



Khulna-based Prime Shipping Lines made Sundarban-4, a 1,500-tonne vessel, which was launched at a function in Barisal recently. Some other companies in the region are also making such ships riding on low-cost but skilled manpower and infrastructure facilities.

Local company floats coastal ship in Barisal

RAFIQUL ISLAM, BARISAL

Khulna-based Prime Shipping Lines, an associate of Sundarban Navigation Company, has entered the local shipbuilding market with completing construction of a coastal ship to be used for carrying goods in coastal areas of the country.

Sundarban-4, the 1500-tonne vessel, was floated on June 26 at a function in Barisal.

Shawkat Hossain Hiron, Barisal City Corporation (BCC) mayor, said at the function that the government has attached top priority to shipbuilding sector considering its enormous potential.

The government believes in the public-private synchronisation to expand the industrial sector by upgrading infrastructure facilities, said the BCC mayor.

Saidur Rahman, managing director of the company, said they can build ships with capacity of 500 tonnes to 2,500 tonnes in their shipyard situated in Beltala area of the city on the west bank of Kirtonkhola river.

Recently another local company Crescent Navigation also started con-

structing this type of vessels and more companies are coming forward, with low-cost labour, infrastructural facilities and local technology helping flourish the sector.

Golam Mawla, owner of Crescent Navigation, said Barisal region has a very old tradition in shipbuilding from ancient period.

Most of the large double- and triple-decker luxury passenger carrying river vessels now plying on major river routes of the country were built here by maintaining international standards," Mawla said.

Md Ebaydul Haque Chand, director of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), said Barisal has a competitive edge over its rivals because of its cheap and naturally expert workforce.

He called for all-out support by making new policies and bringing changes to the existing laws to accelerate development of the sector.

The emerging shipbuilding industry is important not only for earning revenue but also for technology transfer, he added.

All it requires are modern technology and skilled manpower to meet the

increasing demand for water transport vessels, Chand said.

"We have skilled and hard working people. We are hopeful that we will be able to achieve excellence in building larger ships in the coming days," said Manzurul Alam Ferdous, owner of Kirtonkhola Navigation Company.

Cost competitiveness, technical know-how, skilled manpower and excellent communication skills of Bangladeshi shipbuilders helped in getting orders, industry stakeholders said.

Industry people said Bangladesh is enjoying the benefit of skilled workforce in building ships as some workers, who have work experience in different foreign countries, have come back home and joined the local industry.

Meanwhile, Export Promotion Bureau has recommended giving priority to the shipbuilding industry in the upcoming three-year import policy.

It also suggested bringing down bank interest rate to eight percent and simplifying the import procedures of raw materials for the shipbuilding industry, said Sheikh Abdul Rahim, president of Barisal Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Antipoverty project to reach out to 12 more districts

SAYEDA AKTER

Social Development Foundation (SDF), a government pilot project financed by World Bank, is set to expand operations in 12 more districts by year-end, aiming to cut poverty.

Under this expansion, the \$101 million SDF has initially started work in the northern parts of the country, including Rangpur, Nilphamari, Kurigram and Dinajpur, and would later expand to southern districts, said Muhammad Fazlur Rahman, managing director of SDF.

"SDF's current operation -- Social Investment Programme Project (SIPP) -- was successful in Jamalpur and Gaibandha and the government is now preparing a follow-on project for Rangpur, Kurigram, Nilphamari and Dinajpur," Rahman said.

"We have already started the technical groundwork to implement projects in four new districts," he said. "In addition, we plan to reach out to eight more districts by the end of this year."

The poverty rate in Nilphamari, Rangpur and Kurigram districts, which is often hit by Monga, is over 60 percent, said Rahman.

Earlier, SDF has worked in Jamalpur and Gaibandha, two of the poorest districts, under the SIPP project since 2003.

Currently, SDF is imple-

menting three projects -- Social Investment Programme Project (SIPP), Flood Restoration and Recovery Assistance Programme, and Notun Jibon Cyclone Recovery Programme.

"When we started working in Jamalpur and Gaibandha, we initially allocated funds to people in the locality to renovate infrastructure," said the SDF chief. "These initiatives have increased productivity in the area."

SDF has provided 85 percent of the total cost of renovating roads, schools, building mud road and culverts and excavating canals, to eradicate water logging in the districts.

Rahman said the SIPP is being implemented in Jamalpur and Gaibandha through a community driven development (CDD) approach, where the community participates in identifying their needs and then formulate plans to meet their needs. This project has benefited over two million poor people in the districts.

