

# Star BUSINESS

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## Accolades for corporate captains

## STAR BUSINESS REPORT

A spectacular dance with music marked the beginning of the gala event at the Ballroom of Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel in Dhaka yesterday.

The audience was waiting in suspense to see the corporate icons selected for Bangladesh Business Awards 2006. And finally, their names were announced amid

thunderous applause.

The four winners stole the show. The night of March 30, 2007, entirely belonged to the exceptional personalities and companies who received awards for their individual and organisational success, their vision and their enterprising spirit that contributed to a great extent to corporate Bangladesh.

Suspense rose high when the

anchor of the gala function, Mahmudur Rahman, requested Anwarul Alam Chowdhury Parvez, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), to announce the Woman Entrepreneur of the Year 2006.

Parvez announced Zinet Fatema, proprietor of Jahan Metal, as the winner.

Then came Rokia Afzal

Rahman, former adviser to the caretaker government and president of the Women Entrepreneurs' Association, Bangladesh, to announce the Best Enterprise of the year 2006. He declared Acme Laboratories Ltd as Enterprise of the Year 2006. Light fell on Acme Laboratories Ltd Managing Director Mizanur Rahman Sinha amid deafening sound of clapping.

The light came on the year's cham-

pion of the financial institution. Craig Grossgart, vice president, South Asia International, DHL, declared the Dutch-Bangla Bank Ltd (DBBL) as the Best Financial Institution of the year. Managing Director of the bank Md Yasin Ali received the award on behalf of the bank.

For businesspeople it was a night of recognition and for the organisers, The Daily Star and DHL Express, it was an event to honour the corporate heroes who are contributing to the nation building efforts.

The big one was yet to be announced. Guests started whispering when Dr Salehuddin Ahmed, governor of Bangladesh

Bank, was requested to declare the winner. Salehuddin announced Md Nasir Uddin, chairman of Pacific Jeans Limited, as Business Person of the Year 2006.

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## India's smaller neighbours should get free access

Indian businesses suggest

ASHFAQ WARES KHAN and PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

yet to implement the South Asian Free Trade Agreement, and said it would also be important to solve the issue of Islamabad's reluctance to give 'most-favoured-nation' status to India.

Meanwhile, India is likely to place the issue of a comprehensive regional transport system in accordance to an Asian development bank and a Regional Multi-modal Transport Study (RMTS) that would open up a Dhaka-Lahore road corridor, sources said.

With the entrance of Afghanistan into the Saarc fray, India is also hoping that the Dhaka-Lahore corridor can be extended to Kabul, as part of the summit's focus on connectivity.

The RMTS study said South Asia inherits an integrated transport system and they should look to revive it in order to tap the potential of stronger economic integration.

While, the upcoming Saarc leaders summit is likely to adopt a resolution finalising the establishment of a South Asian university.

India will also place a proposal to harmonise and simplify the rules governing the transit issues among Saarc countries such as customs procedures and standardisations of test certifications and banking.

India's cabinet committee has already cleared a proposal to overhaul its 13 integrated trade-posts and set up a land port authority to identify points on land-riverine border for trading with neighbouring countries.

First of the integrated check-posts will be India's Petrapole border with Bangladesh and the Waga border with Pakistan.

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India accounted for 28 percent of US record 763.6 billion-dollar deficit in 2006 and Lavin warned that concerns in Washington about the imbalance were growing stronger.

"The atmosphere on US-China trade issues is probably more negative now than at any time I've ever seen," Lavin said.

The yawning trade surplus has led to American calls for more open trade and a rise in the Chinese currency to erase some of the alleged unfair advantages enjoyed by the Asian giant's exporters.

The undersecretary mentioned barriers to business in sectors ranging from telecom to civil aviation, saying US carriers were eager to open up new routes to China.

"If there is that kind of demand (in aviation), let's just liberalise. Why not just open them all up?" he said.

## US unhappy over China's lack of progress in opening economy

AFP, Beijing

'08."

China has made "little to no progress" in opening key market sectors, a senior US commerce official said Thursday, as he warned of a souring mood in Washington over trade issues with the Asian nation.

China cannot rest on its laurels after the steps it has taken to liberalise its economy during its first five years in the World Trade Organisation and it needs to move forward, US Undersecretary of Commerce Frank Lavin said.

"In a number of critical sectors there has been little to no progress in market opening," Lavin told an audience of US businesspeople in Beijing.

"Our point is that the world economy is moving, so we should always look ahead. We can't simply say in 2002, we fixed a problem, in 2004 we fixed another problem. We have to say, what are we fixing in '07 and

## Asia's No 2 auto show opens in Bangkok

AFP, Bangkok

year sales figures falling sharply for five straight months after the military overthrew the elected government of Thaksin Shinawatra in a coup in September 2006.

In the first two months of the year, sales were down 20 percent compared with the same period last year.

With Thailand's consumer confidence at a five-year low and new political uncertainties arising due to swelling anti-coup sentiment, the auto industry is anything but upbeat about car demand.

"Political uncertainty is a major concern for auto sales. If March sales are at the same level of last year, we should be quite satisfied," Monrak Chokki, president of Tri Petch Isuzu Sales Co, told AFP.

"We want political uncertainty to be short-term and hope that auto demand will recover in the later half of the year," said Chokki from the Japanese truck maker.

Even Toyota, the biggest automaker in the Thai market, was modest in its estimates about the motor show, saying its targeted sales would be the same as last year at 4,900 units.

