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IDLC 50	6,741.04

<b>Asian Markets</b>	
MUMBAI	0.99% 17,614.48
TOKYO	0.77% 9,338.04
SINGAPORE	0.84% 2,868.02
SHANGHAI	1.92% 2,409.42

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<b>Currencies</b>	Buy Tk	Sell Tk
USD	69.77	69.80
EUR	88.84	88.88
GBP	107.02	107.07
JPY	0.82	0.82

<b>Commodities</b>	
Gold	\$1,211.15 (per ounce)
Oil	\$71.99 (per barrel)

SOURCE: STANDARD CHARTERED BANK

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**India kicks off debate on FDI in retail**

AFP, New Delhi

India kicked off public debate Tuesday on opening up the country's giant retail sector to foreign investors, a move which has been strongly opposed by the nation's millions of small family-run stores.

The Congress-led government sought public comment on permitting foreign direct investment (FDI) in multi-brand retail, a reform seen as one of the key measures for India to open up its economy.

Foreign investment may be an "efficient means" of addressing problems besetting the sector, the industry ministry said in discussion paper.

The reform could be key to easing stubborn supply chain bottlenecks that have fuelled double-digit inflation in the country of 1.2 billion people, government officials say.

"Keeping in view the large requirement of funds for back-end infrastructure, there is a case for opening up of the retail sector to foreign investment," the commerce and industry ministry said in a discussion paper.

At the same time, the ministry paper reassured small retail players that there would be safeguards for them.

Giant retailers cannot expect to "have a cakewalk," the paper.

India's tight foreign investment rules allow no overseas chains in the retail sector -- except for single-brand outlets such as Nokia or Reebok -- to protect local retailers in the 500-billion-dollar retail sector.

## Green fertilisers await a boost

SOHEL PARVEZ

Leading organic fertiliser makers have rolled out plans to bolster production to cash in on the rising demand for green farming inputs.

Biofertiliser manufacturers, such as Northern Agro Services, Waste Concern and Faruq Fertiliser Ltd, are taking the lead in expansion, inspired by a steady rise in the sales of inputs to commercial farming entities, especially seed growers and agroprocessors.

In the five years to 2009, the sales of organic fertilisers shot to 30,000 tonnes a year from 10,000 tonnes, said Omar Faruq, president of the organic fertiliser manufacturing division of Bangladesh Fertiliser Association.

"The market is growing mainly because of a rise in awareness. The entry of business firms in farming has also spurred demand for organic fertilisers," said Faruq, also managing director of Faruq Fertiliser Ltd.

Demand for green farming inputs registers a spike in the backdrop of a gradual depletion of organic matter in the soil because of an imbalanced use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides.

"At present, 70 percent of farm land has less than 1 percent organic matter. But it should be 3.5 percent to ensure good soil fertility," said Iftekhar Enayetullah, director of Waste Concern, which makes organic fertiliser by composting vegetables waste.

The government in its draft national agriculture policy said it will raise awareness of the use of organic manure, compost and biofertiliser at farmers' level.

Analysts said the reduction of organic contents is affecting land fertility and crop yield.

Enayetullah said the use of Waste Concern's biofertiliser cuts chemical fertiliser requirement by almost 30 percent.

"Trials show that rice production has increased by 25-40 percent," said the official of Waste Concern, which started production of biofertiliser in March 2009. He said his company's organic fertiliser has received a good response from the farmers.

"At present, our supplies are lower than the demand," he said, adding that the company plans to double its annual production capacity to 10,000 tonnes within next year.

"We also aim at producing 15,000 tonnes of biofertiliser by 2012," said Enayetullah.

Insiders said green fertiliser is used mostly for growing rice, potato and vegetables with the farmers in the north leading the trend. A kilogram of organic fertiliser is sold at around Tk 15 at the farmers level.

The MD of Faruq Fertilisers said big business firms are the main buyers of organic fertilisers. He also said former agriculture officials are joining business firms, especially the seed companies, and promoting organic fertiliser. "It will increase awareness and help the market grow further."

"Now our annual production capacity is 2,000 tonnes. But we hope to produce 5,000 tonnes of organic fertiliser within next year," said Faruq.

