

Sheltech's housing fair begins today

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Sheltech is discounting apartment prices by up to 17 percent at a 15-day promotional housing fair starting at the real estate company's Dhaka office today.

The prices, after taking into account the discount, would range from Tk 60.78 lakh to Tk 9.57 crore, said Toufiq M Seraj, the company's managing director, yesterday. "There would be no further reductions on-the-spot."

"The housing sector is now passing a sluggish trend. So, we have made 'a price correction' to rope in more apartment buyers," Seraj said.

The company plans to sell around 400 apartments ranging from 805-2,225 square feet (sq ft) during the exposition styled Autumn Fair 2013, which starts today at the company's office in Dhaka.

"Each industry has a cycle. The real estate sector is now on a down-



From right, Kutubuddin Ahmed, chairman of Sheltech, and Toufiq M Seraj, managing director, attend a press briefing to announce a promotional event -- Sheltech Autumn Fair -- at the company's corporate office at Panthapath in Dhaka yesterday.

ward cycle, so customers can expect to buy apartments at reduced rates," said Kutubuddin Ahmed, chairman of Sheltech.

"We have designed our products

targeting the middle- and upper middle-income bracket," he said.

Apartments at Baridhara will cost Tk 30,500 per sq ft, Uttara Tk 8,200 per sq ft and Mirpur Tk

7,200, according to the price chart.

It means each flat with a size of 2,055 sq ft at Baridhara will cost around Tk 6.26 crore, Tk 72.98 lakh for a flat size of 890 sq ft at Uttara and around Tk 60.78 lakh for an apartment size of 1,105 sq ft at Gandaria.

Sheltech also plans to sell a number of plots ranging from 3.41-32 katha in Ashulia and Singair at Tk 2.53 to Tk 32 lakh per katha.

It means each plot with the size of 3.41-6.20 Katha at Baro Rangamatia of Ashulia will cost Tk 38.36 to Tk 75.95 lakh.

The real-estate sector now contributes up to 12-14 percent to the country's GDP, employing around one lakh skilled people and 35 lakh in the linkage industries, according to Seraj.

Around 4,000 apartments have so far been handed over to customers since the company's inception in 1988, he added. The fair will remain open from 9 am to 7pm every day and is free of any entry fee.

Regulator fines three stockbrokers for breach of rules

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC) yesterday fined two stockbrokers Tk 3 lakh each for violating securities rules.

PHP Stocks and Securities was fined for having a deficit of Tk 10 crore in its consolidated customers' account and PFI Securities for providing excess share credit to an investor by breaching margin rules.

Separately, DBL Securities was fined Tk 1 lakh for providing share credit against non-marginable shares.

The financial penalties were given out at a meeting with the commission's chief M Khairul Hossain in the chair, BSEC said in a statement.



Officials of Southeast Bank and MoneyGram attend a programme recently when the companies signed a deal to offer MoneyGram's money transfer services at the bank's branches across the country.

ACC to get probe report on Hall-Mark scam in a week

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The probe report on the Hall-Mark scam will be submitted to the Anti-Corruption Commission in seven days, ACC Secretary Faizur Rahman Chowdhury said yesterday.

He also said the probe report of the money laundering case of Destiny Group will be submitted in a week or two.

Chowdhury spoke at a monthly briefing at the commission headquarters at Segunbagicha in the capital.

The ACC on October 4 last year filed 11 cases against 27 top officials of Sonali Bank and Hall-Mark Group for misappropriating over Tk 1,568 crore.

According to a Bangladesh Bank investigation in May 2012, Hall-Mark and five other companies with the connivance of some bank officials had taken out loans of Tk 3,547 crore from the Ruposhi Bangla Hotel branch of Sonali Bank, using forged documents.

Of the money, Hall-Mark alone took away around Tk 2,600 crore while T and Brothers commandeered Tk 609.69 crore, Paragon Group Tk 146.60 crore, Nakshi Knit Tk 66.36 crore, DN Sports Tk 33.25 crore and Khanjahan Ali Tk 4.96 crore.

On July 31 last year, ACC field two cases against 22 officials of Destiny Group for laundering Tk 3,285.26 crore by cheating investors.

In its month-long enquiry, the commission had found evidence that these officials embezzled investors' money by cheating them through company projects and illegally transferred the money to their bank accounts, said ACC officials.

Asked about the findings of the investigations into Hall Mark and Destiny Group, the secretary denied making any comment.

