

Traders stop import of fruits from Bhutan

BDNEWS, Dhaka

Prices of orange and apple have shot up by about 20 percent in the last three days following a sudden strike enforced by fruits importers on Saturday.

Retailers blamed scarcity of fruits for the price hike in the local market following the strike by the importers.

Importers stopped import of apple and orange from Bhutan, the major supplier of the items to Bangladesh, in protest against a government decision to slash unloading time at Burimari Land port.

The government, all on a sudden, in the first week of November cut the unloading time in Burimari border by an hour and fixed it at 4pm instead of 5pm, importers told the news agency.

SEC warns 15 depository participants

BDNEWS, Dhaka

The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) warned 15 depository participants (DPs) for keeping their clients' shares in the clearing accounts on the record date instead of keeping those shares in clients' own accounts.

Of the DPs, 14 are the members of Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) and one is the member of Chittagong Stock Exchange (CSE), said a SEC release yesterday.

"The clients' shares must be kept in their accounts on the record/book closure date so that they can avail their due rights and benefits declared by the companies. But the DPs did not keep their clients' shares in their accounts," Mansur Alam, executive director of SEC, told the news agency.

Referring to the SEC rules, he said if the shares of clients were not kept in their accounts on record dates, they would be deprived of getting the declared benefits of the companies listed with the bourses.

But these DPs kept their clients' shares in the clearing accounts, which had deprived them of their due rights declared by the companies, Alam added.

He said the DPs admitted that it was an unintended mistake and distributed the due dividends or rights to the shareholders, who earlier were deprived of the announced benefits against their shares.

"We have warned them for not doing such mistake again," he added.

The DPs are: NR Islam & Co, Jamal Ahmed & Co, Zobaer & Co, AB & Co, LRK Securities Ltd, Sad Securities, PFI Securities Ltd, Kazi Firoz Rashid & Co, Dynamic Securities Consultants Ltd, Giasuddin Ahmed & Co, SNM Securities Ltd, Western Securities Investment Management Ltd, Shamsul Huda & Co, Arafat Securities, and Hedayetullah Securities Ltd.

Soft drink 7Up Ice launched

New menthol-flavoured soft drink, 7Up Ice, was launched in Dhaka yesterday, says a press release.

GQ Chowdhury, executive director of Transcom Beverages Ltd, formally launched the new product at a function. Atiqur Rahman, director of the company, was also present.

Oil prices rebound

AFP, London

World oil prices rose on Tuesday, but the upturn may only be technical, given forecasts of warmer weather in major energy consumer the United States, analysts said.

New York's main contract, light sweet crude for delivery in January, added 34 cents to 57.68 dollars per barrel in electronic trading. The contract expires later Tuesday.

In London, the price of Brent North Sea crude for February delivery won 32 cents to 56.43 dollars per barrel.

Monday's trading "saw the fourth consecutive day of decline in prices", noted Dariusz Kowalczyk, senior investment strategist with CFC Seymour in Hong Kong.

He added that "when the market failed to go below 57 dollars (in New York), we saw some rebound, which is continuing today (Tuesday)".

Banglalink reaches 1m subscribers

Announces two promotional offers

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Banglalink's subscribers' base has crossed one-million mark and the cellphone service provider hopes to reach three million users by end 2006, officials announced yesterday in Dhaka.

Banglalink's success is tremendous as it reached one million people in only ten months, Naguib Sawiris, chairman Egypt-based Orascom Telecom Holding, the owning company of Banglalink, told a press briefing.

The cellphone service provider has also announced two promotional offers to mark the celebration.

Under the offers, customers can purchase a connection of Banglalink (mobile to mobile) only at Tk132 while a Banglalink M2M plus connection with BTTB incoming facilities at Tk425.

Sawiris also said, "We have kept

our promises to generate real competition in the market. The market dynamics have changed completely since Orascom's entry into Bangladesh telecoms market in February, 2005."

Customer focused packages and innovative and aggressive strategies are the reasons behind the achievement of Banglalink, Sawiris explained.

He said, "As Banglalink intends to be a major market player in Bangladesh, 61 districts are now under its network."

