

CSR: Ramadan style

MD HASAN

The Iftar time in mind, Saidur Rahman was rushing home from his Motijheel office. The banker had no doubts about reaching his family before Iftar as he had more than two hours to spare on the traffic-clogged Dhaka streets.

But an apparently never-ending gridlock stuck his bus at Farmgate on his way to Mirpur.

He was feeling helpless, with his family members repeatedly calling him if he would join them in Iftar.

Sensing no such possibility, Rahman told them: "No".

Two minutes were left for breaking the fast. Suddenly some people representing a mobile phone company got onto the bus and started distributing bottled water and dates among the passengers.

This was the way Banglalink opted for getting done its corporate social responsibility (CSR) during the month of Ramadan.

The Egyptian company launched the initiative on the first day of Ramadan



Underprivileged children take their Iftar at an orphanage. Mobile phone operator Banglalink has come up with a CSR initiative for the month of Ramadan to offer Iftar to the orphans, and people going home right before or during the Iftar time.

with the aim to serve 90,000 people on the streets with Iftar items and 9,000 orphans of 45 orphanages with Iftar and dinner across the country during the month.

"It's totally unexpected. Many thanks to the company," the banker said.

Everyday five teams

having 10 members each offer Iftar items at different points of Dhaka, Khulna and Chittagong.

For the orphans an experienced cook makes the dinner on the orphanage premises.

"Banglalink initiative made happy more than 100 students of my orphanage,"

said Asmot Jahan, deputy superintendent of a government-run orphanage in Mymensingh.

"There was a general expectation among the orphans that they will get a feast during Ramadan from the authorities. But the sudden arrangement by the company came as a sur-

prise gift to them," she said.

The company offered dinner to the girls at the orphanage on September 8.

"The dates and water distribution effort is unique and practical too because when someone is going home right before or during Iftar, very few options are available on the roads. Our little effort will go a long way in making that person smile," said Ahmed Abou Doma, chief executive officer of Banglalink.

"The programmes in the orphanages are something very close to our hearts as these children deserve the very best and more so during the month of holy Ramadan," he added.

In the six operators' market, Banglalink is now the second largest with 11.27 million customers by the end of July 2009. The total mobile subscribers are 47.97 million in the country.

Although the company has established a strong foothold in the market after its inception in 2005, it is yet to break even.

hasan@thedailystar.net

DCCI wants banks to keep open on Saturday

UNB, Dhaka

Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) urged the Bangladesh Bank for keeping commercial banks open on Saturday, a day of the two-day weekly holiday, for smooth financial transaction.

Banks and other institutions will remain closed for three days from September 20 on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr, said a release of the DCCI.

DCCI thinks that the businessmen will fall in trouble in depositing their money earned from sales due to the closure of the banks.

Hence, the DCCI made a strong demand upon the central bank for keeping all commercial banks open on Saturday in order to provide facilities to the businessmen.

NOVO exports medicine to Central America

STAR BUSINESS DESK

NOVO Healthcare and Pharma Ltd is now exporting pharmaceutical products to Central America, said a press statement.

The company, operating in Bangladesh for three and a half years, exported three products to Honduras in their first consignment.

It achieved the WHO GMP Certification recently.

American Airlines talks with JAL for possible tie-up

ANN/THE YOMIURI SHIMBUN

With American Airlines following such carriers as Delta Air Lines and Air France-KLM in making overtures to Japan Airlines, it appears that airlines across the globe are jostling to invest in the cash-strapped carrier and grab a greater slice of the international aviation pie.

JAL, which is undergoing a restructuring programme, is expected to prioritise tie-up negotiations with Delta, especially with the construction and transport ministry having led the way toward talks with the world's largest carrier.

Some JAL insiders, however, are advocating the strengthening of ties with American, a carrier with which JAL has long had a close relationship.

American, a unit of AMR Corp, is the world's second-largest airline.

JAL's deputy president is currently in the United States for talks with Delta. But Japan's flagship carrier also is keeping an eye on such matters as conditions that American may set forth and is ready to enter negotiations.

JAL is considering greatly cutting the number of routes it flies as it formulates its reconstruction plan.

However, if JAL were to code-share with Delta, which has a dominant share of Pacific routes, it would be able to maintain or even expand its flight network, a move a senior ministry official said "has significant merit from a medium- to long-term perspective."