In July, 32 cases were filed against 168 people, including 116 government officials and 14 businessmen.

Bangladesh to lead Asia Pacific's telecom forum

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh has been elected to lead as chairman country of the Asia Pacific Telecommunity and ICT Development Forum (ADF) for the next two years.

Md Giasuddin Ahmed, vice chairman of Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), will chair the forum.

The forum works to bring together policymakers, regulators and other relevant officials from the region on issues of common concern with special attention on the rural areas in the developing countries.

The election took place at the three-day international conference of the forum yesterday.

BTRC was the co-organiser of the conference, where representatives from 38 countries took part in the different technical sessions at Ruposhi Bangla Hotel in the city. Telecom Minister Sahara Khatun opens the event on Tuesday.

Regulator lifts suspension on Appollo Ispat IPO

FROM PAGE B1

Appollo Ispat transferred shares to the complainant shareholders in line with a court order, Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission said in a statement.

The regulator also collected information on the company's tax issues from the National Board of Revenue and that on the loan status of the company's directors from the central bank, and the information was included in the IPO prospectus.

On other issues, the regulator took opinion from Appollo Ispat and that was published in the prospectus.

According to the IPO prospectus, Appollo Ispat will use around Tk 153 crore from the IPO proceeds to repay bank loans, Tk 60 crore for project development and the rest to bear the IPO expenses.

The company will install an environment friendly German technology-based non-oxidising furnace unit for manufacturing lead-free corrugated iron sheet. The new project is expected to come into commercial production in mid-2014.

BB warns against property purchases abroad

FROM PAGE B1

The "objective of the exhibition was to showcase our portfolio in the United Arab Emirates and not for direct sales", the company said through its ad agency in Bangladesh.

The central bank, citing Foreign Exchange Regulation Act 1947, said there is a bar on sending money abroad to buy properties. "And the role of the collaborators in sending money illegally will be a punishable offence," the BB said.

BB Executive Director M Mahfuzur Rahman said they are looking into the matter and collecting information.

"We will take action for sending money illegally such as hundi," he said.

The offer by Damac Properties has also upset local realtors. Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh (REHAB) in a statement said money would be transferred illegally for purchasing apartments abroad.

"It is an ominous sign for the country's real estate sector, which is going through tough times," REHAB said.

Citing newspapers reports, they said around Tk 3,500 crore was siphoned off following the "Second Home" scheme of Malaysia earlier.



Mirza Salman Ispahani, chairman of the trustee board of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DEA) Foundation Bangladesh, attends a meeting of the board and the executive committee at the boardroom of AK Khan & Company in Dhaka recently. M Azizul Huq, honorary secretary, and Jim McCabe, treasurer, were also present.

DEA Foundation's trustee board re-elects top brass

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Mirza Salman Ispahani has recently been unanimously re-elected as the chairman of the trustee board of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DEA) Foundation Bangladesh for two-year term beginning on August 1 this year.

M Azizul Huq, managing director of GlaxoSmithKline Bangladesh, and Jim McCabe, chief executive of Standard Chartered Bank, were also re-elected as honorary secretary and treasurer respectively.

The election took place at a meeting at the board room of AK Khan & Company, Bay's Galleria in Dhaka, the foundation said in a statement yesterday.

Sayeeful Islam, managing director of Concord Garments Group, and A K Shamsuddin Khan, chairman of AK Khan Group, were also present.

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, an international faculty developing programme for youth development, was founded by the Duke of Edinburgh in 1956. It started its journey in Bangladesh in 2006.

Trade unions vital for the safety accord to succeed

FROM PAGE B1

The activist criticised the newly passed labour law "for failing to go far enough to guarantee the workers their rights to organise".

"This is one of the main reasons why the workers have been dying in Bangladesh. If the workers of Rana Plaza had had a union, they would not have had to go into the building after cracks were developed the very day before the building collapsed."

"If the workers of Tazreen Fashions had a union, they would have left the building as soon as the fire alarm rang."

The enforcement of laws, however, is equally important, Nova said.

"There are lots of aspects in Bangladesh's labour laws which are better than the labour laws of the US and Europe," he said, while citing the country's building code as an example.

"But, there does not seem to be any enforcement, which kind of makes the

over-emphasis on legislative reforms futile—it really does not matter if the government does not enforce the law."

Nova said there is a positive link between the Rana Plaza building collapse and the Tazreen Fire and the US suspending the trade benefits for Bangladesh. "I doubt the Obama administration would have acted if there were no Tazreen or Rana Plaza incident."

