
STAR

Anisul Islam Mahmud, water resources minister; Harry Stronach, representative of foreign affairs and trade ministry of New Zealand; and Saiful Islam, chairman of Western Marine Shipyard, inaugurate the construction of a ship in Chittagong yesterday.

# Western Marine building ship for New Zealand

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

WESTERN Marine Shipyard yesterday began construction of a passenger ship to ply the waters at Tokealau, a non-self governing territory of New Zealand.

Water Resources Minister Anisul Islam Mahmud inaugurated the construction as the chief guest at the shipyard on the bank of the Karnaphuli River at Patiya upazila. Neaz Ahmed, honorary consul of New Zealand, was present as the special guest.

"It's an achievement for the shipyard as well as the industry. This is the first time the company is going to build a ship to operate in the southern hemisphere," Western Marine Chairman Saiful Islam said.

The 43-meter long ship with a capacity of 60 passengers is being built for the New Zealand foreign affairs and trade ministry. It will be a SOLAS (safety of life at sea) passenger ship, which means it will have the highest safety measurers considering all possible risks at sea.

The contract value of the project is $6.6 million.

In his speech, Mahmud said Western Marine by building ships for foreign countries has done more than many ambassadors could do—because the ships would carry the country's flag, not only to the country they have been sold to, but also to places they would visit.

On New Zealand's order for a passenger ship, the minister said it was a matter of pride as the company was selected through a rigorous tender involving 12 shipbuilding companies and it was selected not for the lowest price, but for quality.

Harry Stronach, a representative of the New Zealand ministry, said they selected Western Marine to build the ship after evaluating the other companies from different European and Southeast Asian countries, in a global bid a year and a half ago.

The ship will be delivered by December.

Western Marine Managing Director Sakhawat Hossain said the ship is going to be their 130th ship and the first ship built by the country for use in the Pacific.

# Factory inspectors warned against complacency

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

STATE Minister for Labour and Employment Mojibul Haque Chunnu yesterday warned factory inspectors against complacency during their duty.

"If you perform your duties sincerely, laws will automatically be implemented," he told 30 factory inspectors at a symposium to educate them about the recent changes in the labour law.

The two-day programme was jointly organised by the department of labour in collaboration with the International Labour Organisation at Ruposhi Bangla Hotel in the capital.

The state minister said there is a lack of trust between the owners and workers and only laws cannot remove this gap.

"You have a role in addressing this distrust and I believe it is possible if you work sincerely."

Mikail Shipar, secretary of the ministry, who chaired the inaugural session of the training programme, also asked the factory inspectors not to be complacent, as the country is under the surveillance of the world. "Any lapses will be noticed easily," he said.

About trade unionism in garment factories, he said it is a constitutional right, but this right should be practised ethically. He said the government has so far approved 100 trade unions in garment factories.

Atiqul Islam, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said trade unions should not only protect the interests of workers but also help owners create a congenial work environment. Srinivas B Reddy, country director of ILO, also spoke.

# Bajaj to deepen Kawasaki, KTM partnerships to lift exports

REUTERS, Mumbai

MOTORCYCLE maker Bajaj Auto is building on its partnerships with Japan's Kawasaki Heavy Industries and Austria's KTM AG as it looks to increase exports of its bikes to fuel growth.

Bajaj is already India's top exporter of motorcycles and three-wheelers, being well established in some neighbouring and African markets, and has this year weathered weak domestic demand thanks to higher export revenue.

# AirAsia boss lets rip at rival, Malaysian regulators

REUTERS

Planes of JetStar and AirAsia sit on the tarmac at Singapore's Changi Airport.

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

FLAMBOYANT AirAsia boss Tony Fernandes savaged state-backed flag carrier Malaysian Airlines and the nation's aviation authorities on Wednesday, accusing them of mismanagement that was harming the travelling public.

The budget airline mogul posted the comments on his Twitter feed a day after fierce rival Malaysia Airlines (MAS) announced it had lost a whopping 1.17 billion ringgit ($355 million) in 2013.

