the details of the mission, which aims to inform Japanese business groups about investment opportunities in sectors such as automobile and electronics.

India's tea output falls, exports up

REUTERS, Kolkata

India's tea output in the financial year 2004/05 ending March 31 fell 2.32 percent to 830.92 million kg from 850.70 million kg a year ago, the state-run Tea Board said Thursday.

But tea exports in 2004/05 were up 1.51 percent at 185.83 million kg from 183.07 million kg the previous year.

BTTB online cellphone form distribution resumes today

BDNEWS, Dhaka

The online form distribution of Teletalk mobile phone, launched by Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB), begins for the city customers from 11pm today.

The form distribution programme will remain open till May 17 at 11pm.

The website addresses are: <http://gold.teletalk.com.bd> and <http://silver.teletalk.com.bd>

Teletalk official sources said customers have been requested to fill up the form in the website and then they would be given a token number. The print copy of the token has to be kept by the applicant.

This time, the authorities would distribute some 35,000 SIMs (subscriber identity module) among the customers through lottery if the demand exceeds, sources said.

M Obaidullah, managing director of Teletalk told the private news agency that the names of the winners will be published through internet and newspapers. The winners will have to collect SIMs from the authorised bank booths within 5 days of the closing date of the online distribution service.

A Teletalk customer will have to pay Tk 1,800 against a SIM as usual, he added.

Earlier, the authorities were compelled to suspend distribution of forms on April 2 in the face of tremendous pressure of the customers.

Talking to the news agency, Obaidullah hoped that the online system would ease the process.

A BTTB official, however, said private mobile phone operators are yet to come up with the interconnectivity agreement.

Oil prices rise above \$51 in technical Asian trade

AFP, Singapore

Oil prices rose above 51 dollars in technical Asian trade Friday as traders bought back positions in the market despite a sharp rise in US gasoline (petrol) stocks, dealers said.

At 12:15 pm (0415 GMT), New York's main contract, light sweet crude for delivery in June, was up 47 cents to 51.30 dollars a barrel after closing at 50.83 dollars in New York overnight.

Victor Shum, a Singapore-based analyst with US energy consultancy firm Purvin and Gertz, said rising prices reflecting technical trade in various contracts rather than any supportive news.

"There are really no bullish factors at the moment," Shum said, adding the latest gains were a temporary fixture in a market that has seen prices on the downtrend in recent weeks.

"Both supplies and inventories are building up; any upward (price) movement most likely wouldn't be long-lasting."

Oil prices dipped Wednesday on

news of the sharp weekly rise in US crude and gasoline stockpiles but began rebounding as speculative traders took advantage of a volatile market.

The US Department of Energy (DoE) said crude inventories for the week ending April 29 jumped 2.6 million barrels to 327 million, against a predicted rise of 1.25-1.5 million barrels.

Supplies of gasoline rose 2.2 million barrels to 213.5 million, beating market expectations of an increase of 750,000-875,000 barrels.

Gasoline, or petrol, is in focus ahead of the driving season in the United States, when many Americans take to the road for summer vacations.

Analysts from US-based commodity brokerage firm Sueden said the price rally was due to the market failing to break a key technical level despite the data showing rising supplies.

"Further losses are expected although it is evident that there is still plenty of buying in the market," they added.

Pakistan wants to roll out red carpet for investors: PM

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Pakistan Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz on Friday pledged to provide "a level playing field" in a bid to attract foreign investors to bolster his country's economy.

At the same time, Aziz downplayed sectarian violence and terrorism threats, saying they were being contained, and he assured Malaysian business leaders that their investments would be safe.

"On Pakistan's economy, we have come a long way in the last five

years. We have a lot more distance to cover. We have introduced reforms but our tasks are far from over," he told a meeting of the Asian Strategic and Leadership Institute here.

He urged investors to put Pakistan high on their radar screens.

"Pakistan is one of the few countries where there is a level playing field. There is deregulation. You can have a 100 percent stake in your company. There is a very liberal mind-set now in Pakistan," the

former finance minister said.

Aziz identified construction, hotels and health as sectors that offered opportunities for investors, adding: "You can get into any area."

"Pakistan is now on an upward trajectory of economic growth. Pakistan of today and tomorrow is a Pakistan of opportunity and progress," he said.

"Pakistan's economy is back on track so we have told the IMF we will not need any new borrowing," he added.



PHOTO: BAY PHONES

Lars P Reichelt, chief executive officer of Banglalink, and MA Hashem, chairman and CEO of Westec Ltd (Bay Phones), exchange documents after signing an interconnectivity deal on behalf of their companies on Wednesday. Other senior officials from both the sides were also present at the signing ceremony.