## US, Saudi, Chinese firms announce \$5b energy deal

AFP, Beijing

US oil giant Exxon Mobil, Saudi Aramco and Sinopec announced here Friday two joint ventures worth about five billion dollars to operate 750 service stations and a petrochemical refinery in China.

The announcement of the project, Exxon Mobil's largest single investment in China, marked the culmination of 12 years of preparations, according to the American company.

"It's our biggest project so far in China," Sarah Du, a Beijing-based Exxon Mobil spokeswoman, told AFP.

"Developing this type of joint venture is a very complicated process and Fujian is the most complex so far in China due to the nature of its integrated business," she said.

In a joint statement, the companies called the two joint ventures "the first fully integrated refining, petrochemicals and fuels marketing project with foreign participation in China."

The refining joint venture, which will start operations in early 2009, will expand one that already existed in the southeastern province of Fujian between Sinopec and the Fujian government.

It will lead to a tripling of the production of refined Saudi Arabian crude to 240,000 barrels per day, the statement said.

A joint venture co-owned by Sinopec, China's top refiner, has a 50 percent stake in the venture, while Exxon Mobil and Saudi Aramco each have 25 percent.

The second joint venture will operate some 750 service stations and a network of terminals across Fujian province, according to the statement.

Sinopec holds a 55 percent stake in the service station venture, with Exxon Mobil and Saudi Aramco each holding 22.5 percent.

The partnership, which aims to meet China's rapidly growing demand for petroleum products and petrochemicals, also includes a long-term crude supply agreement

with Saudi Aramco, the statement said.

"The cooperation benefits all parties. All the three companies get what they need," said Qiu Xiaofeng, an oil analyst with Everbright Securities.

"Sinopec can take advantage of capital and refining technologies provided by Exxon Mobil, and Exxon Mobil gets access to China's wholesale oil products market."

The three companies said the government had approved both joint ventures. A breakdown for the investment for each of the ventures were not provided.

"It will ... boost the development of China's petrochemical industry and contribute to the economic development of Fujian province," the statement said.

Earlier, state media reported that Sinopec reached a preliminary agreement to sell a 25 percent stake in an eastern China refinery to Saudi Aramco.

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## S'pore's DBS aims to be major player in Islamic finance

AFP, Singapore

Southeast Asia's biggest lender, DBS Group Holdings, wants to be a major player in the 300-billion-US-dollar Islamic financial market, Tai said at an Islamic banking dialogue organised by the bank.

"Today, we announced the association with four prominent scholars who understand the intricacies, the importance of sharia-compliant financing.

"We'll look to them for advice on how we should approach a stronger participation in the Islamic financing world for DBS."

The four scholars include Sheikh Nizam Mohammad Saleh Yaqoubi who is a member of the Sharia Supervisory Board for a number of Islamic banks and institutions.

DBS began its serious foray into Islamic finance last year when the bank was granted a licence to

operate at the Dubai International Financial Centre. It has opened a flagship branch there offering wholesale banking products and services.

The Dubai operations have performed strongly and the bank is open to expanding its presence in the Gulf region, Tai said.

"It's only one year but we are doing very well. We are very pleased so far in our success and progress in Dubai," the DBS chief said.

"We will look to see if it makes sense to do other locations over time," he said.

DBS has a significant presence in Asia with a subsidiary in Hong Kong as well as operations in China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines.

Automakers hope the event will spur domestic sales, with year-on-

## Terrorism no threat to 8pc growth, says Lanka

AFP, Colombo

6.0 percent in 2005. Last year's performance was the best since 1978 when the economy expanded by 8.2 percent.

However, the Central Bank figures were lower than the economic growth estimate of 7.7 percent for 2006 issued by the department of census and statistics on Thursday.

"Our 10-year plan is prepared with this (eight percent growth) target in mind," Rajapakse said.

Officials said the two sets of figures differed because they used different yardsticks and moves were under way to harmonise the numbers.

Rajapakse said the main challenge faced by the country during the past three decades was "terrorism in the North and East" and the search for a political solution to the Tamil separatist conflict which has claimed over 60,000 lives.

The statement of Rajapakse, who is also finance minister, came after the release of Central Bank figures showing that the economy grew by 7.4 percent in 2006, up from

## French luxury brands eye Indian market

AFP, New Delhi

all potential customers of luxury goods.

The Indian luxury market is thought to be worth some two billion dollars and is growing at 20 percent a year, according to India's main trade federation FICCI.

"We believe in the potential of the Indian market," added Carcelle, CEO of Louis Vuitton, said in the Indian capital at the start of a two-day conference promoting international luxury goods.

The per capita income in India hovers just above 700 dollars, according to the World Bank, but with a one-billion-plus economy, increasing numbers of people are crossing into the category of super-rich.

India now has the highest number of billionaires in Asia, according to Forbes magazine, and 1.6 million households earn more than 100,000 dollars a year, making them

## Euro-zone inflation may rise to 1.9pc

AP, Brussels

Inflation in the euro-zone will probably reach 1.9 percent in March, the European Union announced Friday.

The EU's statistics agency Eurostat also said that unemployment in the 13 countries that use the euro dropped to a new low of 7.3 percent in February. The jobless rate stood at 7.4 percent in January.

The Netherlands had the lowest euro-zone unemployment rate with 3.5 percent, while provisional figures for France posted the highest with 8.8 percent.

Unemployment in Germany dropped from 7.6 percent in January to 7.1 percent in February.

The inflation estimate sees the first rise in prices in the euro-zone for this year, Eurostat said. Inflation in the euro-zone held stable at 1.8 percent in February.