

Decision on Sheraton's new management by end of next month

SAYEDA AKTER

Bangladesh Services Ltd (BSL), the owning company of Dhaka Sheraton hotel, intends to take decision on appointment of a new company to manage and operate the hotel by the end of the next month.

Starwood, the present management company of Dhaka Sheraton, said in a letter last week that it would renew its agreement with the BSL to manage and operate Dhaka Sheraton, on condition that BSL immediately starts renovating the hotel for maintaining its international standard.

A team of BSL will visit Singapore next week to discuss the issue with the officials of Starwood Hotels and Resorts Worldwide, said Shams Mahub, communication manager of Sheraton.

Mahub said the BSL team would discuss the terms and conditions that Starwood offered in its letter, and if the discussion succeeds the contract would be renewed for the next five years.

BSL board will hold a meeting today to discuss Starwood's conditional offer with the offi-



A view of Dhaka Sheraton hotel. Bangladesh Services Ltd, the owning company of Dhaka Sheraton, intends to take decision on appointment of a new company to operate the hotel by the end of the next month.

cial of BSL and Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism.

"It will be a regular meeting at which whether we should accept the conditions or to look for new management partners will also be discussed," Lutfur

Rahman, managing director of BSL, said.

Starwood had signed an agreement with Westin Dhaka to manage the hotel last year, and in January of this year expressed its unwillingness to

renew agreement with BSL to manage Sheraton for another term.

Starwood's 25-year agreement with BSL to manage and operate Dhaka Sheraton is set to expire in December this year.

Iran to raise domestic gas prices

AFP, Tehran

Iran plans to hike domestic gas prices in order to encourage consumers to conserve and to help to free up supplies for export, officials said on Saturday.

"The decision is to be announced this summer or just after," said a senior government official.

He was speaking at the third annual Ravand Institute conference, which brings together political and economic leaders and experts from Iran and abroad, and whose proceedings may only be reported under the cloak of anonymity.

Natural gas sells for only two US cents per cubic metre (35 cubic feet) in Iran, compared with 30 cents in neighbouring countries, and the difference represents a subsidy of around 40 billion dollars a year, the official said.

The plan will be to raise the price to 15 cents for industrial customers, the official said, but he did not provide a figure for individual customers.

Ironically, while Iran has the world's second-largest reserves of natural gas, the country is a net importer because of a highly inefficient use of it in industry and profligate use on the part of private consumers.

Japanese firms slowing down capital investment

AFP, Tokyo

Japanese companies are slowing down their capital investment in the face of a stronger yen, rising material costs and concerns about the US economy, a report said Sunday.

They plan to increase spending in plant and equipment by 3.7 percent in the year to March 2009, representing the sixth straight year-on-year gain but the smallest rise in five years, the leading business daily Nikkei said.

The daily was citing a survey of 1,523 firms, mostly big companies.

"The overall trend is probably weaker than the result shown here because smaller firms are generally more cautious about capital spending," it said.

Among the firms, manufacturing companies plan to boost investment by a solid 6.4 percent while nonmanufacturers intend to cut outlays by 0.4 percent, the first decrease in five years, the daily said.

Private-sector capital spending has been one of the driving forces behind the growth of the Japanese economy.

Among the manufacturers, automobile and electronics firms are seeking to boost capital investment by 6.8 percent and 2.5 percent respectively, topping the growth rates seen in the year to March 2008 to meet burgeoning demand from emerging countries, among other reasons, the reports said.

Business portal Tejari appoints Axiom agent in Bangladesh

UAE-base business to business portal www.tejari.com has appointed Axiom Technologies Ltd its agent in Bangladesh, says a press release.

Managing Director of Axiom Rizwan Bin Farouq and CEO of Tejari Omar Hijazi signed a deal to this effect recently.

Tejari has operations in 14 countries. Tejari CEO Omar Hijazi with a team of seven delegates will arrive in Dhaka on June 8 to launch a community portal of DCCI (Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry). The portal will be launched on June 9.

During the launch Tejari will offer corporate presentation on business opportunities and case study on Pakistan.

So far Tejari has traded over US\$5 billion.

