

United to spread wings further to int'l routes

UNB, Dhaka

United Airways is going to spread its wings further on international routes as it yesterday got government permission to operate flights twice a week on Dhaka-London-Dhaka route, the first by a private airline.

It also got permission to operate flights to Jeddah, Dammam and Riyadh of Saudi Arabia.

The company said the civil aviation ministry gave the permission after reviewing the past track record of the airline in operating flights on international routes.

The United Airways, a venture of the non-resident Bangladeshis mainly living in the UK, is expected to start its operating flights on the Dhaka-London-Dhaka route by the year-end and at least to one destination in Saudi Arabia. It is now operating international flights to Kolkata and Dubai.

On July 23, the United Airways launched a direct flight to Dubai. It is operating a flight from Dhaka to Dubai every Thursday and Sunday with its newly procured 155-seat MD-83 aircraft.

Shop owners demand power supply at night

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh Shop Owners Association yesterday demanded uninterrupted power supply till 9pm after the Shab-e-Barat and till early hours during the month of Ramadan.

Association President Amir Hossain Khan raised the demand at a press conference at the National Press Club.

Khan said about 50 percent sales declined since daylight saving time introduced on June 19 as they are to close shops at sunset at 8pm.

He lamented that the shop owners are sustaining heavy loss as they are to close shops at sunset when power supply is snapped. They will sustain an estimated loss of about 5,000 crore if the government does not extend the business hours ensuring power supply.

"We are ready to install energy saving bulbs or own electricity system and reduce use of air conditions by 50 percent to save electricity," said Amir Hossain, urging the government to allow them to keep the shops open at night.

BBS launches BDInfo

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) launched yesterday a web page styled BDInfo to store data generated from censuses, surveys and records of management information.

The web page is accessible from today.

"The main objective is to help monitoring Millennium Development Goal (MDG) progress by the government, implementation of the national development plan and promoting evidence-based planning," said AYM Ekramul Hoque, the BBS director general.

"BDInfo is an adopted version of DevInfo, a United Nations (UN) database system to monitor the MDG. The United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) has provided technical and financial assistance to the BBS to develop the page," he added.

The web page covers all kinds of data from division, district, upazila, union to national level. The user-friendly system will also monitor the vulnerable groups in terms of gender, geographical location, ethnicity and disability.

Habib Ullah Majumder, secretary (planning division), ministry of planning, inaugurated the page at a ceremony organized by the BBS at NEC auditorium in Dhaka.

Jute price fall worries farmers

UNB, Mymensingh

Jute price has declined to Tk 1,000 or below per maund in the primary markets, worrying the farmers and encouraging smugglers.

State-owned jute mills made some 'lucky purchase' at Tk 1,600 per maund at the beginning of the season in June.

Early crop was sold at Tk 1,000 and below at Shambhuganj market a couple of days ago. The price in markets of Faridpur, a quality jute growing district, was better -- from Tk 1,100 to 1,400 per maund (around 37 kilogrammes).

Mill owners and traders apprehend that the price may decline further if banks delay financing the mills and traders.

They said low price in the domestic market will encourage smuggling of jute across the border where the demand is high.

The Advisory Committee on Jute meeting on July 5 with Jute & Textile Minister Abdul Latif Siddiqi in the chair directed the state-owned banks to extend loans to the mills and the traders.

The meeting decided that the outstanding loans of the mills will be kept in a 'block account' for two and a half years. Fresh loans should be given to draw jute from the markets for keeping the mills running and ensuring fair price for the growers, officials present at the meeting told the news agency yesterday.

The meeting observed that if the mills failed to operate due to lack of working capital, they would not be able to repay the loans.

Representatives of the state-owned banks at the meeting sought guarantee that the borrowers will duly repay the loans. The proposal is now under consideration of the finance ministry.

According to the Agriculture office, the crop was good this year despite delayed rains. Officials estimate the harvest at 50 lakh bales.

August-September will be the peak season when bulk of the jute will come to the market, said officials.

If all the mills run properly, they will require around 45 lakh bales, leaving a little for export of raw jute.

Private jute mills' association said they have 90 mills, mostly small, set up with machinery procured from closed Adamjee and other state-owned mills. About 40 small mills are located in 'Monga-prone' areas of greater Rangpur district.

"Most of them are making profit," said a leader of the association.



