

Star BUSINESS

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Siemens Water Tech plans \$50m global water centre in S'pore

MORSHEDE ALI KHAN from Singapore

Siemens Water Technologies, a leader in products, systems and services for water and used water treatment, formally announced Thursday that it is planning to set up a US \$50 million global water research and development (R&D) and engineering centre in Singapore over the next five years.

The investment comes at a time when Singapore is looking for innovative ideas and technologies to meet its municipal and industrial water demands. With only 697 square kilometres, the tiny country has no sweet water river and it has been greatly dependant on water imported from Malaysia. For the 4.2 million people it needs around 300 million gallons of water every day. The country is now setting up a state-of-the-art water reclamation plant at Changi. In 2003, Singapore set up a plant called Newater where liquid waste is turned into pure drinking water. Water crisis could soon be a matter of the past for Singapore.

Siemens top executives pointed out that the company plans to expand its Singapore location into a competence centre for water and used water technologies in the Asia-Pacific region.

Siemens Water Technologies also signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Public Utilities Board (PUB), Singapore's national water agency, to collaborate on water R&D projects.

President and Chief Executive Officer of Siemens Water Technology, Dr Roger Radke said that with Siemens' involvement in intensive R&D would enhance possibilities for Singapore to become a 'vibrant global hydro-hub'.

"Siemens Water Technologies also sees PUB as an excellent partner for its growth not only in Singapore but also in Asia because of PUB's capabilities and efficiency in water management and strong commitment to developing the water industries globally," Dr Radke said.

The Singapore government has identified water and environment technologies as one of the three key growth sectors and plans to invest \$330 million over the next five years to develop the industry.

Khoo Teng Chye, PUB's chief executive and also executive director of the Industry Development Council, said that in the last 40 years Singapore gradually evolved from a nation with limited water resources to a hub for water technologies.

"Through investment in research, technology and development of major national water projects, the country has successfully leveraged on technology to meet challenges in water supply," said Teng Chye.

He added that there are 50 local and international water companies in Singapore but the government's goal is to grow this involvement further to make the country a 'global hydro-hub'.

Siemens' executives said that currently water has an annual global market of US \$400 billion.

Office bearers of Crop Protection Assoc



Kazi Ali Hossain of Padma Oil Company Ltd and Md Shoib Choudhury of SAMP Ltd have been elected chairman and general secretary of Bangladesh Crop Protection Association (BCPA).

Besides, QN Abedin of Krishibanija Protisthan has been elected treasurer of the association, says a press release.

Other office bearers of the BCPA are Mahbubur Rahman of Globe Insecticide Ltd, vice chairman, Md Tofiqul Islam of East West Chemicals Ltd, joint secretary, Partha Sarathi Roy of Petrochem Bangladesh Ltd, organizing secretary, Raihanul Anam of Corbel International Ltd, publicity secretary, and Siraj A Choudhury of McDonald Bangladesh (Pvt) Ltd, AK Rony Kamal of Reximco Insecticides Ltd, AK Azad of Agritech, Mujibur Rahman of SAM Agro Chemical and M Mahbub Rahman of Syngenta Bangladesh Ltd, executive members.

Govt to provide 20pc subsidy for meat exporters

BB warns against any malpractice

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The government has decided to provide 20 percent subsidy to the exporters of halal meat in order to encourage its export.

Such a subsidy is subject to shipment of meat for the period from July 1, 2006 to June 30, 2007, according to a circular issued by the Bangladesh Bank (BB) on December 7 this year.

This subsidy is applicable in case of exporting meat of duck, chicken, cow, buffalo, goat and lamb produced in the exporters' own farms and slaughtered in a

halal way.

The BB circular said as per the World Trade Organisation regulations, the subsidy will be provided to the exporters against the cost of handling, improvement, processing and transportation for halal meat export.

The central bank will provide necessary funds to the commercial banks so that they (the banks) can give this subsidy to the meat exporters after getting necessary export documents from the exporters concerned.

According to the BB circular, the exporters need to submit bill of

lading/air waybill, commercial voice, packing list and bill of export to the banks.

For having access to the subsidy, the exporters will have to export meat through opening letter of credit, the circular further said.

The circular also said every case of meat export will have to be audited by the central bank's audited firms prior to providing subsidy for the exporters.

Any malfunction in the process of providing subsidy or receiving subsidy will severely be dealt with, the BB circular warned.



PHOTO: CITIGROUP

Acbar Ali Khan, former adviser to the caretaker government, and Patricia A Butenis, US ambassador to Bangladesh, inaugurate a branch of Citibank, NA, Bangladesh on Satmasjid Road at Dhammendi in Dhaka yesterday. Mamun Rashid, Citigroup country officer (Bangladesh), among others, is seen.