Under the project, SDF has been disbursing the allocation as loans, at a seven percent rate of interest through village institutions that have been formed with women, youths and the poorest in 922 villages of the districts.

Rahman said they have provided loans to community people on flexible

terms, as the borrower would refund the amount without any interest within a year and would pay the interest after gaining stability.

Sabera Begum, a beneficiary of the project, said the project is trustworthy and popular in the locality because the loan is disbursed at a low interest rate and there is a flexible recollection system.

Sabera said she received loans from the village institutions that received allocations from SDF. The members of the livelihood groups (Jibikayan Groups) later disburse the internal lending. The institution also encourages its members to save.

These groups have gathered savings worth Tk 50 million and provided Tk 33 million as small loans to their group members, to finance income-generating activities, said Rahman.

SDF is an autonomous organisation that was established by the government and financed by World Bank in 2001. Later in 2007, SDF undertook rebuilding and rehabilitating of cyclone and flood-hit areas of the country.

Additionally, SDF along with Palli Karma Sahayak Foundation (PKSF) is also implementing the Flood Restoration and Recovery Assistance Programme in the districts that were devastated by floods in 2007.

In response to the gov-

ernment's request for rehabilitation and reconstruction assistance in the aftermath of the floods, the International Development Association of World Bank (WB) came up with a \$25 million emergency programme.

Some 250 flood-affected villages, including 150 in Jamalpur and 100 in Gaibandha, are covered by the consolidated phase of SIPP. About 1,50,000 flood-hit families are directly being benefited by the livelihood support activities, according to a WB official.

To implement the project, the government has signed a credit agreement worth \$50 million with IDA. This project has initially targeted 150,000 households from 35 unions in 10 upazilas of four districts in the south, including Patuakhali, Barguna, Pirojpur and Bagerhat.

Meena M Munshi, task team leader of SIPP project and senior economist of WB, said the main objective of the project is to eradicate poverty through empowering the poor people.

"If the government can support them in improving their livelihood and skills, it will help eradicate poverty from the country," she said. This programme would help build confidence among the poor communities, as their economic conditions are changing gradually, she added.

BB governor stresses credit card use on internet soon

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The central bank governor called upon yesterday the ICT stakeholders to come forward with specific suggestions that can help introduce soon the use of credit card on the internet.

Bangladesh Bank (BB) Governor Atiur Rahman also urged the local software makers to tie up with foreign companies to supply banking solutions to the local market. "Initially you can team up with foreign companies to develop competence."

Rahman assured the stakeholders of easing the process for getting money from ICT Equity Entrepreneurship Fund (EEF), and asked them to become more aware of fund misuse.

He was speaking at a seminar on Banking & Finance in Light of Digital Bangladesh organised by Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS) in Dhaka.

The ICT (information and communication technology) stakeholders sought central bank's intervention in ensuring the use of local software in banking sector.

The government in the current fiscal year has allocated Tk 200 crore for ICT EEF, which is Tk 100 crore more than that of the previous year. However, in terms of utilisation, the fund remained almost idle last fiscal year as the entrepreneurs took only Tk 60 lakh from the fund.

The stakeholders blamed the situation on the process of allocation.

Although the BB was tasked with disbursing the fund, recently the government handed over the fund disbursement responsibility to Investment Corporation of Bangladesh (ICB).

"Regulator and operator should not be the same," said the BB governor regarding appointing ICB to disburse the EEF.

Humayun Kabir, managing director of ICB, suggested the entrepreneurs should design their project proposals on their own, not by any consultants.

Habibullah N Karim, president of BASIS, said local software companies are struggling for getting global certification due to the central bank's certain restrictions on remitting. Global certification is needed to outsource IT services.

Seminar stresses better policies for social protection

UNB, Dhaka

The governments of Southeast Asian countries need to come up with better policies for social protection, access to ICT, food security and overall development of rural people's livelihood, speakers told a regional seminar here yesterday.

"The economic growth of a country isn't possible unless there is a positive change in the livelihood of rural people," Mokbul Morshed Ahmad from Asian Institute of Technology, Thailand said in his keynote paper at the seminar.

Center on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (Cirdap) hosted the seminar on Changing Rural Livelihoods in the Cirdap Member Countries: Opportunities and Constraints' at its auditorium here.

Cirdap Director General Dr Durga P Paudyal presided over the seminar, while Director (Training) SK Sing and representatives from member countries took part in the discussion.

Mokbul Morshed said poverty is the biggest challenge for the Southeast Asian region and it should be tackled with effective policies and programmes.

"Irrespective of the national income levels, poverty is consistently higher in rural areas than in urban areas in all the Southeast Asian countries with the highest incidence in remote and upland areas where ethnic communities live in," he said.

