

Expert suggests microgrids for rural electricity

STAR BUSINESS REPORT
Bangladesh should launch renewable energy microgrids for rural electrification to cater to consumers in off-grid areas, an expert said yesterday.

Photovoltaic-based microgrids -- usually small-sized PV-based grid systems aimed at delivering power within an area with a diameter of less than a kilometer -- can be an alternative energy source in rural areas, said Dr M Rezwana Khan, vice chancellor of United International University.

In Bangladesh, with sustained economic growth and falling prices of PV modules, there is going to be a qualitative change in the load demand for rural areas, he said.

"As a result, solar home systems (SHS) may not remain an attractive alternative for rural electrification in future," he said. "The PV-based microgrid for rural electrification can become

a landmark like SHS." "At the same time it can contribute significantly to achieve the country's target on renewable energy."

Khan spoke at a seminar on renewable energy at the Canada Showcase 2012 at Sonargaon Hotel in Dhaka.

Under the system, PV-based grid systems will be installed in houses or other places and they will collectively supply electricity to the grid.

He said Bangladesh has a huge potential to use renewable energy for irrigation.

"With more than 60 percent of the rural area outside the grid connection, diesel is the main fuel for irrigation. With soaring prices of diesel and falling prices of PV, it is possible to use solar PV based irrigation on a commercial basis."

By replacing the diesel-guzzling irrigation pumps under the renewable energy system, Bangladesh can save up to \$750

million in consumption of diesel in the agriculture sector alone.

He said the months of February to May are the main irrigation seasons when sunshine is the highest. "Moreover, irrigation requirement does not depend on the time of the day and can be done any time during the day. This means no battery backup is needed."

Khan said Bangladesh plans to generate 5 percent of its electricity from renewable energy sources by 2015 and 10 percent by 2020 in grid areas.

Apparently these targets for grid power may prove to be ambitious, as cost of energy generated by natural gas or coal in Bangladesh is still much cheaper than the solar PV based power generation.

"It will be much easier and cost effective to fulfill the renewable energy target if off-grid power generation is given priority," he said.

He said Bangladesh has a huge prospect in solar energy

compared to hydropower and wind energies.

He said usage of solar energy for drying purposes is one of the oldest technologies and is widely used. However, solar thermal for power generation or water heating is still very limited.

He said the usage of solar PV for household applications has been very popular in Bangladesh.

The reasons for SHS's success in Bangladesh are: it is reliable, environment- and health-friendly and the authorities offer financial facility to install the system.

Islam Sharif, executive director and chief executive of Infrastructure Development Company Limited (IDCOL), a state-run non-banking financial institution, said the number of solar panel suppliers has mushroomed in the country.

"Many building owners are entering into contracts with the suppliers on condition that the company will take the panels back once the building owners

get electricity connection," he said. "It has to be stopped."

Renewable energy is very important for Bangladesh, as the country is at the forefront of dealing with impacts of climate change, said Heather Cruden, high commissioner of Canada to Bangladesh.

Bangladesh needs to focus more on renewable energy to lessen its over-reliance on imported petroleum products amid the fast depleting natural gas reserves, said Masud Rahman, president of Canada Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

"Bangladesh has five coal mines with high quality coal reserves. But the country has failed to extract the natural resources due to indecisive over production method. As a result, people are increasingly using the solar energy products."

"Renewable energy is crucial for the country for economic and environmental reasons," he said.



Rajeev Barai, director for brand and strategy of I Positive Communications (IPC), and Fazole Karim Khan, head of media communications of Tower Automobile Service Centre (TASC), sign a deal recently where IPC will manage marketing activities for TASC to launch the latter's roadside services in Bangladesh. Gautam Ghosh, managing director of IPC, and Shawkat Ali, chairman of TASC, were also present.

New DMDs for Islami Bank



Abdul Malek Chowdhury Md Mahub-ul-Alam

STAR BUSINESS DESK

AKM Abdul Malek Chowdhury and Md Mahub-ul-Alam have recently been promoted as deputy managing directors of Islami Bank Bangladesh Ltd (IBBL), the bank said in a statement yesterday.

