

BPC fixes fuel import contracts

REUTERS, Dhaka

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Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) has concluded first half 2013 term negotiations for refined oil products at mostly stronger premiums than current contracts, a senior BPC official said on Monday.

BPC will also buy 700,000 tonnes of Murban crude from Abu Dhabi National oil Company and another 700,000 tonnes of Arab Light crude from Saudi Aramco in 2013 for its refinery.

The BPC finalised its gasoil term contract at a premium of \$4.30 a barrel to Middle East quotes, up from the \$3.80 a barrel premium for its July to December term cargoes this year. For large vessels, the premium has been set at \$3.62, up from \$3.42 a barrel.

The term contract for jet fuel and kerosene has been fixed at a premium of \$5.30 a barrel, up from \$4.80 a barrel.

The premium for fuel oil for first half of 2013 will remain unchanged from \$39.50 a tonne to Singapore spot quotes for October-December term cargoes.

BPC, the country's sole oil importer and distributor, will import around 2.60 million tonnes of gasoil, 700,000 tonnes of fuel oil, 510,000 tonnes of jet oil, 60,000 tonnes of 95-gasoline octane and 20,000 tonnes of kerosene in the next year.

Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) will supply around 1.02 million tonnes of gasoil in 2013 and 210,000 tonnes of jet fuel.

Malaysia's Petronas will supply 460,000 tonnes of gasoil, 240,000 tonnes of fuel oil, 120,000 tonnes of jet fuel and 20,000 tonnes of kerosene.

Around 180,000 tonnes each of gasoil and fuel oil will be sourced from Emirates National Oil Company (ENOC) and 500,000 tonnes of gasoil and 20,000 tonnes of fuel oil from Egypt's Middle East Oil Refinery.

Philippines National Oil Company (PNOC) will supply 214,000 tonnes of gasoil and 60,000 tonnes of 95-octane gasoline and PetroChina will supply 120,000 tonnes of gasoil and 40,000 tonnes of fuel oil in the next year.

Vietnam's Petrolimex will sell 220,000 tonnes of fuel oil and 60,000

tonnes of gasoil and Indonesia's Bumi Siak Pusako 40,000 tonnes of fuel oil to the BPC.

Domestic demand for fuel oil has been swelling as a shortfall of natural gas supply forced the country to turn to costly oil-fired quick rental power plants. The chronic electricity shortage has limited economic growth and investments in Bangladesh and often stirs public fury.

Until early 2010, Bangladesh was an occasional seller in the Asian fuel oil market, offering small volumes of about 30,000 tonnes irregularly.

The government heavily subsidises BPC, which sells fuel oil to the local market at much lower rates than import prices.

In December 2011 Bangladesh last raised oil prices for the four time since May last year and has been under pressure from the global lending agencies such as the International Monetary Policy to hike again to trim the country's subsidy burden but the government is responding slowly as election is due late 2013.

Japan's new China envoy urges stronger economic ties

AFP, Tokyo

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Japan's new envoy to China urged stronger economic ties with Beijing in an interview broadcast Monday, after the incoming premier pledged to mend bilateral ties strained by a bitter territorial row.

The dispute over the Tokyo-controlled Senkaku islands -- which Beijing calls the Diaoyus -- has soured relations between Asia's two biggest economies, with neither side willing to budge after months of wrangling.

"My mission number one is to improve the Japan-China relationship," Masato Kitera, a career diplomat who will succeed Uichiro Niwa as Japan's ambassador to China, told public broadcaster NHK.

"I will explain to China's senior officials we need to make economic ties warmer if our political

relationship is cooling, as Japanese corporate activities in China are contributing to the Chinese economy," he said.

The dispute flared badly in September after Tokyo nationalised the islands, triggering protests across China that led to boycotts or attacks on Japanese businesses, with Japan's exports to China tumbling 14.5 percent on-year.