Mokbul said farmers are the worst victims of climate change and their number is

gradually declining, raising the number of poor people.

He suggested strong policy for ICT infrastructure development in rural areas which will help farmers and rural people to get updated information regarding their choices. "ICT is the tool of development," he said.

Poverty, food security and issues relating to climate change should be given the highest concentration to find out meaningful solutions to these crises.

Durga P Paudyal said the seminar would surely enhance the knowledge on the particular issues and help formulate policies based on the suggestions for sustainable rural development.

He emphasised regional cooperation and information sharing for formulating effective policies and programmes for rural development.

Paudyal said they would place the recommendations as 'policy proposal' in the ministerial meeting to be held in November this year in Dhaka.

He said the highest authority of Cirdap is its Governing Council which consists of the ministers in charge of agriculture and rural development in the member states.

Earlier, SK Sing described the poverty scenario of India by presenting a paper on 'Rural Livelihood: An Overview.'

He said the majority of the poor people in the world live in rural areas and the world's 22 percent poor people live in India. "Rural development is the key policy issue in developing countries."

Trade thru' Bhomra land port remains suspended

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Border trade through Bhomra land port in Sadar upazila remained suspended since last morning, as Ghojadanga Clearing and Forwarding (C&F) Agents Association in India enforced indefinite strike again at Ghojadanga land port in Basirhat police station after the expiry of the deadline of July 5 they set for resolving the dispute between C&F agents and Indian truckers.

The association condemned the truckers' attacks on the C&F agents on Wednesday.

The agents and Indian truckers locked in a clash on June 30 over parking a truck on the road.

The government is incurring a heavy loss of revenue as the border trade came to a halt through the Bhomra land port.

EU summit planned before G20 meet

AFP, Brussels

The European Union's Swedish presidency is planning an extraordinary summit of EU leaders in September ahead of a meeting of the Group of 20 powers in the United States, diplomats said Monday.

"It is likely that the summit will take place a few days before the G20," to be held in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on September 24 and 25, one diplomat said, with the aim being to prepare a common EU position for the economy talks.

New DMD for Mutual Trust Bank

STAR BUSINESS DESK



Mutual Trust Bank Ltd (MTB) has promoted Md Hashem Chowdhury to deputy managing director, says a press release.

Prior to this assignment, he was acting as the bank's senior executive vice president and head of general services, banking operations, business development, public relations and brand communication and recovery and monitoring.