JAL is part of the Oneworld grouping of airlines, which includes American and British Airways. Should it tie-up with Delta, it likely would have to switch to SkyTeam, an alliance with such member carriers as Delta and Air France-KLM.

It is believed that such a move could be costly, as changing systems to match those of the SkyTeam will involve a not-insignificant expense.

News in Brief

US consumer prices up 0.4 percent in August

AFP, Washington

US consumer prices rose 0.4 percent in August, driven by higher gasoline costs, government data showed Wednesday.

The Labour Department's consumer price index (CPI) showed a year-over-year decline of 1.5 percent, in a report being monitored for signs of deflation rather than inflation in light of the weak economy.

The report showed a 0.1 percent monthly increase in the "core" CPI, excluding volatile food and energy costs, a figure that some economists say offers hints of future inflation trends.

The core index was up 1.4 percent over the last 12 months, the smallest 12-month increase in the index since February 2004.

The overall CPI was lifted by a 9.1 percent rise in the gasoline index, which accounted for 80 percent of the overall increase in consumer prices. But despite the August increase, the gasoline index has fallen 30.0 percent over the last 12 months.

The CPI report was roughly in line with analyst forecasts for a 0.3 percent increase in overall prices and a 0.1 percent rise in the core CPI.

Andres Carbacho-Burgos at Moody's Economy.com said the report highlights concern about a potentially crippling bout of deflation.

EU pushes for G20 bank bonus 'sanctions'

AFP, Brussels

European Union leaders will press their G20 partners to back "sanctions" for banks that hand out excessive bonuses, according to a draft summit communiqué seen by AFP on Wednesday.

"The G20 should commit to agreeing to binding rules for financial institutions on variable remunerations backed up by the threat of sanctions at the national level," the draft said ahead of a special summit in Brussels.

The text will be put to the heads of the 27 EU member states meeting on Thursday evening to agree a common position to take to the G20 summit in Pittsburgh of the world's major economies next week.

Seeking new rules that "fulfil the commitment subscribed to in London" in April at the last G20 summit, the EU contends that bonuses handed out in the financial sector should be tied to "long-term performance."

The draft calls for an end to guaranteed bonuses, with financial police given powers to retroactively slash payments where investments fail to deliver and tools to force boards to control levels of high-risk speculation.

The EU leaders will also seek to block the exercising of stock options over set timeframes and end the insulation of top directors from fall-out when banks fail, following a number of high-profile payouts to failed bank chiefs.



An Indian vendor comforts her four-month old baby at a roadside tea and telephone shop in Allahabad yesterday. These roadside vendors usually earn Rs 100 (\$2) per day and look after their families while working.

Cathay signs largest aircraft leaseback deal to raise cash

AFP, Hong Kong

Cathay Pacific said Wednesday it had signed its largest aircraft sale and leaseback agreement and planned to sell almost half of its stake in an engineering affiliate to preserve cash in the downturn.

The embattled Hong Kong carrier said in a statement it had signed an agreement with BOC Aviation, Bank of China's aircraft leasing company, for the sale and leaseback of six of the 19 Boeing 777-300ER aircraft it has on order.

"This is a landmark agreement because it is the largest single leaseback arrangement we have entered into. It is consistent with our cash-preservation priority during this difficult time," Cathay chief executive Tony Tyler said.

He said in the statement that the arrangement would have no impact on the company's debt-equity ratio as there would be no need to raise finance for the purchase of the aircraft.

Tyler said Cathay had no intention of cancelling aircraft orders but hoped to defer some of them.

Barclays restructures \$12.3b of risk assets

AFP, London

British bank Barclays will restructure 12.3 billion dollars (8.4 billion euros) in assets to reduce its risk exposure, the bank said Wednesday, as it fights off the effects of the credit crunch.

"Barclays today announces the restructuring of 12.3 billion dollars of credit market assets," the company said in a statement.

The deal would lead to "delivering more stable risk-adjusted returns" and restructuring exposure to the risk in the assets," it added.

Barclays last month reported a 10 percent rise in first-half net profits as its investment banking unit shrugged off market turmoil and its part-purchase of collapsed US investment bank Lehman Brothers helped boost business.

Barclays has avoided nationalisation, unlike many other leading British banks, but has warned it expects trading to remain difficult in 2009 and has announced a doubling credit provisions to deal with the crisis.