He said Bangladesh is one of the priority markets for Orascom group. We have already made a commitment to invest \$300million in telecoms in Bangladesh by two years."

Replying to a question about new cell phone company, which is expected to launch its operation in Bangladesh within a short time, he

said, "Five companies in a market like Bangladesh are too much."

However, Sawiris said, "We will welcome any company in the market. But before launching in Bangladesh, the company should study more about the market as the average income of Bangladeshis is very low."

About the further investment in Bangladesh, Orascom Telecom's chairman said some Orascom sister concerns are interested to invest in cement, fertiliser, real estate and hotel business in Bangladesh.

Among others, Lars P Reichelt, chief executive officer (CEO), and Mehboob Chowdhury, chief commercial officer (CCO) of Banglalink, were present at the press conference.



Naguib Sawiris (left), chairman of Egypt-based Orascom Telecom Holding, the owning company of Banglalink, speaks at a press briefing in Dhaka yesterday as Lars P Reichelt (C), chief executive officer, and Mehboob Chowdhury, chief commercial officer of Banglalink, look on.

IMF urges poorer nations to stick to WTO goals

AFP, Washington

IMF chief Rodrigo Rato called on developing countries not to retreat behind a wall of protectionism as he urged WTO members to wrap up a global trade deal next year.

Rato said a World Trade Organisation meeting that ended Sunday in Hong Kong had been a success relative to the "disappointment" of a failed WTO meeting in Cancun, Mexico in 2003 which pitted developing nations against rich powers.

In a statement late Monday, the International Monetary Fund chief said the Hong Kong talks had seen "modest achievements" on the WTO's Doha round, especially in an agreement to eliminate farm export subsidies by 2013.

Rato said the IMF fully endorsed WTO chief Pascal Lamy's call for the broad outlines of

a trade deal to be shaped by April 2006.

"If this can be achieved, a successful conclusion of the round by the end of 2006 should be feasible," he said, adding an ambitious agreement would boost the long-term growth potential of the world economy for all nations.

"And it would help keep the protectionists at bay and lessen incentives to negotiate bilateral trade agreements, which risk jeopardizing the non-discrimination principle at the heart of the multilateral system," he said.

"Let me also stress that we welcome the unprecedented attention given to developing country concerns in Hong Kong," Rato added.

"But too often, development interests seem to be equated with the right to exclude oneself from global markets.

"This does not accord with experience, which suggests that active trade integration offers the best hopes for spurring economic growth."

"Negotiators should consider the lessons from successful development in defining their positions in the coming months."

Rato also welcomed a commitment at Hong Kong by developed nations to boost assistance for poorer countries so that they can fully benefit from freer trade.

But he added: "While an important complement to an eventual WTO agreement, this aid for trade is neither a substitute for an ambitious round, nor should it be made subject to the negotiations themselves."

New brokerage house starts operations

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Primet Securities Limited (PSL), a new brokerage house, yesterday started operations, committing to providing most modern online share trading services on Dhaka Stock Exchange Limited (DSE).

DSE President Shahiq Khan formally inaugurated the brokerage house at Modhumita Cinema Building in Dhaka.

Immediate past president of DSE Ahmed Iqbal Hasan and Altab-ul-Islam, director of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, also attended the function.

The new corporate member of DSE, the first of its kind in Bangladesh, will provide the investors with online account balance checking service round the clock.

It will also benefit them to check the status of their BO accounts and transactions updates within least possible time.

The PSL will also provide margin facilities, day-to-day client confirmation, share transactions through confirmation by phone and fax and home service to its clients.

Addressing the function, the DSE president said the online BO account balance checking services of PSL will add new dimension to DSE's state-of-the-art technology adoption drive.

He said the DSE has infused dynamism into stock trading by incorporating 35 new members last year.

"I believe that with these new entrants, the stock market will be immensely benefited as they bring new ideas and dynamism," he said. PSL Chairman Dr Zahurul Islam said his company will expand online trading service to other cities of the country.

PSL Managing Director Dr Tanvir Hasan Sami and directors Dr Abu Sayed Tito and Dr Saiful Islam also spoke.