AKTEL's owning company gets new name

STAR BUSINESS DESK

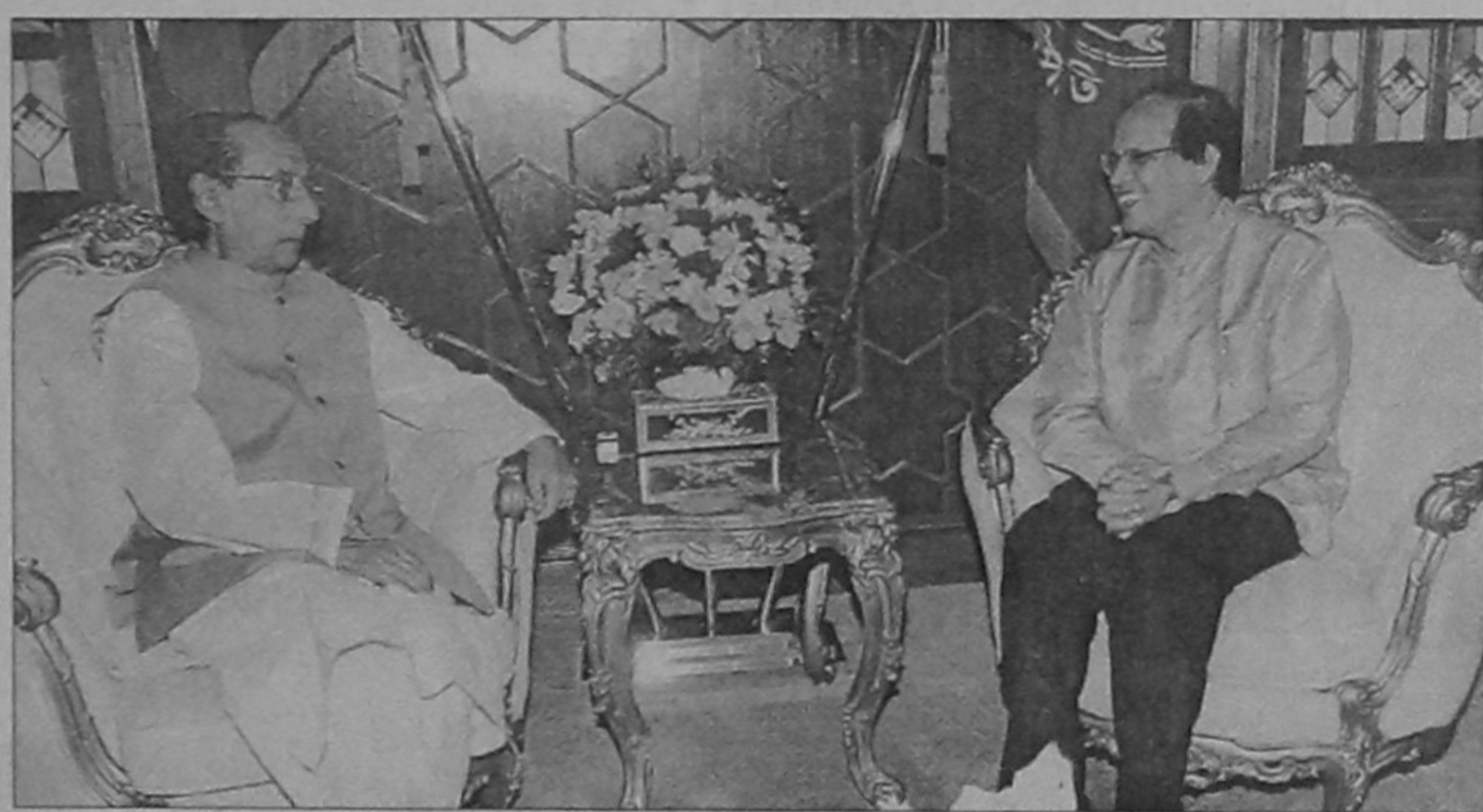


TM International (Bangladesh) Ltd, the company that owns the telecom brand AKTEL, has been renamed as Axiata (Bangladesh) Ltd, says a press release.

Axiata (Bangladesh) Ltd is a joint venture between Axiata Group Berhad of Malaysia, one of the largest telecommunication companies in South East Asia, and NTT-DoCoMo of Japan.

However, the company said that the brand AKTEL would remain the same.

Axiata's other mobile subsidiaries and associates operate under different banners, such as 'Celcom' in Malaysia, 'XL' in Indonesia and 'Dialog' in Sri Lanka.



Bangladesh Bank Governor Dr Atiur Rahman calls on President Zillur Rahman at the Bangabhaban in the capital yesterday.

Adopt policy to implement 'charter of change'

President directs central bank

UNB, Dhaka

A new farm loan policy is going to be introduced from next week aiming to help the country's poor farmers by giving them soft-term loan from the Tk 11,000 crore fund.

Bangladesh Bank Governor Dr Atiur Rahman revealed the plan in reply to reporters after discussion with President Zillur Rahman in a meeting at Bangabhaban yesterday.

The president directed the central bank to frame policies in the light of the new government's agenda for a change.

"The agro-loan policy will be introduced from next week," the governor told reporters.

Dr Atiur apprised the president of different activities and schemes of the central bank, especially the programmes taken up for the benefit of poor people.

Under the new lending policy for the farm sector, around Tk 11,000 crore will be disbursed to the farmers as soft loan through both the private and the state-owned banks, the governor informed the president.

"I apprised the president that under the new agro-loan policy all priorities will be given to the poor farmers to ensure sound agricultural development," he said explaining the agri-credit policy.

Replying to a question, the governor said the president directed the central bank to adopt policies in line with the government agenda to help implement the 'charter of change' declared by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Later, President's Press Secretary Abdul Awal Howlader told the reporters that the president expressed his satisfaction over the initiatives recently taken by Bangladesh Bank.

"The president lauded the role of Bangladesh Bank for taking the initiatives to upgrade the rural economy," the press secretary said, adding that the president said the central bank should design the programmes for ensuring benefit of the poor people.

The president also directed the Bangladesh Bank to take necessary measures to realise the government-conceived 'vision-2021'.

During the meeting, Dr Atiur apprised the president that most developing countries had negative economic growth due to global recession, but Bangladesh achieved GDP growth at 5.9 percent.

The president asked the central bank chief to play a vital role in establishing an exploitation-free economy to build up a hunger-and-poverty-free prosperous Bangladesh.



Rupali Chowdhury, managing director of Berger Paints (BD) Ltd, poses at a dealership agreement signing ceremony for the company's auto refurbish brands of PPG in Dhaka recently.