Beijing has also boycotted various events held in the both countries, including its decision not to send its finance minister and central bank chief to Tokyo for IMF and World Bank meetings held in October.

Beijing sent government boats into the archipelago's territorial waters almost every day, and upped the ante on December 13 with a flypast, in what Japan said was the first Chinese breach of its airspace since at least 1958.



IBBL
Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina receives a donation of winter clothes and blankets from Abu Nasser Muhammad Abdur Zaher, chairman of Islami Bank Bangladesh, for the Prime Minister's Relief Fund at a ceremony in Dhaka on Sunday.

New menace: stock info on Facebook

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"It goes against securities rules and is an obstacle to a stable capital market," said the regulator.

The regulator also cautioned investors against gathering information from the social media or any unconfirmed source as it may cause financial losses to them.

The commission had previously taken legal actions like filing criminal cases against such wrongdoers, said Saifur Rahman, spokesman and an executive director of the commission.

It is difficult to control the diffusion of stockmarket information through Facebook, said Faruq Ahmad Siddiqi, a market analyst and a former chairman of the commission.

"You can only ask the investors not to take decisions depending on the information disseminated through Facebook."

He also urged the commission to involve IT experts to trace the accounts of the troublemakers.

"It is possible to find who spread the price sensitive information through Facebook," said Sunil Kanti Bose, chairman of Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission.

If anyone uses the social media tools, including Facebook, for illegal or unsocial activities, the stock regulator as the custodian of the securities rules will



SQUARE
Samuel S Chowdhury, chairman of Square Group, attends the annual sales and marketing conference of Square Pharmaceuticals, Square Herbal & Nutraceuticals, and Agrovet Division of Square Pharmaceuticals in Cox's Bazar recently. Tapan Chowdhury, managing director, was also present.



BEF
A delegation of Bangladesh Employers' Federation led by its President Md Fazlul Hoque meets Labour and Employment Minister Rajiuddin Ahmed Raju on Monday. State Minister Begum Monnujan Sufian and Secretary-in-Charge Mikail Shipar were also present.

Asia's long-stay schemes lure foreigners

AFP, Georgetown, Malaysia

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Like many Japanese mothers, Ritsuko Kawasaki fretted over the health and safety risks of remaining in Japan after 2011's earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disasters.

So in August she and her two boys moved to the Malaysian island of Penang under a government long-stay programme that aims to lure foreigners -- and their money -- to the country.

"I don't think I want to return to Japan. Life here in Penang is so comfortable," said Kawasaki, 43.

With its warm climate, political stability and modern economy, Malaysia has drawn 19,488 foreigners to settle in the country since launching the Malaysia My Second Home (MM2H) programme 10 years ago.

MM2H and similar schemes in Thailand and the Philippines have traditionally targeted western retirees in the hope they will settle down and boost the economy.

But programme officials say Asians are now the typical applicants, led by post-quake Japanese and increasingly affluent Chinese.

A total of 2,387 MM2H applicants were approved in 2011, and the government is targeting 3,000 for 2012, officials say.

The Malaysian incentives include a ten-year multi-entry visa, tax exemption for remittances of offshore pension funds, the right to open a business, tax-

free purchases of locally made cars, and other enticements.

Applicants, meanwhile, must deposit a certain amount of money in a local bank account -- \$50,000 for MM2H -- in return for a life under the sun.

For Britons Keith and Adrienne Francis, sunshine was the clincher as they mulled whether to settle back in England after Keith's 2004 retirement from 35 years in the Hong Kong police force.

"Look at the UK, it is dull and cold," Adrienne said as the couple sipped sweet milk tea in an Indian restaurant in Georgetown, Penang's British colonial-era capital.

Their other options had included the Thai resort Phuket.

"I didn't like Phuket because of the bars," she said of its bawdy nightlife.

The couple said Muslim-majority Malaysia was attractive due to its high living standards, lack of political upheaval seen often in its neighbours, quality medical care and widely spoken English.