Special budget funds for Ctg sought

CU CORRESPONDENT

The upcoming budget should allocate special funds for the development of Chittagong, a meeting was told.

Speakers at the meeting on Saturday urged the government to make adequate allocation for development of Chittagong Port, industrial infrastructure and planned growth of the commercial capital with proper sewerage system in the upcoming budget.

Greater Chittagong Development Action Committee organised the meeting titled "Upcoming Budget: Thoughts of Chittagong People" at Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and

Industries (CCCI) conference room.

The speakers alleged that Chittagong had so far been deprived in the budget with Chittagong City Corporation having a maximum allocation of Tk 20 crore as against Tk 400 crore allocated for Dhaka City Corporation.

They demanded allocations in consideration of the area and number of population of each city corporation.

90 percent of the export goods are being exported through Chittagong Port with Chittagong Customs House contributing to 70 to 80 percent of the total revenue collection.

Bangladesh Economic Association Chittagong Chapter President Professor

Sikander Khan presented the keynote paper at the meeting with the organisation's Standing Committee President Taslim Uddin Chowdhury in the chair.

Advocate Rana Das Gupta moderated the meeting while veteran revolutionary Binod Bihari Chowdhury, former Minister and President of Chittagong Metropolitan Unit Awami League MA Mannan, CCCI Senior Vice President MA Latif, Federation of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industries (FBCCI) Director Amirul Haque and Forum For Planned Chittagong (FFPC) Executive Member Engineer ABMA Baset took part in the discussion among others.

Japan hosts Africa confce with eye on Asian rivals

AFP, Tokyo

Japan will hold a major conference on African development this week amid growing competition with its regional rivals for influence in the poverty-stricken but resource-rich continent.

With China and India seeking to forge closer ties with the

region and secure commodities to fuel their economic booms, the event is seen as a key opportunity for Japan to maintain its diplomatic clout.

Japan has invited 52 African countries to the Fourth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD IV), which it hosts every five years along with the United

Nations, the World Bank and other organisations.

Presidents, vice presidents or prime ministers from 44 African countries are expected to attend the meeting Wednesday to Friday in Yokohama, southwest of Tokyo, including Sudanese President Omar al-Beshir and South African President Thabo Mbeki.

Marico chairman due in Dhaka today



Harsh C. Mariwala, chairman and managing director of Marico Limited, is due today in Dhaka on a 3 day, says a press release.

Mariwala will be accompanied by Vijay Subramaniam, CEO of Marico International Business Group.

During his stay in Dhaka, Mariwala will meet with business leaders and CEOs of other leading companies operating in Bangladesh. He will also meet high officials of Marico Bangladesh Ltd.

Marico Bangladesh Ltd is the marketer of Parachute Coconut Oil, Aromatic and Camelia soaps in Bangladesh.

Globally Marico is a leading group in consumer products and services in the beauty and wellness space.

OIL EXPLORATION Australian firm to invest \$20m in S Korea

AFP, Seoul

Australia's Woodside Petroleum will invest at least 20 million dollars in exploring for oil off South Korea's east coast, the economy ministry said Sunday.

The planned investment was disclosed as Woodside launched a survey of two blocks of the seabed Sunday in a follow-up to a 2007 deal with Korea National Oil Corp. (KNOC), the ministry said.

Woodside, Australia's second largest oil and gas producer, and KNOC agreed last year to the exploration contract based on a 50-50 partnership.

It marks the first oil exploration around the Korean peninsula by a major foreign firm in 16 years.



Civil Aviation and Tourism Secretary Syed Mohammad Zobaer inaugurates the first international flight of Best Air at the Zia International Airport yesterday. (Story on B-1)

RMG factory installs software to monitor real time production

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Viyellatex Group, a leading apparel manufacturer and exporter, installed the expensive Enterprise Resources Planning (ERP) software yesterday for the first time in the country's textile sector to monitor real time production.

"The import price of the software is US\$1 million and it will take another half a million dollars to install it within the next six months," said Chairman and Managing Director of the Viyellatex Group KM Rezaul Hasanat.

The group, based in Gazipur will start the installation of the ERP Software imported from Germany's SAP, to know the real time data of the business

and production in the factories.

