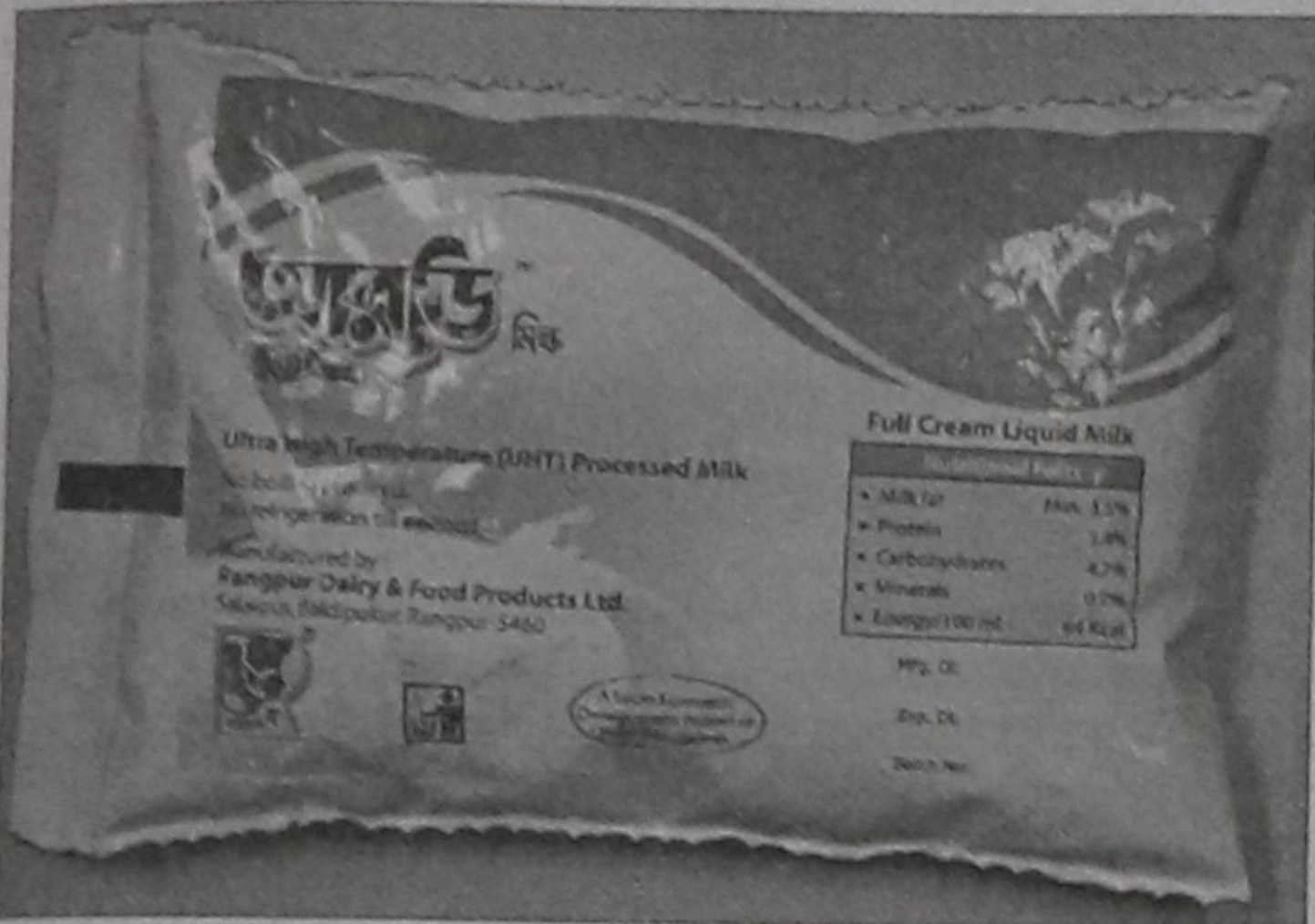


Rangpur Dairy sells milk without BSTI nod



RAFIQUE SARKER, Rangpur

Rangpur Dairy & Food Products Ltd is marketing its pasteurised fresh milk --RD Milk-- across the country without the approval of Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI).