Phone, cable companies to battle in 2007

AP, New York

Vonage tanked after its IPO. It's not entirely clear anymore why eBay paid \$2.6 billion for Skype. And the long-awaited rollout of advanced TV services based on Internet technologies has resembled the drip of a faucet.

It wasn't a banner year for some of the biggest names in Internet Protocol, the technical standard that makes the Web hum. But the technology itself continued to blossom, with newer innovations picking away at every corner of the telecommunications business, from voice to video to wireless.

No doubt the main event for 2007 will be the impending smack-down between the traditional phone and cable TV industries. The regional Bell companies, after losing millions of customers to rival phone services from cable providers in 2006, are just starting to ramp up their risky push into TV.

Verizon Communications Inc. expects its FIOS TV service will be available to 1.8 million homes by January. AT&T Inc. finally appears to be pushing past technological holdups with U-verse, maintaining the IP-based service will be offered in parts of 15 markets by the close of December.

The competitive response couldn't come a minute too soon, as cable companies have had a field day in the phone business thus far. Just over 6 million homes will have switched to cable phone service by the end of 2006, a gain of 2.5 million for the year, the industry research company TeleGeography estimates.

In advance of the TV push, Verizon and AT&T have battled back with DSL Internet connections priced as low as \$15 a month, hopeful of keeping and winning households that can be sold FIOS or U-verse later. The effort has borne some fruit: Although a rapid overall decline in residential phone lines continues, the percentage of remaining homes with phone and DSL service is growing fast, and the Bells are now signing up more first-time broadband users than their cable rivals.

As the giants of phone and cable do battle, however, both sides will

find themselves flicking away at technological threats that threaten to hollow their victories by offering new ways to communicate and deliver content, always for less and sometimes for free.

Daily it seems, there's another renegade company launching some form of calling or video that bypasses the normal mode of consumption, usually by exploiting IP, a network language that reduces all forms of communication into simple building blocks of data, one indistinguishable from the next.

In the past month alone, a half dozen small companies have introduced applications and services to enable cell phone users to make cheaper wireless calls, many exploiting different elements of Voice over IP, or VoIP, the technology also being used by the cable companies and Vonage Holdings Corp.

Some of the new services, with names like Talkster, Efonica's Mobilink, Jajah and iSkoot, mimic aspects of a long-distance calling card providing cheaper rates by first connecting with a local phone number while blending in new capabilities drawn from the world of instant messaging and Skype. Other startups such as Raketu are providing mobile VoIP calling by exploiting a phone's Internet connection rather than the regular voice channel.

By adding online buddy lists to the mobile mix, these services can enable a cell user to see whether friends are available before trying to call them, avoiding a waste of time and precious plan minutes. They also can enable quick-click dialing from one listing containing a friend's various phone numbers, Skype account or IM identity.

It's entirely possible, maybe probable, that all these newcomers will fail to catch on with enough people to ever resemble a real business.

To date, there's only been one Skype, which boasts 8 million simultaneous users at peak hours. And while Skype has only grown in popularity since being acquired last year by eBay Inc. for a stunning \$2.6 billion, it's not clear that success will ever produce pots of gold.

Dhaka Phone offers handset, connection at Tk2000

Dhaka Phone (DP), a PSTN (public switched telephone network) operator, has recently offered a package to its clients at competitive prices, says a press release.

Under the package, subscribers will be able to buy a 'DP Katha' connection along with a wireless handset at Tk2000 including Tk1000 free talk time.

Customers can talk from any DP to DP at 50paisa/min and to all mobile phones at Tk1.75/min. Besides, the package offers less tariff facility for local, NWD and ISD calls.

The phone company now covers Narayanganj, Mughnaghat, Sonargaon, Arahaj, Siddhiganj, Kanchpur, Bhulta, Rupganj, Rupash, Narsingdi, Pachdona, Shekherchar, Purinda, Madhabdi, Palash, Comilla, Daudkandi, Gazipur, Konabari, Shafipur, Kaliakair, Tangail, Korotia, Mirzapur, Chittagong, Sylhet, Bogra and Khulna.

Citibank opens branch at Dhammendi

Citibank, NA, Bangladesh opened a new branch on Satmasjid Road at Dhammendi in Dhaka yesterday, says a press release.

Abkar Ali Khan, former adviser to the caretaker government, and Patricia A Butenis, US ambassador to Bangladesh, jointly inaugurated the branch of the bank.

Vikram Subrahmanyam, head of Operations & Technology of Citigroup (South Asia), and Mamun Rashid, Citigroup country officer (Bangladesh), were also present at the opening ceremony.

