

Mobile banking helps economy grow

Says BB governor at the launch of NCC Bank's mobile banking service

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Around Tk 112 crore is being transacted through mobile banking services in the country every day on an average, helping the economy grow further by transferring money from urban to rural areas, Bangladesh Bank Governor Atiur Rahman said yesterday.

Banks have been providing mobile financial services to 50 lakh people through around 7,000

agents across the country and the transaction volume every day on an average is around 4 lakh, he said.

Every month mobile banking services are growing at 20 percent, Rahman said at the launch of a new such service of NCC Bank -- NCCB SureCash -- at Ruposhi Bangla Hotel in the capital.

The banking regulator has so far allowed 25 banks to conduct mobile banking services of which 17 banks, including NCC, have already launched the service, he said.

Various non-agriculture business initiatives are also expanding through mobile banking services along with the expansion of the financial inclusion programme, Rahman said.

With NCCB SureCash, a customer can open new account, deposit money or withdraw cash at any authorised SureCash agent or NCCB branch, said the bank's managing director Nurul Amin.

A customer can also send money to another customer, receive salary or pay bills from his account using mobile phone without visiting any bank branch or agent, Amin said.

A Canada-Bangladesh joint venture company -- Progati Systems Ltd -- provided technical



Atiur Rahman, governor of Bangladesh Bank, attends the launch of NCCB SureCash, a mobile banking service, at Ruposhi Bangla Hotel in Dhaka yesterday. Heather Cruden, Canadian high commissioner in Bangladesh, and Md Nurun Newaz Salim, chairman of NCC Bank, were also present.

solutions to enable the project to come to fruition, he said.

At the event, Canadian High Commissioner Heather Cruden expressed concern over the weak workplace safety at garment factories.

The private sector needs to

work with the government to address workplace safety issues so that international buyers have the confidence to continue to invest," Cruden said.

She said North American retailers asked for Bangladesh Prime Minister's help in resolving the workplace safety issues.

"Bangladesh is having a crisis of reputation. But it is not just reputation -- these are serious issues that need to be addressed by all parties involved."

NCCB SURECASH ALLOWS A CUSTOMER TO

open new account



deposit money or

withdraw cash at any

authorised agent or NCCB

branch



Send money to another

customer



Receive salary or pay bills
from NCCB account using
mobile phone



Rashed Maqsood, Citi country officer, and Mostaq Ahmed, founder managing director of Green Housing and Energy Ltd, exchange a grant agreement for the second year continuation of the Citi Solar Project for rural microenterprises in Bangladesh yesterday.

Cap on upload speed goes

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The telecom regulator yesterday lifted curbs on the uploading speed of internet.

The regulator earlier asked the international internet gateways on May 15 to slash the upload speed by 75 percent to contain the illegal use of voice over internet protocol.

The IIGs supply internet bandwidth to the internet service providers. The ISPs, including the mobile and Wimax operators, reach the bandwidth to the end users.

"It (limiting the upload speed) was a routine work. We did it in the past, too, to track down the illegal VoIP calls," said Sunil Kanti Bose, chairman of Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory

Commission.

Officials said the regulator slashed the upload speed to identify the illegal VoIP users as the same upload and download speed is required to make VoIP calls.

Higher upload speed is required when people make video calls or transfer large files.

As a result, people engaged in freelancing and outsourcing business, were affected by the cuts in upload speed, said Sumon Ahmed Sabir, chief strategic officer of Fibre@Home, a transmission and IIG company.

Embassies, government agencies, banks, financial institutions and software developing companies were kept out of the purview of the restriction.

StanChart supports 1.5pc of GDP

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Prof Kapstein is a visiting professor of Global Strategy at the McDonough School of Business, Georgetown University and an associate partner of Steward Redqueen, a Netherlands-based consulting firm. He has also been a professor at The Wharton School, INSEAD and Harvard.

The bank, which has been operating in Bangladesh for over 100 years and is the country's largest foreign-owned bank, serves 280,000 retail customers, 15,000 small- and medium-sized enterprises (SME) and a significant number of corporate houses.

Through its financing and trade finance products, the bank contributes to 13.2

percent of Bangladesh's total international trade, the study found.