The company is also selling the product without mentioning its manufacturing and expiry dates on the packet.

When contacted, General Manager of the company Ashraf Hossain said, "BSTI has approved all our products except fresh milk. In fact, fresh milk doesn't need BSTI approval."

"We need BSTI approval for producing such milk products as Banana Milk, Mango Milk,

and RD Butter, and we have got go-ahead for these products," the GMSaid.

BSTI has nothing to do in controlling the standard of the pasteurised milk being marketed under the brand of RD Milk, he said.

Rangpur Dairy (RD) & Food Products at Boldipukur under Mithapukur upazila in the district started operation in March 2006, and is marketing RD Milk without BSTI approval from the beginning.

The company produces pasteurised fresh milk, butter, mango milk, banana milk and milk candy. Mango milk or banana milk is a kind of drinks that are produced by mixing milk with the flavour of the fruits.

Amin Jute Mills workers call off work abstention

UNB, Chittagong

The agitating workers of state-owned Amin Jute Mills postponed their scheduled work abstention programme yesterday following an assurance by the mill management to meet their demands.

The workers' leaders and the mill management had two meetings on Monday night and Tuesday morning to resolve the matter.

On Monday, the workers declared work abstention programme for Tuesday to press home their longstanding four-point demand that include payment of outstanding wages for 21 months.

The three other demands are reinstatement of 23 sacked workers, halting appointment of casual workers and regularisation of the jobs of daily-paid workers.

The mill management assured that out of the seven weeks' wages of daily workers, wages for two weeks would be given immediately while for another two weeks just before the Eid-ul-Fitr holiday.

Out of the 21 months' outstanding wages of regular workers, one month's arrears will be paid immediately while another one month's arrears along with Eid bonus will be given just before the Eid-ul-Fitr holiday.

Singapore unlikely to meet tourism target

AFP, Singapore

Singapore -- due to host tens of thousands of foreign visitors for its first Formula One Grand Prix this weekend -- said Tuesday it is unlikely to meet its annual target for tourist arrivals.

Visitor arrivals in August fell 7.7 percent compared with a year earlier, to 842,000, the Singapore Tourism Board said.

It was the third straight month in which visitor arrivals fell, a reflection of "the current challenging global economic environment and outlook for the tourism sector, which may continue into 2009," the board said.

After more than four years of gains, tourist arrivals began declining in June.

"While the tourism sector is likely to fall short of this year's target of 10.8 million visitors, the Singapore Tourism Board is strengthening its efforts in increasing tourism (spending) to achieve the tourism receipts target of 15.5 billion Singapore dollars (11 billion US)," it said.

Officials have estimated 40,000 overseas visitors will be in the crowd for Sunday's

Formula One Grand Prix race through the city-state's streets.

The race will be the sport's first held at night and should generate 100 million Singapore dollars annually in revenues, officials have estimated.

Tourism officials have been working with the private sector to offer a series of events surrounding the race. These range from free cultural shows and concerts, to a river festival, a motor show, and high-brow affairs including the Amber Lounge after-dinner party, which costs 1,000 Singapore dollars to get into.

The Tourism Board said Indonesia, China and Australia led tourist arrivals in August, but nine of the top 15 markets saw a decline, likely because of a global economic slowdown.

Along with the Grand Prix, the tiny but affluent city-state is trying to boost its appeal by building new attractions including two casino developments which are expected to open by 2010.

Singapore is also trying to become an arts and entertainment centre, and will host the inaugural Youth Olympics in 2010.

Square Pharma distributes gifts to shareholders

DSE seeks explanation

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Dhaka Stock Exchange has sought explanation from Square Pharmaceuticals as to why the company distributed gift items to the shareholders at its annual general meeting in violation of securities rules.

The DSE management sought the explanation in a letter to the company recently, company officials said.

DSE said video recording of

42nd AGM of Square Pharma, held in Dhaka on September 16, showed the company distributing gift items to its shareholders.

As per Securities and Exchange Commission rules, no benefit in cash or kind, other than in the form of cash dividend or stock dividend, shall be paid to the shareholders.

