

ASA to lend Tk 31,500cr in FY18

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

ASA, the second largest micro-lender by customer numbers, has set a target to disburse Tk 31,500 crore in the current fiscal year.

The money will be lent among eight million clients, the microfinance institution said in a statement yesterday.

The decision was taken at the organisation's 38th annual general meeting in its headquarters in Dhaka on September 28.

The meeting also approved a budgetary allocation of Tk 40 crore to implement non-financial programmes, which comprise primary healthcare, primary education strengthening, physiotherapy, sanitation, and hygiene.

The lender also took decisions to expand the coverage of the non-financial programmes in the coming years to provide access to a large segment of disadvantaged people of the country.

Taherunnessa Abdullah, chairperson of ASA, presided over the meeting, while Md Shafiqul Haque Choudhury, president of ASA, presented the annual report. Mohammed Azim Hossain, a director of ASA International, moderated the programme.

Portal for customs clearance for export, import on way

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The government is set to establish an electronic portal that brings all government agencies dealing with exports and imports under one platform, the National Board of Revenue said yesterday.

To be termed the National Single Window, the portal will ensure faster processing of trade-related documents and clearance, which will facilitate faster and increased cross-border trade, the revenue authority said.

"Businesses will be benefited from the establishment of the National Single Window as all the government departments will come under one umbrella," said MA Mannan, state minister for finance and planning.

Mannan's comments came at the inauguration of a four-day workshop at Grand Sultan Tea Resort & Golf at Sreemangal in Sylhet, organised by the NBR and the World Customs Organisation.

NBR Chairman Md Nojibur

Rahman said it would be tough to implement the window without ensuring effective coordination among the revenue authority, commerce, finance and planning, food, industries, agriculture ministries and the other related departments.

"Participation from businesses is also important," he said.

An NSW allows a single point of entry for submission of data and information, re-use of data and information to avoid repeated keying-in of data, single synchronous processing of data and information and quick and easy release and clearance of cargo.

"First of all, the establishment and implementation of NSW are aimed at quick and less cumbersome clearance of goods," said Khondoker Aminur Rahman, member for customs modernisation and international trade at the NBR.

Second, this is the best example of having customs and all other government and private sector entities related to trade facilitation in a single platform for coordina-

tion and cooperation, he said.

The government has received a commitment of a substantial amount of fund from a development partner to implement the NSW.

The project is at the final stage of approval from the government, he added. "Ideally, a single window benefits all," said Mohammad Ehteshamul Hoque, first secretary of customs modernisation and international trade at the NBR.

The government gets increased revenue for better compliance by traders.

Businesses also can clear their goods faster in a more transparent and predictable process and there would be less bureaucratic tangles.

The economy also benefits because of improved transparency and governance, reduced corruption and fewer opportunities for physical interaction, he added.

Md Lutfor Rahman, member for customs policy at NBR, and WCO's Rajendra Meena also spoke among others at the workshop.



Sohail RK Hussain, CEO of City Bank, hands over a crest to Vittorio Di Bello, regional head of Asia and Pacific for Financial Institution Group at International Finance Corporation (IFC), at a programme at the bank's head office in Dhaka yesterday. IFC will have its representative in the bank's board as the bank issued 5 percent of its outstanding common equity for IFC as per approval of relevant regulatory authorities.

3-day wedding expo begins tomorrow at Ctg Radisson

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Chittagong

A three-day "Grand Wedding Expo 2017" will begin at Radisson Blu Chittagong Bay View from tomorrow.

A press conference yesterday revealed

that for a Tk 50 entry fee, visitors can know about products and services of 55 organisations while consultants would give expert opinions.

The hotel is the organiser and Violet Inc a co-organiser.



Md Shahab Uddin, a general manager of Teletalk, and Rony Riad Rashid, chief marketing officer of Summit Communications, cut a cake at the mobile operator's office in Dhaka to celebrate five years of Summit Communications providing Nationwide Telecommunication Transmission Network service to Teletalk.

SUMMIT COMMUNICATIONS

New acting finance secretary takes charge

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The government yesterday appointed Mohammad Muslim Chowdhury as the acting finance secretary.