Nepal to unveil tourism master plan

XINHUA, Kathmandu

The Nepali government is going to introduce Nepal Tourism Master Plan, 2006, aimed at maintaining regional balance and alleviating poverty by developing Nepal a destination of natural beauty and quality tourism facilities.

According to the National News Agency BSS Saturday's report, the 15-year master plan, targeted to be completed by 2020, stresses the integrated development of tourism by utilizing the historical, cultural, religious and archaeological heritage of the country.

The master plan has projected that the total tourist arrivals, which were 375,398 in 2005, will reach the minimum of 517,982 by 2010, the report said.

The master plan has suggested constituting Tourism Committees at the local and the district levels, upgrading of the airports, exploring and strengthening of new tourism routes and increasing the access to information, sanitation, electrification and alternative energy.

US okays probe into China subsidy to exporters

REUTERS, Washington

The U.S. International Trade Commission on Friday approved the first U.S. investigation into suspected Chinese government subsidies to exporters since 1991 in a case that could open the floodgate to more probes.

The trade panel voted 4-1 to clear the way for the Commerce Department to decide whether to slap countervailing duties on coated paper from China to offset what U.S. manufacturers charge are subsidies that include government grants, preferential loans and tax breaks.

At issue is a long-standing Commerce Department policy, upheld by a 1986 court ruling, that U.S. countervailing duty laws do not apply to non-market economies like China.

When Commerce accepted the countervailing duty petition last month, it said it would decide within the course of that investigation whether to change its policy.

The department is expected to issue its preliminary decision in the case next month.

Dollar extends gains as market shakes off inflation report

AFP, New York

The dollar extended its modest rally Friday as investors shook off a tame inflation report, focusing instead on data showing strong capital inflows and improving industrial output.

The euro dropped to 1.3081 dollars at 22200 GMT, the lowest point since November 24, from 1.3142 dollars late on Thursday in New York.

The dollar edged up to 118.13 yen from 117.80 yen late on Thursday.

It had earlier hit 118.34 yen -- the highest point since November 21.

The dollar fell briefly on weak US inflation data, but better-than-expected US portfolio flows figures released later helped it erase much of those losses.

The US Treasury reported net foreign purchases of long-term securities were 82.3 billion dollars in November, better than expected. A separate report showed US industrial production up 0.2 percent.

Analysts also pointed to talk of central bank buying of dollars at certain levels, but thin volumes as the pre-Christmas period gets into full swing are also causing exaggerated movements.

"The overall theme is one of consolidation at the moment. But it will be a choppy ride with some big moves either side from now until after Christmas," said Standard Chartered currency analyst Marcos Maratheftis.

Data released Friday showed both US headline and core retail inflation were unchanged in November, against expectations for a 0.2 percent rise in both.

Following some recent strong



PHOTO: SHAHJALAL ISLAMI BANK

M Kamaluddin Chowdhury, managing director of Shahjalal Islami Bank Ltd, and Harun Miah, managing director of Kushiara Financial Services Ltd, UK, exchange documents after signing a remittance agreement recently in London. Under the deal, Kushiara Financial Services will send the money of Bangladeshi expatriates in UK through the branches of the bank. Sajjatu Jumma, chairman of the bank, was also present.

Walton launches energy saving power tiller

RB Group of Companies Ltd, a local marketing firm of electrical, electronics and automobile products, recently introduced Walton energy saving power tiller in Bangladesh market, says a press release.

Considering the present oil market situation, the company has brought direct injection engine, a seminar, organised in Dhaka to highlight the product's features, was told.

RB Group Managing Director SM Nurul Alam Rezvi presided over the seminar while RUET Vice Chancellor Prof Dr AFM Anwarul Haque attended it as chief guest.

The Walton power tiller is equipped with improved nozzle, planter, liner, piston and other features to help reduce oil consumption, while its primary feature is electronic start option, the release adds.

Japan to continue ODA to India

PTI, Tokyo

Japan on Friday said it will continue to provide Official Development Assistance (ODA) to India on a priority basis for strengthening their partnership and supporting New Delhi's efforts to accelerate economic and social development.

This was announced in a joint statement issued after talks between visiting Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and his counterpart Shinzo Abe.

The two leaders have directed their concerned agencies to intensify cooperation under the ODA, particularly in priority sectors such as infrastructure, environment, social development and human resource development.

The two sides also agreed to cooperate in setting up the Dedicated Multi-model High Axle Load Freight Corridors with computerised control on Mumbai-Delhi and Delhi-Howrah routes.

"Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has submitted its interim report on the feasibility study of the project and the final report will be submitted by October 2007," the joint statement said.

The two sides would consult on the ways and means to implement the project utilising Japan's Special Terms for Economic Partnership (STEP) scheme with the inputs of Japanese technology and expertise, it added.

The two sides would also examine the possibility of electrical equipment and in construction in railway sector.