

Star BUSINESS

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Reckitt Benckiser okays 200pc dividend

Reckitt Benckiser Bangladesh Ltd has declared a 200 percent dividend for its shareholders for the year 2006, says a press release.

The dividend, which was announced at the company's 46th annual general meeting (AGM) held recently in Dhaka, is a 376 percent increase from that of the previous year.

Chander M Sethi, regional director (South Asia) of the company, presided over the AGM that was attended, among others, by Rashidul Hasan and Md Ayub Miah, directors, Ata Sadfar, managing director, Rashid Umer Siddiqui, finance director, and Navidul Islam Khan, alternate director.

The company's revenue in the year 2006 reached Tk119.32 crore, which is a 34 percent increase from that of the previous year. The company has achieved more than 34 percent growth for two consecutive years. The company's after-tax income grew by 55 percent in 2006. The growth came primarily from its three main brands -- Harpic, Mortein and Dettol, the release added.

China hits back at US piracy complaint

AFP, Beijing

China hit back Tuesday at a US decision to file a WTO complaint against it for copyright abuse, warning the move was ill-informed and would damage trade relations between the two countries.

"China feels regret and is strongly dissatisfied (with the US decision)," commerce ministry spokesman Wang Xinpei said in a statement.

"The move will seriously damage cooperation (on intellectual property rights protection) that the two parties have already built up and will have a negative impact on trade relations between the two sides."

The United States announced on Monday it would file a case at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) over widespread copyright piracy in China, a practice which US companies say deprives them of billions of dollars each year.

Washington also said it would lodge another complaint at the WTO accusing China of restricting distribution of foreign music, films and books.

"Piracy and counterfeiting levels in China remain unacceptably high," US Trade Representative Susan Schwab told a news conference in Washington, brandishing a fake Chinese DVD of the Ben Stiller hit: "Night at the Museum."

In a further Chinese reaction to the announcement, China's top copyright official said the United States did not understand the huge efforts Beijing had undertaken to combat the problem.

"It's not a sensible move for the US government to file such a complaint," the state-run Xinhua news agency quoted Intellectual Property Office commissioner Tian Lipu as saying.

Beijing to expand overseas investment scheme

AFP, Hong Kong

China will expand a program that allows domestic institutional investors to buy foreign securities, following its success since launching a year ago, a banking regulator said Tuesday.

China Banking Regulatory Commission (CBRC) Chairman Liu Mingkang said the country is planning to extend the qualified domestic institutional investor (QDII) scheme although he did not say how it will be expanded.

However, CBRC said on its website that it is considering "cautiously adjusting and enlarging" the scope of overseas investments that can be acquired by commercial banks under the scheme.

Relevant policies will be announced "soon" after it completes its study of the issue, it added. The first QDII product was launched in June 2006.

By allowing qualified banks and fund management companies to invest overseas, China hopes to ease the pressure on its currency and to broaden the investment channels for China's wealth management products.

A recent Standard Chartered research report said that 18.5 billion US dollars worth of quotas under the scheme had been allocated but only around five percent had been uti-

Handling charge for imported clinker at Ctg jetty halved

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Halving the handling charge for imported clinker at Sadarghat lighter jetty of Chittagong Port, operation of which is under private management since 2003, came into effect from yesterday, according to the business circle.

The manufacturing companies concerned from now on will be charged Tk 65 a tonne of imported clinker, a raw material for cement, for using the jetty by the private operator, Great Bengal Enterprise.

The rate was Tk 120 a tonne, which the cement manufacturers described as 'exorbitant' to raise the price of cement. They had been pursuing to fix it at a lower rate since long.

The decision of enforcing the new rate came Monday at a meeting

with representation from the cement manufacturers and Chittagong chamber leaders. The joint forces initiated the meeting.

The cement manufacturers also agreed to reduce the price of cement by Tk 5 a sack, which was also made effective yesterday.

Senior Vice President of Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) MA Latif, CCCI and FBCCI Director Amirul Haq, CCCI Director Syed Jamal Ahmed, Great Bengal Enterprise directors Abu Bakar and Abdul Mannan, representatives from different cement manufacturers including Confident Cement, Mostafa Hakim Cement, Royal Cement and Premier Cement attended the meeting where high officials of joint-forces were also present.

Sources said the Chittagong Port

Authority leased out the lighter jetty at Sadarghat to Great Bengal Enterprise back in 2003 and the present revenue earning from the jetty is over Tk 1 crore per annum on an average.