Prior to the appointment, Chowdhury has been serving the finance division as an additional secretary.

He is one of the audit and accounts cadres of the 1984 batch.

He replaced former senior secretary Hedayetullah Al Mamoon, who went into retirement yesterday.



Muslim Chowdhury

Chowdhury holds a postgraduate degree in accounting from Chittagong University and an MSc in finance with distinction from University of Birmingham, UK.

He had also worked in World Bank and DFID financed projects. He was also actively involved in initial formulation and implementation of the PPP Framework in Bangladesh and drafted the PPP Strategy and Policy 2010.

Chowdhury has over 30 years experience in public service.

City Group, Deshbandhu get nod to export sugar

FROM PAGE B1

The prices of sugar have fallen to Tk 49-50 each kilogram at mill gate after the waiver of duty and VAT by the National Board of Revenue for the import of sugar by the BSFC, said Bishwajit Saha, general manager for marketing for City Group.

At the retail level in Dhaka city yesterday, sugar prices declined 3 percent to Tk 55-58 per kilogramme from Tk 56-60 a month ago, according to the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh. Earlier, refiners sold the sweetener at Tk 52 per kilogramme at the mill gate, he said.

"We have a huge stock, so we have sought permission for export."

City Group has 2.85 lakh tonnes of stock of sugar and letters of credit for import of 2 lakh tonnes have been opened. "We have order for shipment to Nepal. We also want to export to China," he added.

The government withdrew restriction on sugar exports in October 2012 in the face of demand from local refiners that they could not utilise their total annual processing capacity of 35 lakh as domestic consumption was less than that.

The US Department of Agriculture estimates Bangladesh's

annual consumption to be more than 23 lakh tonnes.

The government, however, tagged conditions that require exporters to get prior permission from the commerce ministry for shipment.

The notification also said that exporters need to submit application to the commerce ministry based on recommendation from Bangladesh Sugar Refiners Association about their stock position.

The Bangladesh Tariff Commission would analyse the overall stock situation of sugar in the country and imports in the pipeline and recommend whether sugar could be exported or not.

At least 10 percent value addition will be required to export sugar, which is imported in the raw form, according to the notification.

Due to scanty domestic production of sugarcane, Bangladesh meets 95 percent of its annual demand for the sweetener by processing imported raw sugar mainly from Brazil and Argentina, according to processors.

Sugar and sugar confectionary exports fell 40 percent year-on-year to \$17.63 million in fiscal 2016-17, according to data from the Export Promotion Bureau.

Dollar U-turn could call time on 2017's emerging market boom

REUTERS, London

Developing countries have been on a borrowing binge this year with nine months of bumper investment inflows and record bond sales, but a sharp US dollar bounce into year-end could end the party early.

Signs of an upswing in the dollar's fortunes made the last week of September poor - equities fell 2 percent, bond yields rose about 10 basis points and currencies weakened on average by over 1 percent, their worst week since last November.

While emerging markets are still among the year's best performing assets, the moves last week cast a chill on the sector. They closely emulated those in late-2016 when Donald Trump's US election win and stimulus plans briefly boosted the dollar, ended a three-quarters emerging market rally.

Last week's swings were driven by expectations of a December US rate hike. But possibly, a bigger threat is the revival, after many months, of the so-called Trumpflation bet - Trump's plans for stimulus

through tax cuts.

The measures could be immensely dollar-supportive, especially if they induce US firms to repatriate cash held overseas. Estimates of such holdings are reckoned to be well over \$1 trillion.

That could see the dollar repeating the 12 percent surge it witnessed in 2005, after a 2004 tax holiday lured home about \$300 billion. That's a formidable hurdle for emerging markets, which usually suffer when the dollar strengthens.

"The last time they did it (encouraged dollar repatriation), it had a huge impact on the dollar and this time the scale could be much larger," Abhishek Kumar, lead portfolio manager for emerging markets at State Street Global Advisors.

On top of that, emerging markets look "frothy in some areas", Kumar said, citing the fall in corporate dollar bond yields below those on sovereign debt, and successful bond issuance by junk-grade borrowers Tajikistan and Ukraine.