Northern Agro Services, one of the leading organic fertiliser makers, also aims to boost annual production capacity to 30,000 tonnes from the present 20,000 tonnes, said Farhatul Islam, managing director of the company.

He said the demand for the green inputs rose in the past five years.

"But the demand has not increased compared to that for chemical fertilisers," he said, adding that the fall in prices of chemical fertilisers has slowed down the demand for organic ones among the farmers.

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## Container handling delay piles up Tk 325cr loss

JASIM UDDIN KHAN

An unusual delay in carrying containers from Chittagong Port to Kamalapur ICD in Dhaka caused a revenue loss of more than Tk 325 crore in the immediate past fiscal year.

ICD earned Tk 1,277 crore in FY 2009-10 against the Tk 1,602 crore revenue target.

Exporters said the delay was also a matter of their concern because they could not maintain lead-time, which affected their relations with international buyers.

Kamalapur ICD-bound 1,548 TEU (twenty-foot equivalent unit) containers piled up at Chittagong Port, according to officials. The deadlock emerged since the present government came to power in early 2009.

Inadequate equipment, special charges collected by Chittagong Port officials and a limited number of railway engines resulted in poor container transportation and handling, the officials concerned pointed out.

"Private operator Global Agro Trade (Private) Co Ltd (Gatco) took 48 to 72 hours to offload containers from a train instead of the scheduled 4 hours. This is because of Gatco's inadequate handling equipment. The unusual delay forces the railway to go behind the schedule," said Kamalapur ICD Joint Commissioner



Containers at the Kamalapur ICD in Dhaka. The government lost over Tk 325 crore in fiscal 2009-10 due to the delay in carrying containers.

Wahida Rahman Chowdhury.

She complained that several port officials charge importers an additional Tk 17,000-Tk 20,000 to get a CPA (Chittagong Port Authority) assignment, a pre-requisite to boarding a container from Chittagong Port to Kamalapur ICD.

Wahida said had these containers been carried and offloaded in time, the government could have surpassed the revenue target.

She pointed to the exceeding revenue target of FY 2008-09. In that fiscal year, the ICD customs cell earned Tk 1,450 crore, while the target was Tk 1,440

crore.

The arrival and departure of containers at Kamalapur ICD now have dropped below 90 TEU from over 120 TEU a day on average, which worries businesspeople.

Ahsan Ahmed, a garment accessory businessman and also an importer of resin, a raw material used in the plastic industry, said he incurred huge losses as three of his containers were stranded at Chittagong Port for about three months.

"I lost two buyers due to the unusual delay and I have made up my mind to use alternative way of transportation," he said.

Meanwhile, all efforts to improve the situation have turned futile, as the Kamalapur ICD top official complained. Wahida Rahman Chowdhury said any response from National Board of Revenue, CPA and Getco to her letters asking for a better situation is yet to be received.

When contacted, a high official of the Chittagong Port denied charging any additional amount to importers.

"If someone paid extra money to the port workers, it may not be termed as charges," the official said.

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## Mobile operators splash out on TV commercials

SAYEDA AKTER

The country's six telecom operators have spent around Tk 103 crore in the first three months of this calendar year on television commercials. Robi was the largest spender.

Such spending has increased to Tk 41.2 crore in March from Tk 35.4 crore in January, according to a report published by Ryans Archive, a media monitoring organisation.

However, the February spending was the lowest -- Tk 26 crore -- in these months.

Industry insiders attribute the rise in the spending to the re-branding move and restructuring tariff patterns by major operators during January-March.

In March, Robi spent around Tk 5 crore on television ad with its new slogan Jole Uthun Apon Soktite. Robi replaces the earlier brand name of AKTEL. The company launched the branding campaign, Bangladesh Mela, at more than 70 spots across the country in March.

Grameenphone spent Tk 3.97 crore in the month and the most highlighted offer was its new tariff structure, followed by Banglalink and Citycell. The expenditure of Banglalink was Tk 3.37 crore, while Citycell spent Tk 82 lakh in March.