CNG pump owners raise demand with PM's adviser

UNB, Dhaka

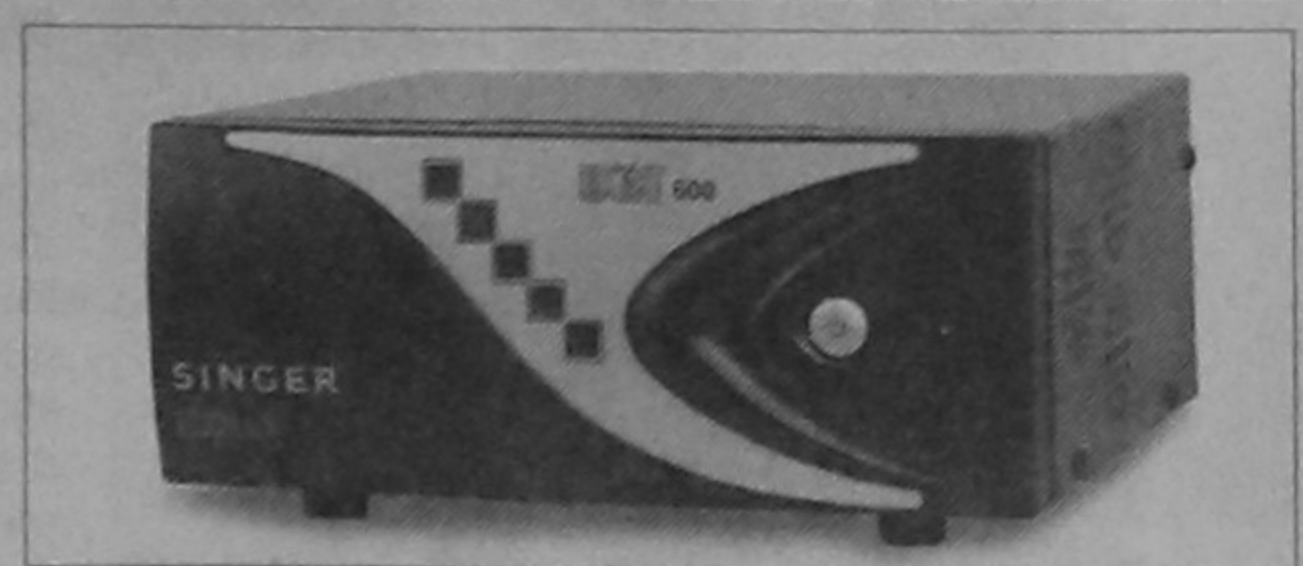
CNG pump owners have submitted their six-point demand to Prime Minister's Energy Adviser Dr Towfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury.

Officials with the energy ministry said the demands were forwarded to the PM's adviser on Sunday as the follow-up of Thursday's meeting between the CNG pump owners and the government.

After that meeting, the CNG pump owners postponed their countrywide strike, scheduled to start on August 1, and set the government a deadline to meet their demands by August 16.

The pump owners were asked by the PM's adviser to submit their demands in detail with "logical grounds".

Their demands are reducing gas prices to Tk 13.26 from Tk 16.75 per cubic metre at consumer level, fixing feed gas price at Tk 5.23 like other industries, cancelling the minimum billing system, installing electronic volume conductors on an emergency basis, reducing BERC licence fee to Tk 5,000 from Tk 1 lakh, cancelling the cash security deposit system and exempting the CNG stations from the Department of Environment's NOC.



Singer launches new IPS

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Singer Bangladesh Ltd has introduced 'digital' IPS in the market, said a statement.

The new product comes with a 'sealed lead acid battery', which does not require pouring water during its lifetime. A digital controller technology ensures longer life of the battery, added the statement.

The IPS (instant power supply) comes in three models -- Lucent 400 for two tube lights and two fans, Lucent 600 for four tube lights, two fans and a television, and Lucent 1400 for eight tube lights, five fans and a television.

The IPS, also available with high quality industrial battery, can be adjusted according to the load requirements.

The product offers one-year warranty for the main unit and battery, and clients can also avail of a two-year extended warranty period for the main unit. It also comes with free installation and easy instalment facilities.

Privatised Rajshahi textile mill reopens

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Rajshahi Textile Mills (RTM) resumed operations yesterday after nine months of its closure, following a private initiative that is expected to employ around 500 people.

Rajshahi City Corporation (RCC) Mayor AHM Khairuzzaman Liton formally opened the mill at a ceremony on the mill premises.

Trade Exchange, a private cotton trading firm of Narayanganj, signed a two-year agreement with RTM to provide raw materials and collect yarn on the basis of service charge at a rate of Tk 6,200 per bale of cotton.

The mill will begin operations with 150 employees and then gradually increase to 500 people in the next few months.

The agreement was signed following the approval of Bangladesh Textile Mills Corporation (BTMC), said M Ansar Uddin, general manager of RTM.

He said officials and employees have not been paid for the last nine months, while the mill is in around Tk2 crore debt.



STAR

AHM Khairuzzaman Liton, Rajshahi City Corporation mayor, formally reopens the Rajshahi Textile Mills in the district town yesterday.

