



Yeafesh Osman, state minister for science and information and communication technology, and Prem Chand, general manager of Nokia Emerging Asia, pose at the launch of Nokia's campaign Avijan in Mymensingh yesterday. The programme, aimed at enlightening the young generation with information technology, will stay in the district until December 22.

## Experts call for collaboration to expand biotechnology

### STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Agriculture experts yesterday called to strengthen collaboration among stakeholders to speed up biotechnological research and development efforts, aiming to ensure food security for Bangladesh's growing population.

"We have done many things to expand biotechnological activities. But we have to go a long way to ensure food security," said Cabinet Secretary M Abdul Aziz.

His call came at a workshop where discussants observed that dependence on food production based on high yielding varieties (HYVs), a result of Green Revolution, will not be sufficient to feed the increasing population of Bangladesh amid gradual agricultural land losses every year.

At the same time, climate change also poses challenges for agriculture, which according to participants, calls for adoption of modern biotechnology to enhance production.

"Our food requirement is going to

double by the year 2035. Our land is declining, population increasing -- hence the demand for food," said Aziz.

Under the circumstance, Bangladesh should opt for expanding biotechnology to boost food production, he told the workshop.

Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (Barc) and Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) organised the programme at Barc to mark completion of a project on 'Formulation of Enabling Regulatory Measures for Research and Sustainable Application of Biotechnology'.

Chaired by Barc Executive Chairman Dr Wais Kabir, the workshop was also addressed by Additional Secretary at the Ministry of Agriculture Quazi Akhtar Hossain and FAO Representative in Bangladesh Ad Spijkers.

Discussants said biotech research is at initial stage in Bangladesh. To boost biotech research and development, the government earlier approved the

National Policy on Biotechnology. The bio-safety guideline was also given a go-ahead.

The cabinet secretary said Bangladesh should be quick to adopt biotechnology in agriculture.

"When other countries are taking benefit of biotechnology, we should not sit idle and become a victim of gene divide," he said.

Referring to media reports and the opposition of environmental activists, he said a mere dependence on environment will not help attain food security.

"We must not subscribe to the idea that GMO (Genetically Modified Organism) is bad. We are not saying that all GMOs are good and all GMOs are bad. It is a bad crop science."

The FAO representative stressed the need for better breeding programmes to increase food production.

The Barc chief said Bangladesh should tap the potential of biotechnology to allow agriculture to face multidimensional challenges in the days ahead.

## Stocks plummet



### STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Dhaka stocks fell heavily yesterday, as mutual funds and bank shares witnessed a sharp decline in prices.

The benchmark index of Dhaka Stock Exchange, DSE General Index, went down 81.39 points, or 1.85 percent to 4,312.24.

The 4.92 percent decline in mutual fund prices came as a result of market regulator's new restrictions on margin loans, market operators say.

Following a two-month suspension of sanctioning loans against mutual funds, a set of new criterion was announced Thursday by the Securities and Exchange Commission.

It said mutual funds must trade in a limited range to qualify for margin loans. The funds that trade

7.5 percent higher than their latest NAV (net asset value) will not qualify for the loans. It means if a mutual fund has Tk 100 in NAV per unit and trades only up to Tk 107.50 (7.5 percent higher than NAV), margin loans can be approved for the fund.

Apart from mutual funds, the banking sector also went down 3.02 percent as all the banks, except Rupali Bank, traded in the red.

Among the biggest loser, Dutch-Bangla Bank, Southeast Bank and Shahjalal Islami Bank lost more than 5 percent each.

Shares in other sectors such as telecom, non-banking financial institutions, fuel and power, pharmaceuticals and cement also declined.

The broader DSE All Share Price Index dropped

65.8 points, or 1.8 percent to 3,576.22.

The losers outnumbered the advancers 199 to 34 with two securities remained unchanged. A total of 2,83,94,347 shares and mutual fund units worth Tk 748.86 crore were traded on the premier bourse.

Chittagong stocks also plunged yesterday. The CSE Selective Categories Index went down 157.46 points, or 1.9 percent to 8,107.61. The CSE All Share Price Index dropped 232.61 points, or 1.82 percent to 12,536.61.

A total of 51,30,432 shares and mutual fund units worth Tk 67.65 crore changed hands on the Chittagong Stock Exchange. Of the traded issues on the port city bourse, 18 advanced, 135 declined and two remained unchanged.

## Software fair starts Feb 10

### STAR BUSINESS DESK

A five-day software exposition will kick off on February 10 at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in Dhaka, organisers said in a statement yesterday.

Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS) will organise SOFTEXPO-2010, themed as Digital Bangladesh in Action.

Habibullah N Karim, BASIS president, disclosed the date of the fair at a press meet in a city hotel yesterday.

Karim said the IT event is expected to have a large software display and IT-enabled services breaking all previous records.

A Towhid, chairman of National Events Committee, MA Mubin Khan, director,

and Nahid Ahmed, secretary general of BASIS, also attended the programme.

Mubin said the fair would focus on the government's Vision-2021 -- a deadline to make a Digital Bangladesh.

The fair is expected to see around five lakh visitors at its stalls of over 200 local and international companies.

Bangladesh has earned \$32.91 million by exporting software accessories this year, a \$5.91 million rise from last year. "The volume will increase by 30 to 40 percent next year."

SOFTEXPO aims to create a platform for showcasing immense potential of the industry by synchronising all sorts of software resources and skills available in Bangladesh, said organisers.

## Manthan South Asia Award goes to D.Net

### STAR BUSINESS DESK

D.Net's Computer Learning Programme (CLP) has received the Manthan South Asia Award 2009 in e-Education category, said a statement.

Ajoy Kumar Bose, coordinator of the programme, received the award at a ceremony in New Delhi, India recently.