By the end of 2011, the bank mobilised finance for 24 percent of the total installed power in the country, helping relieve one of the major constraints on the economy.

The study also said SCB saved 600 trees by reducing its paper usage by 61 percent, and it is one of the first banks to introduce solar-powered ATMs in Bangladesh.

Kapstein also said the bank should focus more of its advisory attention on the SME community to ensure that they remain competitive. Besides, the bank also should continue and consider developing its outreach to women entrepreneurs.

UN human rights chief welcomes the building and fire safety accord

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The United Nations human rights chief called for further actions to improve the working conditions of the country's garment sector.

"We welcome the fact that dozens of international companies have made a legal commitment to improve safety in Bangladesh's garment factories, in the wake of last month's building collapse that killed more than 1,127 people," Navanethem Pillay said.

So far, 37 companies including major retailers in Europe such as Inditex,

Arcadia Group, Carrefour and H&M have signed on to the Accord on Building and Fire Safety.

The signatories committed "to the goal of a safe and sustainable Bangladeshi readymade garment industry in which no worker needs to fear fires, building collapses or other accidents that could be prevented with reasonable health and safety measures", said the International Labour Organisation's website.

Pillay called the agreement to be "important and in many ways unprecedented", while calling for swift action to empower trade unions and overhaul the garment sector, with a far more stringent approach to oversight and inspection.

Risks loom over economy

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"Only some responsible buyers have sent representatives to Dhaka to do controls and really check all the issues in the factories where they produce -- but many have not."

The envoy termed the signing of Bangladesh's fire and building safety accord by 32 major international buyers as an important development.

"The BGMEA [Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association] has welcomed that. Now they finally know the terms of references and what they will have to face in terms of pressure from the buyers."

"So, one is not pricing for more than the other. They are all now going after the same standards -- what was missing so far. Now the BGMEA has a text which it can deal with. They have stopped talking and started to act, which I welcome."

Citing a big fire in a New York garment factory in 1907 which triggered upgrades in social and safety standards in the US, he said the Rana Plaza tragedy can have a similar effect on Bangladesh.

Conze also said he does not think that the international buyers, especially those from the European Union, would abandon Bangladesh, but they could cut a certain percentage of their sourcing and try other countries.

"That is something the BGMEA should really try to avoid. They can only be avoided by acting, not by words."

The envoy said the momentum created by the 32 major garment buyers can bring about quick action.

"I don't think any major company can do anything else than complying with the standards, whether they are members of the alliance or not."

About the amended labour law, he said: "I think it is an important first step."

Conze, who joined the foreign service in 1981 and have served in Hong Kong, Beijing, Vienna, Warsaw, Tunis, Khartoum, Moscow and Harare, suggests Bangladesh change its attitude towards trade unions to improve its labour standards.

Many garment producers still have the attitude that the trade unionists are enemies -- this attitude must change. It is against international principles for workers rights, as laid down by the ILO, he said.

"Now everybody should try and work on how to receive trade unions as a partner in the social fabric of Bangladesh, and not as a destructive force."

The envoy also said the objective of the country's garment industry should not be to become the biggest in the world, but to be the best.

"If you can put quality first, then you can re-establish your reputation."

On the garment makers' plea that they cannot afford to improve the industrial conditions as international buyers do not pay them much, Conze said: "I don't know their calculations, but I still assume they are wrong."

Even with the safety and building standards, Bangladesh will still remain competitive in terms of pricing, he said.

DSE seeks tax break for five years

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It also called for reduction of tax at source for brokerage houses to 0.015 percent from 0.05 percent.

The bourse recommended launching a new scheme which would allow a 50 percent rebate on income tax for investors with outlays of up to Tk 1 lakh in the market. The scheme, however, would have to have a lock-in period of three years.

The DSE also demanded cuts in taxes on capital gains for companies which currently pay 10 percent to the NBR on incomes derived from share transactions.

"There is no possibility of revenue fall for the government because of a reduction in corporate tax rate for banks, insurances and non-banks, as such companies showing higher profits every year," the DSE argued.

"On the other hand, the companies would be able to extend higher dividends, and eventually, general investors would benefit."

Lafarge's AGM to be held on June 8

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Lafarge Surma Cement Ltd has rescheduled its 15th annual general meeting from June 13 to June 8 this year, the company said in a statement yesterday.