Asked if the European Union would follow the US's lead in withdrawing trade privileges, he said: "If the retailers pay for implementing the accord, the factories do what they need to do and the government enforces rules and regulations that improve the working conditions, I do not think that the EU will take any action."

"The EU would recognise that progress has been made, and this, in turn, will help Bangladesh regain the GSP [from the US]."

fazlur.rahman@thedailystar.net



Atiur Rahman, governor of Bangladesh Bank, presents a crest to Mohammad Shams-Ul Islam, deputy managing director of Agrani Bank, for Agrani's performance in the remittance sector, at a function organised by the Centre for NRBs, at Sonargaon Hotel in Dhaka on Saturday.

Factory survey starts on Sept 15

FROM PAGE B1

IndustriALL -- a global trade union, and North American Alliance -- a platform of 20 US-based retailers and brands for worker safety in Bangladesh, will separately inspect 800 and 1,200 factories.

IndustriALL will inspect the factories under an accord signed by 85 retailers and brands, mostly European.

However, Shipar could not say when IndustriALL and North American Alliance will start the inspection.

Buet will train the inspection teams from August 28, the secretary said, adding: "We will also prepare a checklist and a guideline for factory inspection on September 7."

The labour and employment ministry has already recruited four inspectors and will appoint 72 more by October, Shipar said.

A process is underway to appoint 128 inspectors in November, he added.

Sekender Ali, a professor at Buet, said more than 200 factories will not come under the tripartite inspection as those have already been visited by experts after the Rana Plaza collapse.

However, Ali is unsure whether these 200 factories will be inspected by IndustriALL and the North American Alliance.

Roy Ramesh Chandra, general secretary of IndustriALL Bangladesh Council, said they received 57 applications for the post of chief executive officer to conduct the inspection.

"We will appoint both global and local CEOs soon to start our function," he said.

IndustriALL will open an office in Dhaka and the 85 retailers and brands will pay \$12.5 million each in the next five years for the inspection and as compensation to workers.

The North American Alliance has already appointed former US under-secretary of state Ellen Tauscher as the independent chair of its board of directors to start the inspection.

India's rupee skids to new record low

AFP, Mumbai

India's rupee tumbled to a new record low against the dollar Thursday, hitting the symbolic 65 level, as economists urged the government to focus on reforms to boost confidence instead of quick-fix solutions.

The currency, which has hit record lows for five straight trading days, slumped to 65.56 to the dollar as uncertainty about the future of the US stimulus programme added to growing fears about the state of the Indian economy.

The rupee has lost about a fifth of its value this year and there are doubts over whether policymakers are in control of the situation, which analysts now routinely refer to as a crisis.

"Unless reforms related to growth and lowering the current account deficit are addressed, things will not improve," said economist Devendra Pant with India Ratings, part of the Fitch ratings group.

Investors are concerned that the US Federal Reserve will begin winding down its bond-buying scheme, which has helped fuel an investment spurge in Asia's emerging markets.

India has a large current account deficit which must be funded with foreign capital and the country is seen as one of the most vulnerable among emerging markets whose currencies are under pressure globally.

Pant said the government needed to find ways of boosting foreign direct investment, which plunged to \$36.8 billion last year from \$46.5 billion the previous year.



Mahbubur Rahman, chairman of International Chamber of Commerce Bangladesh, attends a reception to distribute certificates among 95 certified documentary credit specialists of Islami Bank Bangladesh at its head office in Dhaka on Wednesday. Mohammad Abdul Mannan, managing director of Islami Bank, was also present.

National grid to get power from new Haripur plant tomorrow

FROM PAGE B1

Japan International Cooperation Agency has provided 71 percent of the funding by way of soft loans—at 0.01 percent interest rates, while the government paid the rest.

Chowdhury also said the government is contemplating revising fiscal regime of gas to make them at par with Myanmar and Sri Lanka to make the country's untapped hydrocarbon resources in the Bay of Bengal attractive to the international oil companies.

He also said the government would go ahead with its plan to set up a coal-based power plant at Rampal, Khulna, near the

Sundarbans, the world's largest mangrove forest.

"We will, however, pay heed to constructive suggestions to the environmentalists," he said.

"We have already taken some mitigation measures to reduce the potential impact of the plant on the environment and biodiversity of the Sundarbans. We will tighten those measures further."

Japan has been one of the leading contributors to the development of Bangladesh's power sector, responsible for 22.5 percent of the country's total electricity production.