Teletalk, the lone state-owned operator, and Warid spent the lowest among all operators in March. They spent Tk 55 lakh and Tk 17 lakh respectively in the month.

At present, the local advertising industry is growing at 10 percent a year, mainly due to the intense battle for winning customers by the major mobile phone operators. And such battle has fuelled the growth in advertising spending, especially on television commercials, the report further pointed out.

Tk 1200 crore is the market size of the advertising industry.

The print media still remains the largest advertising vehicle, with around 43 percent of spending. TV commercials accounted for 36 percent of the total advertising spending.

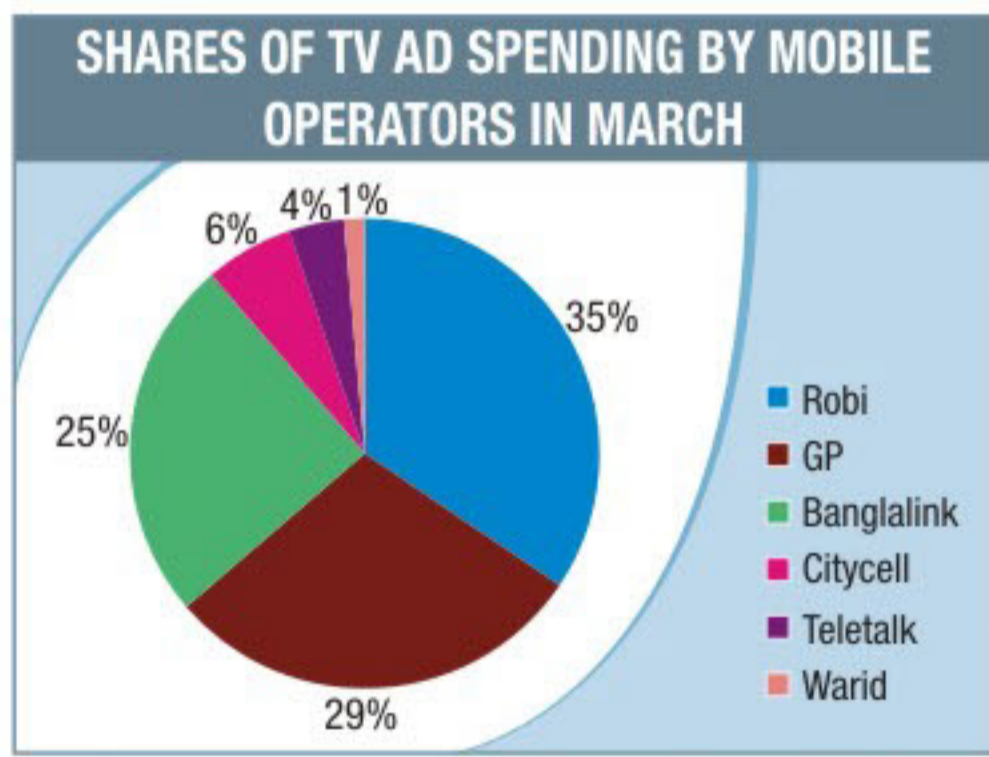
Mohiuddin Babar, head of communication of Robi, said his company had to increase spending mainly for re-branding.

"We had to raise ad spending, as we re-branded our company. Initially, the main task was to make the new brand name familiar to our customers."

"And for that, we had to launch a massive campaign, which eventually increased the spending on TV ad. However, the spending also grew on other media, such as press, radio and outdoors (billboard) as well," Babar added.

At the same time, the company has launched some new products, including Tk 0.44 per minutes for calls made to the same operator.

Babar, however, said that the growth in advertising might not sustain, although the telecom operators' ad spending would not cease, as companies would keep offering newer products.



## Maldives keen to import sand

BSS, Dhaka

The Maldives is interested to import sand from Bangladesh for construction work and developing infrastructure, said an envoy yesterday.

Ahmed Sareer, Maldives high commissioner to Bangladesh, expressed his country's interest at a meeting with Shipping Minister Shahjahan Khan at the minister's secretariat office in Dhaka.

Khan assured the envoy of all-out cooperation in this regard, and requested him to take more workers from Bangladesh.

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