The AGM of the venture of Lafarge and Cementos Molins will begin at 11 am at the Harmony Hall of Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in Dhaka.

Lafarge is one of the world leaders in building materials with top-ranking positions in its cement, aggregates and concrete businesses, according to the statement.

Cementos Molins is a Spanish company with more than 80 years of experience.

Ref. DACPM/B777/133/2013/710 Date: 16 May 2013

Request for Proposal (RFP) for Dry Lease of additional two 777-200/200ER Aircraft

1. Biman Bangladesh Airlines Ltd. invites offers/proposals for Dry Lease of additional 02 (two) B777-200/200ER aircraft powered by any engine for a period of 60 (sixty) months. Airlines, Operators, Owners of Aircraft, Manufacturers and/or Leasing Companies having aircraft of its own or legally authorized by the owner to submit the offer, may participate in the RFP meeting the requirements of RFP schedule.

2. Basic requirements are mentioned below:

Particulars	Requirement
i. Number and Type of Aircraft	Additional 02 (two) 777-200/200ER aircraft powered by any engine.
ii. Nature & Period of Lease	Dry Lease for 60 (sixty) months.
iii. Configuration	Two class standard configuration.
iv. Age of the Aircraft	Should not be more than 15 years of age at the time of offer submission.
v. 'D'-Check or Heavy Maintenance Check	Must not fall due during the first two years of lease.
vi. Authorization	If the lessor is not the owner of the aircraft, owner's authorization/mandate must be submitted along with the offer/proposal.
vii. Last date of submission	Latest by 1000 hours LT (0400 hrs UTC) on 16 June 2013.

3. Detailed terms and conditions have been given in the RFP schedule. RFP notice and schedule may be viewed in Biman's web-site: www.biman-airlines.com.

4. Offers/proposals may be submitted to General Manager (Corporate Planning) at E-mail: rfp777-2013add@bdbiman.com on or before 1000 hours LT (0400 hrs UTC) on 16 June 2013. Proposals/offers may also be submitted through courier service or dropped in the tender box placed in the office of General Manager (Corporate Planning), Biman Head Office, Balaka, Kurmitola, Dhaka-1229. No offer/proposal will be accepted after the closing time and date.

5. Biman Bangladesh Airlines Ltd. reserves the right to accept or reject any or all the offers/proposals partly or wholly without assigning any reason whatsoever and no claim shall be entertained in this regard.

General Manager (Corporate Planning)
Biman Bangladesh Airlines Ltd.



Khater Massaad, chairman of Rakeen Development Co (BD) Ltd, attends the launch of the company's first residential complex -- Bijoy Rakeen City -- to be built in Mirpur, at a press meet on Thursday.

RAKEEN

Top Swiss official due today Bilateral meeting on trade expansion begins tomorrow

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Expansion of trade and investment and reinforcement of development cooperation between Dhaka and Geneva will be high on the agenda at the first Bangladesh-Switzerland bilateral political consultation to be held in Dhaka tomorrow.

Ambassador Beat Nobs, assistant state secretary of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland, who arrives in the capital today for a three-day visit, will lead the Swiss delegation.

Mustafa Kamal, additional foreign secretary, will lead the Bangladesh side.

The two countries will endeavour to develop common understandings on a wide array of regional and multilateral issues, the Swiss embassy said in a statement yesterday.

Nobs is scheduled to meet Dipu Moni, foreign minister; Shahidul Haque, foreign secretary; and representatives of the diplomatic missions, international organisations, civil society and media during his visit.

The ambassador will also visit the "Community based climate adaptation by coastal afforestation" project, co-funded by the Swiss government, in Barguna.

He holds a political science master degree from the Dhaka University, Islami Bank said in a statement.

He also serves the Association of Bankers Bangladesh as vice chairman, the Arbitration Committee of Bangladesh Foreign Exchange Dealers Association as treasurer and chairman.

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Mohammad Abdul Mannan, managing director of Islami Bank Bangladesh, began his second term as the bank's chief executive off for another three years yesterday.

Prior to assuming the position first time in 2010, he had three decades of experience in banking and also served as remittance marketing officer in six Gulf countries.