The RTM failed to manage private investment to run the mill, floating open tenders three times since November 2008, said the GM. The mill was closed with an aim to privatise.

Later, under the initiatives of the RCC mayor, the private organisation agreed to bring the mill back to operations on a service charge basis, Ansar added.

"If the mill successfully continues to produce yarn, the government plans to turn it into a composite mill, by using its own land in the future," said Mayor Liton.

He added that the government is trying to overcome the problems with unemployment in the country by reviving closed mills and factories.

The mayor said invitations were sent to private investors to construct at least 20 knitwear factories in the city to generate employment for 30,000 people.



LAFARGE SURMA CEMENT

Mike Cowell, managing director of Lafarge Surma Cement Ltd, speaks at a technical session on 'Construction Practices in Bangladesh' at the annual review meeting of the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) in Dhaka on Saturday. Md Wahidur Rahman, chief engineer of LGED, is also seen.

News in Brief

Oil extends gains on US recovery hopes

AFP, Singapore

Oil advanced further in Asian trade Monday, still cheered on by data showing the US economy contracted at a slower-than-expected pace in the second quarter, analysts said.

New York's main contract, light sweet crude for September delivery, rose 1.07 dollars to 70.52 dollars a barrel.

Brent North Sea crude for September delivery advanced 85 cents to 72.55 dollars.

Both contracts had closed higher Friday, buoyed by data from the Commerce Department that showed the US economy shrank at an annualised rate of 1.0 percent in the three months to June.

That was less than the 1.5 percent contraction most analysts had expected, renewing hopes that the world's biggest economy was likely recovering from a recession that began in December 2007.

The United States is the world's number one energy user and any improvement in its economy is seen as a boost to oil demand, which in turn lends support to crude futures prices.

Top US administration officials said Sunday that economic growth was highly likely to resume in the second half of the year and President Barack Obama's massive 787-billion-dollar stimulus plan was working.

"A very great likelihood, and this is what most professional forecasters say, is that we'll see growth going forward in the second half of this year," White House economic adviser Larry Summers said in an interview with NBC television.

Singapore's OCBC says Q2 net profit up 10pc

AFP, Singapore

Singapore's Oversea-Chinese Banking Corp (OCBC) said Monday net profit rose 10 percent in the second quarter on the back of growing income as business picks up from the global economic slump.

For the three months to June, OCBC made a net profit of 466 million Singapore dollars (323.57 million US), up from 425 million dollars a year ago, the Singapore bank said.

The results exceeded average market expectations of 387 million dollars for the period, according to a Dow Jones Newswires poll of seven analysts.

"There is growing consensus that the worst is over for the global economy and global financial markets, but the pace of the recovery remains uncertain," chief executive David Conner said.

"We will continue to be disciplined and prudent as we strive to grow our customer businesses in our key markets," he said.

During the April-June period, OCBC earned net interest income of 710 million dollars, up five percent year on year while non-interest income increased 37 percent to 494 million dollars, the bank said.

It also set aside 104 million dollars in allowances for loans and impairments of other assets, up from 55 million dollars last year but significantly down from 197 million dollars in the first quarter.

OCBC, one of three Singapore lenders, is the first to release its second quarter financial results.

US officials see economic growth in second half

AFP, New York

Top US administration officials said on Sunday that economic growth is highly likely to resume in the second half of the year, but warned of "hard choices" to contain rising deficits once recovery is assured.

Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner would not rule out higher taxes in the future, telling ABC television: "We're going to have to do what is necessary."

Geithner and White House economic adviser Larry Summers went on the Sunday television talk shows to make the case that President Barack Obama's economic stimulus program was gaining traction despite rising unemployment and worries about the US deficit.

"A very great likelihood, and this is what most professional forecasters say, is that we'll see growth going forward in the second half of this year," Summers said in an interview with NBC television.

Their prognosis was backed by former chairman of the Federal Reserve, Alan Greenspan, who told ABC the worst US financial crisis in a half a century was "not quite" over, "but we're getting there."



AFP

A couple stands by a shop window at a mall complex in Hong Kong yesterday. Hong Kong retail sales slumped 6.2 percent year-on-year in May, the government has said as consumers continued to stay away from luxury goods amid the economic downturn.

S Korean July inflation at nine-year low

AFP, Seoul

South Korea's annual inflation rate fell in July to its lowest level in more than nine years thanks to cheaper oil prices, official figures showed Monday.

The National Statistics Office said the consumer price index rose 1.6 percent compared with July 2008, when a surge in world oil prices caused inflation to rocket to 5.9 percent.

Prices inched up 0.4 percent month-on-month. "The 20.9 percent negative growth for products like gasoline, diesel and kerosene checked potential price gains caused by seasonal factors," said Song Seong-Heon, head of the office's price statistics division.