"AirAsia Allstars, take a bow. Malaysia Airlines lost over a billion," Fernandes tweeted. "So much money wasted. If people were more efficient Malaysians would spend less on travel."

Fernandes bought ailing AirAsia in 2001, quickly turning it around with his no-frills, low-fare formula.

AirAsia has put severe pressure on inefficient MAS, which analysts say is hampered by poor management, bloated and demanding unions and government interference.

On Tuesday MAS also reported its fourth straight quarterly loss and warned of a "challenging" year ahead.

The airline has bled money in recent years and announced a series of turnaround plans, but the poor earnings have continued.

"I wonder if it's fair that Malaysia Airlines can lose so much money and protect its market share. Can only do that with taxpayers money," Fernandes tweeted.

The outspoken Fernandes also took aim at Malaysian regulators, implying they were seeking to hinder MAS's competition.

"Imagine how many jobs AirAsia could have created if (there was) effective regulation. We have done amazing. Unbelievable. Despite all the roadblocks," he said.

The two airlines briefly buried the hatchet in 2011, when Fernandes agreed to a strategic tie-up aimed at helping to revive struggling MAS. But the deal was called off just months later, with Fernandes faulting "massive" MAS union resistance to reform and hinting at deep problems in the rival airline.

AirAsia is currently at odds with government-controlled airport operator Malaysian Airport Holdings Berhad over a two-year delay and cost overruns in the construction of a new budget terminal outside the capital Kuala Lumpur.

AirAsia is set to be the main presence at the facility. Its current opening date is May 2 but recent media reports have suggested it may yet be pushed back again.


REUTERS

A Tesla Model S electric sedan is driven near the company's factory in California.

# Apple looking at cars, medical devices for growth

REUTERS

APPLE Inc is looking at cars and medical devices to diversify its sources of revenue as growth from iPhones and iPads slow, according to a San Francisco Chronicle report.

Apple's head of mergers and acquisitions, Adrian Perica, met with Tesla Motors Inc founder Elon Musk at the company's headquarters last year around the same time analysts suggested that Apple acquire the Model S electric car maker, the newspaper reported on Sunday, citing a source.

The company is also exploring medical devices and sensors that can help predict heart attacks by studying sound blood makes at it flows through arteries.

The company's senior vice president of operations, Jeff Williams, has met with U.S. Food and Drug Administration chief Dr. Margaret Hamburg and Dr. Jeffrey Shuren, who oversees the agency's approval for medical devices, to discuss "mobile medical applications," the paper reported, citing FDA records.

Apple could not be reached for comment.

Rival Google Inc recently bought thermostat maker Nest Labs for $3.2 billion, robot maker Boston Dynamic and artificial intelligence startup DeepMind Technologies Ltd. The company has also been working on projects including Google Glass and self-driving cars.

Investors hope that Apple, which last came out with a new device - the iPad - in 2010, has something up its sleeve for 2014. Speculation currently revolves around a smartwatch or even a long-rumored TV product.

# Bitcoin value plunges on Japanese exchange

AFP, Tokyo

THE value of bitcoin on a Tokyo exchange was less than half that on other platforms Wednesday, two weeks after it suspended withdrawals claiming a bug in the software that underpins the virtual currency.

MtGox, one of the world's oldest Bitcoin exchanges, this month stopped processing client requests to withdraw money held at its "wallet", citing a problem with the technology.

On Wednesday afternoon a single Bitcoin at MtGox stood around $286 while other exchanges around the world were offering more than $600. In January a Bitcoin was worth over $900 at the Tokyo exchange.

Bitcoin is at the leading edge of the nascent crypto-currency movement. It is based on an open-source computer code designed by an anonymous person or people five years ago.

Unlike fiat currencies like the dollar or the euro, the bitcoin is not backed by a central bank or a government, but depends on cryptography to control the creation and transfer of money.