Prior to the promotion, Chowdhury was the head of risk management unit of the bank where Mahub-ul-Alam was the head of treasury division for the international banking wing, according to the statement.

A postgraduate in economics from Jahangirnagar University, Chowdhury started his career with Bangladesh Shilpa Bank as an economist in 1979, and joined IBBL as a principal officer in 1985.

Mahub-ul-Alam joined IBBL as a probationary officer in 1984. He is a postgraduate in marketing from Dhaka University.

Lafarge revamps cement brand Supercrete

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Lafarge Surma Cement Ltd has revamped its flagship cement brand, Supercrete.

The announcement came from the company's press meet yesterday at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre under a new communication theme, Dream Large.

"Lafarge Surma Cement will take a lead in fulfilling dreams to innovate and design the best products and apply the best practices in production," Michael Andrew Cowell, managing director of Lafarge Surma Cement Ltd, told reporters in Dhaka. "We believe it is our responsibility to share our expertise for the betterment of the society, and the nation as a whole," Cowell said.

Lafarge Surma, a joint venture of Lafarge of France and Cementos Molins of Spain, has been producing and marketing cement since 2006 under the brand name of Supercrete.

Cowell said the cement producer wants to lead the building materials industry in this country and always comes up with innovative solutions for the customers. "It's the launch of a new and improved product and improved brand communications, which links back to our parent company," said Kazi Khalid Mahmood, commercial director of Lafarge Surma.

The company follows the global process of production, where high-tech machinery automatically tests and sends real-time online production results to the Asia Technical Centre located in Malaysia, Mahmood said.

"The facility in Malaysia is free from human error and guarantees that every single bag of cement performs the bet for consumers," he said.

He explained that the word Supercrete is derived from English words, Superior and Concrete.

Lafarge Surma Cement started production in Bangladesh in 2006 after it established its plant in Chhatak and Sunamganj, which is the first fully integrated dry process cement factory in Bangladesh connected with India.

After mining in the Indian state of Meghalaya, the limestone travels cross-border through a 17 kilometre long conveyor belt directly to the Lafarge plant at Chhatak in Sunamganj to be converted into Supercrete.

The company has invested \$280 million in Bangladesh and the Indian state of Meghalaya.

The cement manufacturer re-launched the new brand after getting a green light to mine limestone in Meghalaya for its plant in Bangladesh by the Supreme Court in India on July 6 last year.

Earlier, India's top court on February 5, 2010, had halted mining by the unit of the world's biggest cement maker because of environmental concerns.

Inflation to tick down

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He said a fall in non-bank borrowing and foreign assistance, and a rise in expenditure on subsidy caused such borrowing to increase.

According to finance ministry statistics, net foreign assistance dropped by \$1 billion in the first quarter, while Tk 4,080 crore was released on subsidy during the period.

But no money was released for the purpose in the same period last year.

The government spent Tk 27,889 crore in the first quarter of the current fiscal year out of the entire year's budget of Tk 1,63,590 crore.

The expenditure rose by 62.4 percent over the same period last year.

Of the amount, non-development expenditure went up by 66.9 percent and development expendi-



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina hands a cheque for Tk 9.6 lakh as financial assistance from Mercantile Bank to the families of two martyred army officers killed in the BDR carnage at Pilkhana, at a programme at Gono Bhaban in the capital recently. The bank's Chairman Md Abdul Jalil and Director M Amanullah were also present.



M Shahjahan Bhuiyan, managing director of United Commercial Bank, inaugurates a branch of the bank in Munshiganj yesterday. M Shahidul Islam, additional managing director, was also present.

JS body wants telecom to be in ICT ministry

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

A parliamentary body has asked the information and communication technology (ICT) ministry to request Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to include the telecommunication sector in the ministry.

The parliamentary standing committee on the ICT ministry made the recommendation, according to a statement issued by the parliament secretariat after the meeting.

The government formed the ICT ministry at the end of last year, splitting the science and ICT ministry. Minister Syed Abul Hossain was removed from the communications ministry and was given the charge of the new ICT ministry.

Hossain, who was present at the meeting, supported the committee's decision and said his ministry is preparing a brief to this effect and will send it to the premier with reference to the committee's recommendation, an official present at the meeting said.