Such frontier market, along with Chinese firms, led a bor-

rowing frenzy that saw bond sales of almost \$500 billion in the first nine months of 2017, a quarter above year-ago levels.

Yield-hungry bond investors submitted orders of over \$4 billion for Tajikistan's \$500 million issue, despite its doubtful economic prospects. A \$12.5 billion deal from Saudi Arabia - in recession and struggling with huge budget deficits - enjoyed bids around \$40 billion.

But while such entities benefited from Treasury yields - the reference rate for global borrowing costs - bumping along near multi-year lows, Kumar predicts US tax changes to have "material" impact on the US curve.

Higher US yields, crowding out flows to riskier assets, can drive an exodus from emerging markets, especially when long-dated bond yields rise faster than shorter-maturity debt.

A taste of such curve steepening, as these yield moves are known, came last week as the Treasury curve steepened the most since August. That forced up yields on the new Saudi bonds by around 15 basis points.

FBCCI chief calls for greater partnership with India

FROM PAGE B1

While there has been a surge in the volume of bilateral trade between Bangladesh and India increased over the years, it is still in favour of the neighbouring country.

"The statistics speaks for itself."

For instance, in fiscal 2016-17, Bangladesh's exports to India stood at \$672.40 million, whereas imports from India amounted to \$6.2 billion, up 13 percent from a year earlier.

The reasons for the trade imbalance are that Bangladesh's shipments to India are routinely affected by trade and non-trade barriers that neutralise the duty-free benefits provided by the neighbouring country, Mohiuddin said.

"We hope we can make concrete progress to resolve the issues." The movement of people is also an issue, the FBCCI chief said.

While Bangladesh issues visa that allows Indian businesspersons to use any land port, India's business vis require selecting any one land port. "We look forward to reciprocal accordance," Mohiuddin said.

The picture though is not all gloomy.

About 70 percent of Bangladesh-India trade is conducted through the Benapole-Petrapole land ports and it has been upgraded to an all-time integrated check post to facilitate faster movement of goods-laden trucks, he said.

Mohiuddin invited the Indian entrepreneurs to invest in textile, manufactured goods, consumer goods, agro-processed products, fish processing, leather, ceramics, pharmaceuticals, food products, electronics and electric products.

At the meeting, Pankaj R Patel, president of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, called for greater integration between the two countries for more trade.

He also urged both the governments for restoration of old railways between the two countries.

The signing of coastal agreement between the two countries will help increase trade, he said, while also calling for more flights between the two countries.

BB rejects City request to set up subsidiary in HK

FROM PAGE B1

Prime Bank set up its subsidiary company in Hong Kong in 2006, Eastern Bank in 2013 and AB Bank in 1995.

Under the circumstances, there is no need to allow any local bank to expand its overseas banking operations in Hong Kong, according to the BB report.

"The Hong Kong market is deep and wide enough to accommodate a forth Bangladesh bank to open an office there," said Mashrur Arefin, additional managing director and chief communications officer of City Bank.

The bank will soon approach the BB governor to reconsider its application, he added.



Economist Mustafa K Mujeri, Keith Thompson of DFID Bangladesh; Md Eunusur Rahman, senior secretary to the bank and financial institutions division, finance ministry; and SK Sur Chowdhury, deputy governor, Bangladesh Bank, attend a roundtable, "National Financial Inclusion Strategy for Bangladesh" organised by the division, Bangladesh Bank and DFID's the Business Finance for the Poor in Bangladesh Project at the Sonargaon hotel yesterday.

FDI

Illegal handsets to be deactivated soon: Tarana

FROM PAGE B1

The code is also used by operators to deactivate stolen phones by accessing the network.

"Now, we are discussing different proposals on how the mobile handsets will be detected and how the deactivation will take place," Tarana said.

Last year, Bangladesh Mobile Phone Importers Association and Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission initiated the process to develop an IMEI database. Besides, the state minister said they were planning to equip Bangladesh Telecommunications Company Ltd with modern technologies.

"A mechanism will be launched through which every call to a BTCL number will be diverted to a mobile phone if it is not answered after three rings."

She also expressed her optimism to introduce 4G mobile service in December and mobile number portability in the next four months.