# Energy-starved Pakistan sets sights on coal

AFP, Gadani, Pakistan

AFTER years of rolling blackouts that have wreaked havoc on industry and fuelled political unrest, energy-starved Pakistan has set its sights on a coal-fired future.

Regarded as the dirtiest of all fossil fuels, recent discoveries of untapped coal fields in southern Pakistan have convinced the government they could be on the cusp of a solution to their energy woes.

Late last month, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his former rival, ex-president Asif Ali Zardari jointly inaugurated the construction of a $1.6 billion coal plant the southern town of Thar, hailing their shared goal of ending the nation's power crisis.

The government has also green-lighted the construction of a pilot 660 megawatt coal-fired plant in Gadani, a small, serene town on the Arabian Sea known as Pakistan's ship-breaking hub.

A 600 megawatt plant has also been given the go-ahead in the southern city of Jamshoro.

The construction of these plants is one plank in an ambitious plan to convert many of the country's existing oil-based thermal plants and upgrade its ports as they begin swapping one black gold for another.

"This is a major and historic fuel switching plan as we generate zero from coal compared to India which generates 69 percent of its electricity from coal-fired power plants," Pakistan's minister for power and water Khwaja Asif told AFP.

Pakistan has struggled with scheduled power cuts for decades. But the problems have been particularly acute since 2008, with regular outages of up to 22 hours a day for many domestic users and even longer for industries -- costing about two percent of GDP per year.

In the hot summer, when temperatures soar to 50C in the country's centre, Pakistan produces around 18,000 MW of power, with an average deficit of 4,000 MW.

A lack of capacity together with huge debt cycles exacerbated by poor rates of tax collection are seen as some of the major factors contributing to the country's dismal power shortages.

The issue was also a central campaign theme in last year's general elections, which saw Nawaz Sharif elected to the top post.

Faced with a growing bill for imported oil that currently stands at $14 billion and a rapidly depleting supply of natural gas, the country's private and public plants are switching their oil-plants over to coal.

"Pakistan has been facing rising oil prices and declining gas reserves as well as tight foreign account situation, rendering the reliance on the import of oil to fuel power plants increasingly unaffordable," the Asian Development Bank said in a statement.

largest private sector power utility Karachi Electric Supply Company (KESC), which provides electricity to the country's biggest city, has taken the lead in plans for the coal switch.

The company has recently granted engineering, procurement and construction contracts to Chinese company Harbin Electric International to convert two units of the Bin Qasim thermal power stations with 420 megawatt capacity.

The $400 million project is expected to be completed by 2016.

Alongside the conversions, Pakistan is also upgrading its port facilities to increase its ability to import coal.

"Ports are the lifeline of the country," says Haleem Siddiqui, a veteran seaman who pioneered the first state-of-the art container terminal at Karachi Port and whose company is building a "dirty cargo terminal" at Port Qasim along Arabian Sea.

The fully-mechanised terminal would be able to handle four to eight million tons of coal in the first phase to be completed by 2015, growing to 20 million tons in the extended phase in 2020, at a cost of $200 million.

But merely raising the amount of imported coal would strain the country's already dwindling foreign exchange reserves and adverse balance of payment, which fell to 13-year low of $2.8 billion in February.

Which is why Pakistan is determined to find some of its energy needs under its own soil.

Some experts have pointed to the Thar Desert in southern Sindh province, which sits on top a vast potential source of 175 billion tons of coal.

"It is very huge reserve and is equivalent to combined oil reserves of Iran and Saudi Arab in terms of heating value," Agha Wasif, chief of the provincial energy department told AFP.

Engro Powergen Limited, a joint venture of public and private sectors, is developing a block of the Thar coal field with $800 million dollars investment which is set to open by 2016.

But not everyone is pleased. Some residents inside the Gadani Energy Park have been forced to leave their homes.

"We are living here for seven generations and we have the graves of our ancestors here, how could we leave our place?" said 25-year-old Umaid Ali from the village of Qadir Goth.


AFP

Children play in their village at the proposed site of Energy Park in Sindh province, Pakistan.