Manthan Award South Asia, initiated in 2003 by Digital Empowerment Foundation, is to showcase the richness and diversity of content creativity to those interested in understanding and planning the Global Information Society.

The CLP, initiated in 2004, promotes knowledge and usage of computers and information technology among the underprivileged youths in Bangladesh.

With the primary objective to bridge this digital divide by ensuring access to computers and other resources of information technology, the programme established 109 computer literacy centres in 39 districts across Bangladesh by December 2009.

The CLP was formed in collaboration with Volunteers Association for Bangladesh-New Jersey (VAB-NJ), Bank Asia Ltd, Hossain Trust and individual donors, added the statement.

Through the initiative, 257 teachers have already been trained and over 20,000 underprivileged youths and community people graduated.

In 2008, D.Net also received Manthan award for its jeon-IKB project under e-Content for Development category for local content on livelihood.

## Bumper oil seeds output expected in the north

### BSS, Rangpur

The farmers and concerned officials are expecting a bumper production of all variety oil crops following various government steps and favourable climatic conditions in the northern region this Rabi season.

Farming targets of the oily crops have been achieved in most of the northern districts and the crops are now growing excellent predicting bumper productions, farmers and officials in the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) said yesterday.

Harvesting will begin next month and the farmers will bring most of the same land under Boro farming after completion of harvests of the oily crops, officials said.

The DAE has fixed an enthusiastic target of producing 1,12,188 tonnes of oily crop seeds from 1,06,459 hectares of land in the northern region during the current Rabi season.

DAE, BARI, BARC, BADC and many NGOs have taken adequate steps in collaboration with other departments this season to achieve the fixed production targets and increase oil seed productions in the region as elsewhere in the country.

The DAE and other agri-departments and NGOs have provided

quality seeds, necessary inputs and trainings on the latest technologies to make the programme successful.

Under the programme, a total of 91,731 tonnes mustard will be produced from 97,731 hectares of land including 41,835 tonnes from 41,835 hectares in Rangpur Zone and 55,896 tonnes from another 55,896 hectares in Rajshahi Zone during this season.

A total of 1,257 tonnes of 'Til' seeds will be produced from 1,257 hectares including 997 tonnes from 997 hectares in Rangpur Zone and 260 tonnes from another 260 hectares land in Rajshahi Zone.

A total of 13,041 tonnes of groundnut will be produced from 7,245 hectares including 4,187 tonnes from 2,326 hectares in Rangpur Zone and another 8,854 tonnes from more 4,919 hectares in Rajshahi Zone.

Besides, 159 tonnes 'Tishi' seeds will be produced from 226 hectares including 25 tonnes from 35 hectares in Rangpur Zone and 134 tonnes from another 191 hectares in Rajshahi Zone during this Rabi season.

The landless and marginal farmers have also brought vast tracts of the sandy char lands under cultivation of the oily crops this time in the Brahmaputra and Ganges basins and the crops are growing excellent everywhere now in the region,

officials said.

Deputy directors of DAE Kamal Shariful Alam, Mohsin Ali and Aftab Uddin Khan and BADC expert Asadur Rahman and Head of Agriculture of RDRS MG Neogi said the country has immense prospects to achieve self-reliance in oil seed productions.

They stressed the need for using the latest agro-technologies and disseminating proper knowledge to the farmers for increasing oil seeds in achieving self-reliance in edible oil to save Taka 6,000 crore being spent annually for importing the same.

They laid special emphasis on the need for increasing mustard, groundnuts, soybean and palm farming to move further forward in achieving the goals using the latest agro-technologies in the country's food granary of the northern region.

Farmers of the region always produce huge surplus quantities of rice, potato, maize, vegetables and they should explore tremendous potentialities to increase production of oil seeds through proper crop diversification and land management, they said.

They urged for cultivating hybrid varieties of oil seeds invented by BARI and BINA in between the gap of harvesting the short duration Aman paddies and Boro farming period to get the maximum productions and quality seeds.



Erfanuddin Ahmed, president and managing director of Bank Asia, and Mobasherur Rahman, director general of Bangladesh Post Office, pose after signing a deal in Dhaka recently. Bank Asia will use designated post offices to channel remittance payments electronically.

## United spreads wings to KL today

### UNB, Dhaka

United Airways (BD) Ltd, a joint venture of non-resident Bangladeshis, is going to introduce its flight on Dhaka-Kuala Lumpur-Dhaka route today with its 155-seated MD 83 aircraft.

Civil Aviation and Tourism Secretary Shafiq Alam Mehedi will inaugurate the flight. Malaysian High Commissioner in Dhaka Jamaluddin Sabeh will be present as special guest.

Its three other international routes are Dhaka-Kolkata-Dhaka, Dhaka-Dubai-Dhaka and Dhaka-London-Dhaka.

The two-way airfare for this new route has been fixed at Tk 19,900, while for one-way at Tk 13,751, including all taxes.

The flight will be operated twice a week -- Monday and Friday.

On November 21, the United started its Dhaka-London-Dhaka flight. The

airlines started its operation on domestic routes on July 10, 2007.

The United Airways that owns one 155-seated MD 83 aircraft and two 37-seated Dash-8-100 planes will procure another MD 83 soon, its Manager (Marketing Support and PR) Md Kamrul Islam told the news agency.

It also plans to procure a Boeing 767-300 ER aircraft by mid-2010 and is scheduled to operate flights to Kathmandu, Bangkok and Jeddah soon.



Hafiz Ahmed Mazumder MP, chairman of Pubali Bank Ltd, inaugurates the bank's 378th branch at Dhakadakshin in Sylhet recently. Helal Ahmed Chowdhury, managing director of the bank, is also seen.