Bank Asia signs deal with CDBL

Bank Asia Limited yesterday signed an agreement with the Central Depository Bangladesh Ltd (CDBL) in Dhaka.

Under the deal the CDBL will convert the paper shares of Bank Asia into electronic ones through Central Depository System (CDS) which will help eliminate the risk of damage, loss, forgery and duplication of the share certificates, says a press release.

Syed Anisul Huq, president and managing director of Bank Asia, and MH Samad, managing director and CEO of CDBL, signed the agreement on behalf of their organisations.

The electronic book entry under CDS will also ensure prompt transfer of share ownership, the release added.

DCCI gets new president



MA Momen
STAR BUSINESS REPORT

MA Momen has been elected president of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) for the year 2006.

Besides, Hossain Khaled and Hossain A Sikder have been elected senior vice-president and vice-president for the same period.

The election was held at the DCCI auditorium on December 15. Eleven new directors have also been elected for 2006-08 period, a DCCI press release said.

Momen is the managing director of Toka Ink Bangladesh Ltd, a joint venture between Bangladesh and Japan, and Pioneer Printing Press Ltd.

He is also the president of Bangladesh ink manufacturers' association.

Khaled is the managing director of Anwar Jute Spinning Mills Ltd and AG Automobile Ltd while Sikder is the managing director of Kohinoor Leather Products Ltd and owner of Star Steel Store.

The other newly elected directors include Safina Rahman, Sayed Habibur Rahman, Haider Ahmed Khan, Md Sharfuddin, M Saleem Sulaiman, Asif Ibrahim, MS Shekil Chowdhury, Shafique Hossain and Arshad Ali.

The new office bearers of the DCCI will take charges on December 29 at the annual general meeting of the chamber.

Int'l plastic goods fair begins tomorrow

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

A four-day international fair of plastic goods will begin at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in Dhaka tomorrow aiming at expanding export market for Bangladesh plastic goods.

Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman is expected to inaugurate the fair as chief guest while Commerce Minister Altaf Hossain Choudhury and Commerce Adviser Barkat Ullah Bulu will be present as special guests.

Bangladesh Plastic Goods Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BPGMEA) is organising the fair.

The fifth version of the fair will have around 60 stalls where some 40 exhibitors from both home and abroad will showcase their products. The Daily Star and ATN Bangla are the media partners of the exhibi-

tion.

Announcing the fair schedule at a press conference in Dhaka yesterday, Jasim Uddin, president of BPGMEA, said five foreign companies -- two from Taiwan, one from Singapore and two from India -- will take part in the fair to showcase a wide range of plastic goods.

He said the country fetched Tk 865 crore in foreign exchange in the last fiscal year through direct and indirect exports. "The country has a potential to increase export volume especially in the US market as the US recently imposed anti-dumping measures on Chinese plastic goods," he added.

The association leaders at the function urged the government to withdraw the condition of showing 25 percent bank guarantee to the customs department for importing basic raw materials, which increases production cost of plastic goods.

The import duty on basic raw materials should be 5 percent instead of existing 13.5 percent, they said.

Criticising the ban on polypropylene products, they also appealed to the government to withdraw the restriction only for the plastic products manufactured for export or used for packing export items.

They also urged the government to give 10 percent cash incentives to the export-oriented plastic industries.

The fair will remain open to visitors from 8am to 10pm everyday until Sunday. Entry fee has been fixed at Tk 10 a person.

On the sidelines of the fair, a seminar on plastic waste recycling in Dhaka will be held on the third day of the fair.

Citigroup plans to hold financial edn summit in Bangladesh

MONJUR MAHMUD, back from KL

Citigroup plans to hold an international financial education summit in Bangladesh.

As financial education is increasingly becoming important for micro finance activities, Citigroup's top executives in Asia Pacific region plan a summit in Bangladesh, the birthplace of micro credit.

"We will hold an annual summit in Bangladesh shortly," Ashok Vaswani, Citigroup CEO for Consumer Banking in Asia Pacific, told The Daily Star.

After visiting India and China, Citigroup's top officials will select a place for the third conference.

Last year, the group committed US\$200 million over 10 years to support financial education programmes and organisations around the world.