But, Square Pharma has violated the rules by distribut-

ing gift items to its shareholders, said a DSE senior official.

The DSE management also forwarded a copy of the letter to the stock market regulator to take necessary steps in this regard.

Square Pharma is not the only company that gives gift items or cash benefits to the attending shareholders at the AGM, there are many other listed companies who practice this.



Abdur Rob, managing director of National Housing Finance and Investment Ltd and MH Samad, chief executive officer of Central Depository Bangladesh Ltd (CDBL), shake hands after signing a agreement which covers full dematerialisation of the shares of National Housing including their forthcoming IPO shares.



BIZ LETTERS

bizletters@thedailystar.net

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words.

Is customer service an art?

Few days back, I went to a jewelry shop in Singapore to buy a gift for my friend. As I entered to the shop I was greeted like a guest by one sales person with her smile. I was amazed to experience the customer comfort a sales person can ensure to arrive at a right buying decision. She enquired thoroughly to understand what would suit my friend best. Then one very important question comes to my mind, 'Is customer service an art?'

Proliferation of media, growth in telecommunication, mushrooming financial institution, mobility of people across the world have opened our eyes to the development of the modern world for last one decade. People are getting exposure to the changing business world. In our trade dependent country we have seen a phenomenal growth in the service industry. To take it to next level and package it with professional touch 'customer service' has become a key differentiating factor. Being brutally honest, we see lack of this particular aspect in professionalism.

Customer service can be defined as an art which starts at top of any company. Attitude towards customer service is the primary determinant of the quality of service that a company delivers. If the management thinks that customers are a pain in the ass who always want something for nothing, that attitude will permeate the company, and service will be lousy. The best kind of customer service happens when management enables employees to put the customer in control. This requires two leaps of faith: first, that management trusts customers not take advantage of the situation; second, that management trust employees with this empowerment. If we can make these leaps, then the quality of customer service will zoom; if not, there is nothing more frustrating than companies copping the attitude that something is "against company policy."

A company that takes responsibility for its shortcomings is likely to provide great customer service for two reasons: first, it's acknowledged that it's the company's fault and the company's responsibility to fix. Second, customers won't go through the aggravating process of getting us to accept blame--if we got to the airport on time and checked our baggage; it's hard to see how it's our fault that it got sent to the wrong continent. 'Point the finger' is the flip side of taking responsibility. As computer owners we all know that when a program doesn't work, vendors often resort to finger pointing: "It's Apple's system software." "It's Microsoft's 'special' way of doing things." "It's the way Adobe created PDF." A great customer service company doesn't point the finger--it figures out what the solution is regardless of whose fault the problem is and makes the customer happy. There is a saying, "You're either part of the problem or part of the solution." (By the way, as a rule of thumb, the company with the largest market capitalization is the one at fault.) We have also experienced that great customer service companies don't shoot the messenger. When it comes to customer service, it could be a customer, an employee, a vendor, or a consultant who's doing the pointing. The goal is not to silence the messenger, but to fix the problem that the messenger brought so that other customers don't have a bad experience.

One of the most common justifications for anti-service is "What if everyone did this?" For example, what if everyone bought a new wardrobe when we lost their luggage? The point is: Don't assume that the worst case is going to be the common case. There will be outlier abusers, yes, but generally people are reasonable. If we put in a policy to take care of the worst case, bad people, it will antagonise and insult the bulk of our customers. To put it mildly, customer service is not a job for everyone. The ideal customer service person derives great satisfaction by helping people and solving problems. This cannot be said of every job candidate. It's the company's responsibility to hire the right kind of people for this job because it can be a bad experience for the employee and the customer when you hire folks without a service orientation. In our country we need to seriously look into this. Definition of customer service is yet to understand by us properly.

The goal of customer service should be delighting customer.