Under MM2H, retirees also can own freehold property and land -- although some restrictions apply -- a key factor for the Francis, who shuddered at the thought of a costly and cramped retirement nest in Hong Kong.

Home is now a spacious 2,500-square-foot (232-square-metre) seaside Penang condo they bought in 2004 for \$182,000.

But increasingly it is Asians, and particularly Chinese and Japanese, driving the so-called "silver" market -- business opportunities linked to seniors -- says Janice Chia, managing director of Singapore-based consultancy Ageing Asia.

She said by 2050 Asia will account for an estimated 63 percent of the world's senior citizens, who will become increasingly important to economies, especially as medical advances extend lifespans.

"Traditionally, MM2H has attracted Western retirees, but there will be greater movements of Asian retirees to Southeast Asia," where they "can stretch their retirement dollar," Chia said.

Siti Nani Shaarani, director of MM2H, said its applicants are now led by China, Japan, Bangladesh, the United Kingdom and Iran.

The Philippine Retirement Authority cites a similar mix of origins for the nearly 21,000 people now in its retirement incentive programme, led by China, South Korea, Taiwan and Japan.

England, America and Germany still top Thailand's long-stay scheme, which approved 35,488 applicants in 2011, according to Thai immigration figures.

Coming to Malaysia was a big leap for Kawasaki, who speaks only Japanese. She likes that her two boys, nine and three years old, are learning English in school.

Political strife casts shadow on tourism outlook

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In 2000, foreign tourist arrivals in Bangladesh were 199,000, and that number increased by 56.25 percent over the decade to 303,000 in 2010, according to a report by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

In 2011, foreign tourist arrivals generated Tk 380 million-odd, with the number forecasted to cross the 400 million-mark in 2012, according to a World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) study.

The travel and tourism sector raked in Tk 182.5 billion, about 2.2 percent of the GDP in 2011.

The sector's contribution is forecasted to rise by 7.3 percent in 2012, and by 6.1 percent annually until 2022, according to the WTTC study.

Masud Hossain, executive director of Bengal Tours, said tourists are very sensitive about the political environment.

"We are very worried about what is going to happen next year. Hartals have caused a lot of damage, as tourists could not move around and we had to shift the travel dates many times."

Bangladesh sees tourist arrivals mainly from Europe and Japan.

Foreign tourists were higher in the first half of this year because of the relatively stable political situation, said Syed G Qadir, general manager of Galaxy Holidays.

"The country's achievements and positive indicators help attract tourists," he said, adding around 700 foreign tourists came to Bangladesh via Galaxy in 2012, up from 500 in the previous year.

Galaxy, which operates both inbound and outbound tour packages, saw a huge spike in the number of Bangladeshis traveling abroad for holidays.

"It is because of rising income among the middle-class," said Qadir.

Galaxy facilitated travels of 2,000 Bangladeshis abroad in 2012, up 25 percent from the previous year.

Zahirul Islam Bhuiyan, chief executive of Discovery Tours and Logistics, mentioned decent growth of the tourism sector in the outgoing year.

"But it is uncertain whether the rising arrivals of foreign tourists will continue into next year," he said, adding many tourists cancelled trips in December.



SJBL
Anwer Hossain Khan, chairman of Shahjalal Islami Bank, opens the bank's 83rd branch at Donia in Dhaka on Monday. Md Abdur Rahman Sarker, managing director, was also present.



RAKUB
M Islam Alam, secretary of the Bank and Financial Institutions Division of the finance ministry, and M Shah Nowaz Ali, chairman of Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank, attend a view exchange meeting at the bank's head office in Rajshahi on Monday.



CITYCELL
Mehboob Chowdhury, chief executive officer of Citycell, and Syed Waseque Md Ali, deputy managing director of First Security Islami Bank, exchange documents after signing a deal at Citycell's head office in Dhaka on Monday. The bank's employees will enjoy special services in voice, data and value added services of Citycell.