The two-day second Financial Education Summit 2005 jointly organised by Citigroup and INSEAD ended in Kuala Lumpur on

December 13.

More than 250 delegates from 30 countries participated in the summit held at Prince Hotel with representatives from private, government, and non-government organisations (NGOs). An eight-member team from Bangladesh also jointed the event.

Donald J Johnson, secretary general of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Dinh Tuyen Truong, trade minister of Vietnam, Anil Gaba, professor of risk management of Decision Science of INSEAD, and Liu Zhongjun, vice president of China Banking Association, were among the keynote speakers at the summit.

Ashok Vaswani said, "Our goal was to understand the level of interest in financial education around the region."

There is a tremendous need to help people budget and manage their income, save and invest efficiently, protect themselves against fraud

and prepare for the future, Vaswani said.

"Financial education is important for everyone, and we should begin as early as possible." "Our commitment is serious. It is broad. It is long term. It cuts across ages, nationalities, income levels and financial experience."

The Citigroup Foundation focuses its grants primarily on three areas -- financial education, educating the next generation, and building communities and entrepreneurs.

International Herald Tribune supported the promotion of this event to attract participants from different countries.

INSEAD is widely recognised among the world's top-tier business schools as one of the most innovative and influential one. It is the only business school with full-fledged campuses in Asia and Europe.

First financial education summit was held in Hong Kong a year ago.

Tokyo exchange chief, executives resign over system failures

AP, Tokyo

The president and other executives at Japan's largest bourse have resigned following two massive computer system failures, including one that caused massive losses at a major brokerage house, the Tokyo Stock Exchange said Tuesday.

Chairman Taizo Nishimuro will double as the Tokyo exchange's president effective Wednesday, after the departure of President Takuo Tsurushima, the bourse said in a statement. Executives Sadao Yoshino and Tomio Amano also stepped down.

Board directors will also take a 10 percent pay cut for three months starting in January, the exchange said.

Earlier this month, the Tokyo Stock Exchange failed to stop an erroneous order placed by Mizuho Securities Co that cost the brokerage about 40 billion yen (US\$333 million; euro 278 million).

After initially denying there was a problem with the trading system, the exchange later said a malfunction of its own system prevented Mizuho Securities from quickly cancelling the botched trade.

That may leave open the possibility of the bourse shouldering part of Mizuho Securities' loss.

That incident came a month after trading was suspended for all but the last 90 minutes of the trading session due to a glitch in the bourse's transactions system.

Last week, Japan's financial watchdog agency ordered the TSE to improve its operations after the botched trade involving Mizuho.

The TSE has until January 31 to report on the measures to ensure there are no further trading problems, and to determine who was responsible for the mishap, the Financial Services Agency said.

Natural disasters cause record losses for insurers in 2005

AFP, Geneva

Natural disasters caused about 225 billion dollars (187.5 billion euros) in damage in 2005 making this year the costliest ever for insurers especially in the United States, the world's largest reinsurance company Swiss Re said yesterday.

About one-third of the amount, an estimated 80 billion dollars, was insured by the industry, Swiss Re said in a statement on preliminary estimates of catastrophe losses for 2005.

"At 80 billion dollars, insured property losses were higher than ever before," it added.

More than half of those insured losses, 45.0 billion dollars, were caused by hurricane Katrina, which prompted the evacuation of the flooded US city of New Orleans in August.

That storm caused damage totalling 135.0 billion dollars as it battered a swathe of the Caribbean and US southern seaboard, while hurricanes Wilma and Rita added another 15 billion dollars in losses.



Officials of Transcom Beverages Ltd pose for photographs at the launching ceremony of new menthol-flavoured soft drink 7Up Ice in Dhaka yesterday.

PHOTO: ASIATIC

HK CR Airways orders 40 new Boeing planes

AFP, Hong Kong

A Hong Kong charter airline CR Airways on Tuesday signed a memorandum of understanding to buy 30 new Boeing 737-800 aircraft and 10 B787s in a deal worth 3.31 billion US dollars.

CR said the new aircraft would enable it to expand its services in China and the rest of Asia.

The order for the B787s, that cost 130 million dollars each, and the B737-800s, costing 67 million dollars each, is expected to be completed next year.