The private company rented out its silos to Care Bangladesh at Tk 80 lakh annually, while it was realising handling charge of Tk 120 per tonne of clinker. This jetty handles around 5 lakh tonnes of clinker a year.

A high official of a cement manufacturing company said, "Even if the handling charge was reduced to a rate of Tk 25, a huge profit could be earned by the concerned operator of the jetty where a total of 12 lakh tonnes of bulk cargo, including clinker, are being handled annually."

Handicraft, pottery fair begins today

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

In a bid to tap the potential of potteries and handicrafts in the domestic and international markets, a five-day show styled 'National Handicrafts and Pottery Fair Trade Fair 2007' begins today in Dhaka.

Ecota Fair Trade Forum, a platform to promote pottery and handicraft industries, and International Institute of Technology and Management (IITM) are jointly organising the fair at Shishu Academy.

The objective of the show is to develop a niche in local and foreign markets for the products, said Arshad Siddique, director of Ecota, at a press conference in Dhaka yesterday while announcing the schedule of the fair.

Around 120 handicraft and pottery makers will showcase products including clay works, jewellery, handloom products, cosmetics and woodwork at 73 stalls at the exhibition.

The fair will represent the art works of the rural poor who generally cannot afford to make a space for themselves in the mainstream market, said Siddique.

The show will also highlight the problems of the poor artisans who are being marginalised due to the process of industrialisation, the organisers said.

The Daily Star and satellite television channel ATN Bangla are the media partners of the fair, which is open for all from 9am to 7pm every day with a five-taka entry fee. However, on Pahela Baishakh, the first day of Bangla new year, the fair will remain open until 10pm.

Ziaul Haque, chief executive officer of IITM, also spoke at the press conference.

Concord's water park at Foy's Lake opens next month

A water park of Concord Amusement World at Foy's Lake in Chittagong is going to open next month, says a press release.

The water park will feature motel, resort, honeymoon chalet and restaurant to attract tourists from home and abroad.

Other features of the park include family pool, wave pool, separate change rooms for men and women, lockers and clothe stores.

FS Sweaters gets award for CSR practices

FS Sweaters Ltd, a concern of SQ Group, has recently been given away runner-up award in recognition of its complying with corporate social responsibility (CSR) by UK-based retailer Tesco International Sourcing & Logistics Directorate.

The company received the award in the category of socially responsible companies in Bangladesh, says a press release.

The award was announced at the Tesco's International Sourcing & Suppliers' Conference held recently in Hong Kong.

Japan seeks energy from Kazakhstan

AFP, Tokyo

Japan will send a large delegation to Kazakhstan from April 29-30 to secure uranium and other energy supplies, a government official said Tuesday.

The delegation would contain some 100 government officials and corporate executives led by Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Akira Amari, according to the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy official.

It would include top representatives from about 30 power utilities, trading houses and manufacturing companies and seek to negotiate deals in the energy sector, including Japanese investment in Kazakh uranium mines, he said.

"The mission will not only aim to secure uranium and other fuels but also seek wide-ranging cooperation, including Japan's assistance to Kazakhstan's acquisition of nuclear reactors," the official said.

In August last year, then Japanese prime minister Junichiro Koizumi toured Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, where he offered aid and discussed cooperation in the energy sector.



PHOTO: CONCORD AMUSEMENT WORLD

A partial view of the water park of Concord Amusement World at Foy's Lake in Chittagong. The park opens next month.

Citibank mandated to raise \$55m for Brac

Brac, the world's largest NGO and micro-finance institution (MFI) with over 5 million borrowers, has mandated Citibank, NA Bangladesh to raise US\$55 million in equivalent local currency.

The money will be used to further expand microcredit programmes for low-income individuals, primarily in rural communities not reached by traditional commercial banks, says a press release.

The transaction will involve the Partial Risk Guarantee facility of International Finance Corporation (IFC), OPIC-Citi framework Risk Sharing facility and a syndicated financing from a host of local banks. OPIC (Overseas Private Investment Corporation) is a US government agency.

This groundbreaking transaction, denominated in Bangladesh

taka, will provide Tk 38.5 billion (US\$55 million equivalent) of financing for Brac for a period of 5 years. Brac will be the service provider to the microcredit borrowers where Citigroup is the lead arranger to raise the fund.