For example, the signs in the lines at Theme Park that tell us how long we have to wait from each point are purposely overstated. When we get to the ride in less time, we are delighted. Imagine if the signs were understated we'd be angry because theme park lied to us. It is also very important to integrate customer service into the mainstream. Let's see: sales make the big money. Marketing does the fun stuff. Engineers, well, we leave them alone in their dark caves. Accounting cuts the paychecks. And support? Do to the dirty work of talking to piss off customers when nothing else works. Herein lies the problem: customer service has as much to do with a company's reputation as sales, marketing, engineering, and finance. So integrate customer service into the mainstream of the company and do not consider it profit-sucking necessary evil. A customer service hero deserves all the accolades that a sales, marketing, or engineering one does.

To put several recommendations in action, suppose a part breaks in the gizmo that a customer bought from us. First, take responsibility: "I'm sorry that it broke." Second, don't point the finger--that is, don't say, "We buy that part from a supplier." Third, put the customer in control: "When would like the replacement by?" Fourth, promise equals to over deliver: Send it at no additional charge via a faster shipping method than necessary. That's the way to create legendary customer service.

AZM Saifuddin
Dhaka



Embedding CSR into practices of companies

The recent surge of interest in corporate social responsibility (CSR) has led to the birth of a CSR industry in Bangladesh. This has in turn led to many definitions of what constitutes "CSR". CSR is generally defined as open and transparent practices that are based on ethical values and respect for all who are impacted by those practices such as its shareholders; its

employees, its suppliers and the society in which the company operates. The common thread amongst the available definitions is that CSR is not about how a company spends its money, but about how the company makes its money.

CSR is one of the many steps of the journey that started with the movement for improved corporate governance. It is not without its critics, the most famous is from the eminent economist Milton Friedman who wrote in 1970: "There is one and only one social responsibility of business -- to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game, which is to say, engages in open and free competition without deception or fraud." However, three decades onwards, CSR has become a norm and well-accepted concept. Today companies engage in CSR activities because behaving responsibly helps them protect the interest of their shareholders.

Although the movement to embrace CSR is gaining momentum, there are still a good number of companies in Bangladesh that have yet to start operating responsibly. There are examples of companies engaging in practices that maintain their profits by compromising the needs of future generations of Bangladeshis e.g. dyeing factories that pollute public water bodies with untreated effluents and publishers using paper from non-sustainable sources.

Among the companies that have conducted CSR activities, there are very few that have actually embedded CSR as part of their business practices preferring to use CSR as a public relations or marketing tool. In order to truly claim CSR is part of the corporate DNA, companies have to have a structured methodology to listen to its stakeholders; respond and act on valid stakeholders concerns; and account themselves on their commitments to address their stakeholders' concerns. Secondly, CSR must be embedded as part of everyday business as opposed to one-off acts of charity. Today, corporate philanthropy activities are being touted as CSR. While CSR outlines the basic responsibility areas for a company related to its business i.e. how it makes its money; corporate philanthropy has more to do with sustainable investment for social causes which are not directly linked with the core business of that company i.e. how it spends its money.

A purist may argue that CSR should be ensured before companies begin to engage in corporate philanthropy. Thus, companies have been accused of not embracing CSR when their reputations for corporate philanthropy are better known to the public.

While it is easy to criticise such activities as public relations exercises, one should not forget their roles in leading their peers towards adopting a greater level of responsibility towards society. Many other companies in Bangladesh are also attempting to develop their own CSR practices triggered by an urge to do something better for the community.

The present government has also started to endorse and encourage laudable initiatives by different Bangladesh companies. Finance Adviser Mirza Azizul Islam said that the government is in the process of framing a policy to encourage greater participation of corporate bodies in CSR practices. Senior officials of the government have also expressed the need for a set of policies on CSR because of its obvious benefits to the country.

There is still a long way for CSR can be said to have been truly embedded into the practices of Bangladesh companies. However, many companies have started the process as part of a quiet revolution towards greater level of responsibility. It is vital that that these companies are well-informed about what truly constitutes CSR. Adopting new practices and embedding are expected to take time, effort and resources. We need to recognise that companies in Bangladesh are heading in the right direction and will face great challenges. It is therefore important for us to encourage them in their resolve towards achieving greater corporate responsibility to the society in which they operate.

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Dhaka

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