He said six software experts from India and Sri Lanka have already arrived in Bangladesh to install the software in the Viyellatex Group, which is going to fulfill its export target of \$125 million in 2007-08 fiscal year.

The installation of the ERP will help to improve alignment of the company's strategies and operations enhancing productivity, as all live data will be installed in the server.

He said ERP will also help minimise the waste of the company as the real time data will help to make quick decisions.

At present, multinational companies operating in Bangladesh like BOC and

Novartis have been using this expensive ERP Software in their businesses.

Almost all the internationally renowned buying houses use this expensive software, Hasanat added.

Viyellatex Group, having operations from yarn to garment, has various divisions including spinning, finishing, dyeing, fabrics finishing, textile testing, knit cutting division, woven cutting division, knit sewing division, washing plant division, fashion plastic, effluent plant division, designing division, knit finishing division and washing plant division.

The installation of the ERP will help link all the divisions of the group to reflect the real time data, the group chief said.

Multiplan real estate fair begins

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

A 12-day fair, organised by Multiplan Limited, a real estate company, was inaugurated in Dhaka yesterday.

The main objective of the fair is to sell flats of the company's biggest joint venture project 'Multiplan Red Crescent City'.

The Multiplan Red Crescent City, located at Mirpur 1 in Dhaka, is a joint venture project of Bangladesh Red Crescent Society and Multiplan Limited. The project, comprising 4 fifteen storied buildings

with 900 flats ranging from 950sf to 1350sf, has already been completed.

Customers have already booked around 50 percent of these flats, the company officials said.

Shamimatun Nasim, managing director of Multiplan Limited, inaugurated the fair. Syed Munsif Ali, the company's chief executive officer, was also present.

The company officials claimed the Multiplan Red Crescent City is the country's third largest real estate project in Dhaka, followed by Japan

Garden City and Lake City Concord.

Speaking at the inaugural ceremony, Munsif Ali said his company has already completed more than 40 apartments and about 3 lakh sq ft of commercial space at different locations in Dhaka and Sylhet.

He said besides apartments, Multiplan Red Crescent City also has play ground for children, mosque, gymnasium, schools and healthcare centre.

The fair will remain open from 8am to 8pm everyday.



A daylong workshop on passport processing activities through additional 13 branches of Trust Bank Ltd covering Dhaka, Chittagong, Feni, Comilla and Sylhet was held recently in the capital. Md Abdur Rob Howlader, director general of the Department of Immigration and Passports, Shah Jalal Uddin Khan, senior vice president, and Ishtiaque Ahmed Choudhury, deputy managing director of the bank, among others, were present at the workshop.

Tourism shaken in China quake zone

AFP, Dujiangyan, China

A sculpture proclaims Dujiangyan the "top tourist city in China." But at the ancient irrigation works, a World Heritage site, the ticket office is now a smashed reminder of a devastating earthquake.

Boulders that tumbled down from the hills above have come to rest among crumbled roofing tiles. A sign warns people to watch their heads.

Tourism in Sichuan province -- known for its spectacu-

lar scenery, pandas and cultural attractions -- has suffered a terrible blow.

The industry was already hurting, tourism operators say, from a shutdown of areas bordering Tibet following a government crackdown on protests there against Chinese rule earlier this year.

But they say the May 12 earthquake, which measured 8.0 on the Richter scale and destroyed towns and villages across an area the size of South Korea, has hurt the sector even further.

"There's nothing much to see anymore," said Sim Kwan Wah, 44, who runs Sim's Cozy Garden Hostel in the provincial capital Chengdu with his wife.

Sichuan's major tourist attractions were in the heart of the quake zone.

China's top panda breeding centre is in Wolong, about 30 kilometres (19 miles) from the epicentre.

It suffered major damage and six of the pandas were evacuated on Friday because of a lack of food and ability to look after them.



Managing Director of Axiom Technologies Rizwan Bin Farouq (right) and CEO of business portal Tejari Omar Hijazi shake hands after signing the agency agreement as Luca Gorlero (centre), director (Business Development) of Tejari, looks on.