The raising of this financing will allow Brac, to diversify its funding sources and also disburse more funds to a larger number of micro entrepreneurs, reinforcing Brac's determination in helping the development of the microcredit sector.

"International pro-development agencies, such as IFC and OPIC, are increasingly taking interest in supporting MFIs. This transaction will mark yet another milestone in the development of micro-finance industry globally, and demonstrate Bangladesh as an invincible leader in micro-finance. Given Citi's leadership in supporting

MFIs globally and expertise in providing such innovative structured finance solution, we are pleased to appoint Citibank to arrange this facility for us," said Fazle Hasan Abed, chairperson of Brac.

Mamun Rashid, managing director and Citigroup country officer Bangladesh, said, "The world knows Bangladesh as a country of micro-finance. This transaction in the micro-finance sector is again a testament to Citi's strong commitment to micro level borrowers in Bangladesh and globally."

Mahbubur Rahman, director and head of Financial Institutions said, "We thank Brac for putting their confidence in us. This will be Citi's another innovative solution for Brac with the first one being the world's first AAA-rated microcredit securitisation structured by Citi last year."

S'pore posts strong Q1 growth

AFP, Singapore

Singapore's economy expanded strongly in the first quarter, helped by a recovering construction industry, and should easily meet the government's 2007 growth target of 4.5-6.5 percent, official figures showed Tuesday.

Gross domestic product (GDP) expanded 6.0 percent in the first quarter compared with the same period last year, coming in at the upper end of analyst projections of 5.2-6.0 percent.



PHOTO: STANDARD CHARTERED BANK

Vikram Issar, head of Consumer Banking of Standard Chartered Bank, and Omer Rashid, director (Marketing) of mobile phone operator Banglalink, shake hands after signing an agreement recently. Under the deal, the existing and new credit cardholders of the bank will receive a free postpaid connection from Banglalink that comes with attractive call charges and a wide range of value-added services. The bank is offering this facility to mark its 10th anniversary of introducing credit cards in Bangladesh this year. Senior officials from both the sides were also present.

Trade players meet in Delhi today for Doha talks

AFP, New Delhi

India, the United States and other key trading players assemble here today in an attempt to salvage global trade talks aimed at lifting millions out of poverty.

But hopes are slim that any breakthrough will emerge from the negotiations gathering representatives from the group of influential trading powers -- the European Union, the United States, Brazil and India, analysts said.

The most that can be hoped "is for people to come on the same page and agree there is a need to move forward," said T.S. Vishwanath, head of international trade policy at the Confederation of Indian Industry.

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) is seeking to conjure up agreement in the Doha Round of talks before the end of June when the fast track trade negotiating powers of US President George

Bush are set to expire.

"If we are to use the remaining window of opportunity open to us, we need to intensify and accelerate the process of negotiation," EU Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson said ahead of the gathering.

"If we fail, Doha's prospects for this year will be lost," he warned.

The ministers will focus on the knotty issues of agriculture subsidies and tariffs in bilateral meetings Wednesday and will gather for four-way talks on Thursday.

The sessions will be attended by Indian Commerce Minister Kamal Nath, US trade representative Susan Schwab and Brazilian foreign minister Celso Amorim.

If a breakthrough can be achieved by June, a conclusion to the Doha talks, called a once-in-a-generation chance to help bring millions out of poverty, could be reached in about eight months, WTO officials say.

Otherwise the Doha round, launched in the Qatari capital Doha in 2001, risks years of delay.

"There doesn't seem to be any willingness to compromise so in in that kind of situation, it's difficult to expect any favourable outcome," said D.H. Pai Panandiker, president of the RPG Foundation, an Indian economic think-tank.

India and Brazil have emerged as leaders in the developing world's challenge to the wealthy nations to curtail generous farm subsidies.

The deadlock over attempts to cut down subsidies and import tariffs on farm products is regarded as the key stumbling block to expanding free and fair trade, which also covers industrial goods and services.

India's Nath has said there is "no commitment by India on the deadline" and has said he would prefer no deal to a "bad deal."



PHOTO: HOLCIM BANGLADESH

PN Iyer, managing director of Holcim (Bangladesh) Ltd, a cement manufacturing company, poses for photographs with the participants in 'Regional Training Managers Workshop' organised by the company recently in Dhaka. Around 22 participants from Holcim Group Companies in Switzerland, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, India, Thailand, Indonesia and Bangladesh took part in the 3-day workshop.