"We want the telecommunication sector be merged with the ICT ministry. Without this sector, the aims and objectives of the ministry will not be fulfilled,"

Zuanid Ahmed Palak, a member of the committee, told The Daily Star over telephone yesterday.

He said either the telecommunication sector should be merged with the ICT ministry or the ICT ministry should be merged with the post and telecommunications ministry.

After the formation of the ICT ministry, the issue was taken into consideration by government high-ups, but with a slow rate of progress. If the changes are made according to the committee's recommendation, the telecom sector, including all the telecom service providers, will move under the ICT ministry.

State-owned Bangladesh Telecommunications Company Ltd, mobile operator Teletalk, Bangladesh Submarine Cable Company Ltd, Telephone Shilpa Shangstha and Bangladesh Cable Shilpa Ltd are currently operating under the telecommunications division of the post and telecommunication ministry.

After the merger, the post and telecommunication ministry, currently headed by Rajiuddin Ahmed Raju, will be called only the post services ministry, which will be responsible for the century-old postal department.

Stocks rise on interest waiver news

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Stocks gained yesterday after the government announced a plan to give a 50 percent waiver on the interest on margin loans to retail investors who incurred huge losses in the recent stockmarket debacle.

The benchmark general index, DGEN, the gauge of the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) closed at 4,577.69 points, after adding 0.52 percent or 23.91 points.

The government also allotted a quota of 20 percent of all initial public offerings -- government and private -- to be issued in 2012 and 2013 to the investors.

"The government's decision to waive margin loans for the next two years and a special IPOs quota for retailers has boosted up investors' confidence in the market," said Prof Helal Uddin Nizami, senior

member of Securities and Exchange Commission.

It is a sign of the government's cordialness for the small investors as well as its intentions to stabilise the market, said Nizami, who teaches accounting and information system at Chittagong University.

He said the decision that came yesterday was a result of the prime minister's meeting with Securities and Exchange (SEC) and stakeholders on November 16 to bring back normalcy in the market.

The market continued topsy-turvy trade the whole day due to profit-taking sell-offs by investors, said Ahmed Rashid, director of DSE.

The market started to gain in the last hour of trading, which was a result of the positive impact of the government package to compensate the small

investors, Rashid said.

Turnover lost 33 percent compared to the previous day. A total of 0.94 lakh trades were executed, generating turnover worth Tk 274 crore with 6.51 crore shares and mutual fund units changing hands on the Dhaka bourse.

All major sectors closed higher; non-bank financial institutions posted the largest gain by increasing 2.87 percent, power 0.75 percent and pharmaceuticals 0.41 percent. Telecoms lost 0.19 percent and banks 0.77 percent.

The selective categories index of Chittagong Stock Exchange gained 0.17 percent or 14.27 points to end the day at 8,427.02.

Advancers beat losers 108 to 57 with 10 issues unchanged on the port city bourse that traded 1.02 crore shares and mutual fund units with Tk 39.46 crore.

Govt seeks sugar deal with Brazil

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Bangladesh consumes 1,400,000 tonnes of sugar a year but the country has to meet almost its entire requirement from imports due to insufficient local sugarcane production.

Private refiners meet nearly 95 percent of the annual demand for sugar by importing raw sugar mainly from Brazil and Argentina.

State-owned BSFC meets the rest of the demand partly by crushing sugarcane at its 15

mills and through imports.

The corporation produced 69,300 tonnes of sugar till February, out of its target for 135,000 tonnes from local sugarcane in the current fiscal year, according to the statement.



Kazi Mozaffar Ahmed, deputy director for planning of Bangladesh Tea Board, and Kazi Shahed H Ferdous, country director of TX Bangladesh, attend a workshop on "Sustainable livelihoods for small tea growers project" arranged by TX Bangladesh and Bikash Bangladesh at IDB Bhaban in the capital yesterday.



Sohail RK Hussain, additional managing director of City Bank, and Pradip Bhowmick, executive director of PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), exchange documents of a deal in Dhaka recently. PwC will help the bank align its core banking with international best practices. K Mahmood Sattar, managing director of the bank, was also present.