Dhaka signs aviation deal with EU

UNB, Dhaka

An aviation agreement was signed between Bangladesh and the European Union (EU) at the Civil Aviation and Tourism Ministry yesterday.

Civil Aviation and Tourism Secretary Hedayatullah Al Mamun and EU Head of Delegation Dr Stefan Frowen signed the agreement on behalf of their respective sides.

Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister Golam Mohammad Qader and high officials of the ministry were present.

More sops for Indian auto exporters

ANN/THE STATESMAN

In a move that would give a boost export of automobiles from India, the government has announced additional incentives on overseas shipments of cars and goods carriers to 13 countries, including Australia and Brazil.

Cars and other vehicles used for transportation of goods have been included in the new market-linked focus products, under which exporters will get incentives equivalent to two per cent of free-on-board (FOB) value of exports in foreign exchange, the Directorate General of Foreign Trade said.

Earlier, under the scheme the exporters were getting 1.25 per cent of FOB value of exports.

In the new foreign trade policy, the government had identified 13 countries, including those in Latin America and Africa, in a bid to increase exports, which are on a downside since October 2008.

Automobile firms exporting vehicles to Algeria, Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Brazil, Mexico, Ukraine, Australia, New Zealand, Cambodia and Viet Nam, will get the benefits of focus product schemes.

Exports of cars and goods transport vehicles were valued at \$4.68 billion during April-December 2009. Outward shipments of the products in 2007-08 stood at \$4.48 billion.

Hyundai Motor India, Maruti Suzuki and Tata Motors are the leading exporters of cars from India.

In August 2009, India's overall passenger car exports stood at 40,901 units as compared with 29,741 units last year.

Central effluent treatment plant tender by Oct 15

BSS, Dhaka

Industries Minister Dilip Barua said yesterday the government would invite bids by October 15 to set up a central waste treatment plant at the newly developed tannery city on the outskirts of the capital.

The government is working fast to secure a quick transfer of Hazaribagh factories to the new tannery city where infrastructure development is almost complete, the minister said.

Barua was sharing views with the functionaries of Bangladesh Tanners

Association and Bangladesh Finished Leather, Leather Goods and Footwear Exporters Association at his office.

The minister said the government is committed to shifting the tannery factories to the new location somewhere between Savar and Keraniganj. The new industrial city is being set up over 200 acres.

Major development activities are almost over. Construction of administrative building, drains, installation of light posts, police station and such other facilities are in progress.

He said industrial plots have already

been handed over to 134 tannery factories, out of 154.

Barua said the government would provide all support to factory owners in relocating their plants.

Factory owners urged the minister to give them financial support in securing the transfer of factories. The minister said he would try to bring them relief by providing long-term bank credit.

Barua said the government is working to restore a healthy environment to Hazaribagh area as quickly as possible by relocating the factories to the new tannery city.



Syed Mahbubur Rahman, acting managing director and chief executive officer of BRAC Bank, and Mobasherur Rahman, director general of Bangladesh Post Office, exchange documents after signing a deal recently. Under this agreement, the bank will disburse remittance from Bangladeshi expatriates instantly through the Post Office payout locations all over the country.

CCC gives respite to sugar customers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Chittagong City Corporation (CCC) yesterday came to the rescue of the sugar consumers by starting selling the item at Tk 40 per kilogramme when its price was hovering around Tk 64 in the city groceries.

CCC Mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury

formally inaugurated the sale at fair price at Jamal Khan Lichutola sales centre.

Chittagong Development Authority Chairman Abdus Salam, Chittagong Metropolitan Police Commissioner Md Moniruzzaman and other high officials of CCC were present.

Though the CCC had

earlier decided to sell 4,000 tonnes of sugar, the mayor said they would continue selling until the price returns to normalcy.

The CCC is procuring the sugar from S Alam Refined Sugar Industries Ltd to sell in the city through 100 sales centres under all its 41 wards, officials said.

S Alam is the first sugar

mill in the region that went into formal production from Tuesday.

However, 41 tonnes of sugar were sold on the first day through 41 sales centres with one tonne in each centre of the wards.

CCC officials said that they would be able to start selling at all the 100 centres within a couple of days.



Yonbok Jo, chief executive officer and managing director (current charge) of IDLC Finance Ltd, inaugurates an SME booth of the company at Imamganj in Dhaka recently.