

Bring back foreign airlines to Ctg

Tourism experts demand at the opening of Chittagong Travel Mart

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chittagong

The gradual closure of commercial operations of foreign airlines to Chattogram is a matter of concern and it would leave a negative impact on the region's tourism, experts said yesterday.

The civil aviation and tourism ministry should take immediate measures to bring back the foreign airlines, they said.

They spoke at the opening of a three-day international tourism fair—Chittagong Travel Mart 2018—that began at the Peninsula Chittagong in the port city yesterday.

Chattogram is an important city and it has immense tourism potential, said Kazi Wahidul Alam, editor of The Bangladesh Monitor, a travel and tourism fortnightly which has organised the show.

He urged the Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) to find out what made international airlines close their operations in Chattogram.

"We have been organising the show for the last nine years and we hope to arrange the event on a bigger scale in the future."

Twenty two organisations, including airlines, travel agencies, tour operators, hotels and resorts, set up stalls at the fair offering discounts of different amounts.

US-Bangla Airlines, a private carrier, has come up with a 15 percent discount on tickets of all domestic and international routes.

At the fair, US-Bangla is also providing tour operators with special offers on the sales of holiday packages of the carrier.

"More people are visiting the stall of Regent Airways this year compared to the previous years," said Sardul Sikandar, an official of the airline.



AJM Nasir Uddin, mayor of Chattogram City Corporation, visits a stall at a three-day international tourism fair at the Peninsula Chittagong yesterday.

AJM Nasir Uddin, mayor of Chattogram City Corporation, opened the show and stressed the need for coordination among the public and private sectors for the overall development of the country's tourism.

Mahbubul Alam, president of CCCI, called for establishing better connectivity and improvement of tourism facilities.

"Millions of dollars can be earned if we can harness the tourism potential of the region."

Bangladesh Tourism Board (BTB) has taken an initiative to draw up the much-awaited tour-

ism master plan for the country and tender has also been floated for the appointment of consultant, said Md Jahangir Hossain, CEO of the board.

The BTB also plans to run a global digital marketing campaign and expects the initiative to show result in the next six months, he said.

The fair will remain open for visitors from 10.30am to 8pm every day.

Mustak Luhar, general manager of the Peninsula Chittagong, also spoke.

Corporate SIM sale now needs prior BTRC nod

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Meanwhile the BTRC is also verifying corporate numbers at random. Operators are submitting their corporate numbers and focal points of respective companies with their email IDs and other contacts.

"It might not be logical to check all the connections one by one," said a senior official of the regulator.

Md Jahurul Haque, acting chairman of the BTRC, said if the regulator still finds anomalies on the part of the operators, they would definitely be punished while unauthenticated SIM cards blocked immediately.

The government registered and re-registered mobile phone numbers from January to May last year. Law enforcers say SIMs were still being registered bypassing the legal format.

Illegally pre-activated SIMs are being sold in the market for Tk 500 to Tk 5,000 each, the buyers inevitably being mostly those with ill-intentions, whereas a regular connection costs about Tk 100.

Chemical importer sued for dodging Tk 59 lakh in tax

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The Customs Intelligence and Investigation Directorate (CIID) yesterday filed two cases against a Dhaka-based company for dodging Tk 59 lakh in tax through false declaration while importing chemicals.

SAARC Engineering declared that it had imported 60 tonnes of dolomite worth Tk 1.9 crore in the six containers that arrived from China on May 8.

The Dhaka-based company actually brought in urea-formaldehyde and melamine formaldehyde, according to CIID officials.

After being tipped off, CIID officials seized the six containers containing the chemicals upon arrival at the Chattogram port.

The cases were registered after physical and chemical tests last week confirmed the fraudulence, said CIID Chattogram Deputy Director Md Mohiuddin.

Dolomite is used for acid neutralisation in the chemical industry, in stream restoration projects and as a soil conditioner as per information available online.

Urea-formaldehyde is used in adhesives, particle board and molded objects while melamine formaldehyde extensively in automotive, epoxy and polyester appliance coatings.

KDS Accessories approves 15pc dividends

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

KDS Accessories Limited approved 10 percent cash dividend and 5 percent stock dividend for shareholders for 2017-18 at its 27th annual general meeting in Chittagong Boat Club in the port city yesterday.

Selim Rahman, managing director of the company offering apparel trims and packaging products and services, chaired the meeting which was attended by Mohammad Jamaluddin, independent director, and Kamrul Hasan, director, among others, says a press release.

Accord departs Nov 30

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So far, a total of 60 engineers have been recruited for running the operations of RCC, formed to oversee the remediation and inspection after the departure of the Accord and Alliance from Bangladesh. Alliance is the North American inspection and remediation agency.

The RCC will recruit another 40 engineers soon to take the tally past 100, which is enough for skilful operation of the platform. Since the RCC has been formed in consultation with the International Labour Organisation (ILO), it has also sponsored some skilled engineers for the RCC.

The ILO will also sponsor few more engineers for the RCC, Chunnusaid.

Contacted, Rob Wayss, executive director of the Accord, said the agency submitted a transition plan to the labour ministry in the middle of September.

"We remain in discussions with the ministry on the implementation of the transition and gradual handover of the Accord's work to the RCC."

The transition plan also includes working with and supporting the RCC to ensure they are prepared to gradually take over such work and effectively regulate safety at garment factories, he added.

The factories that were handed over to the RCC have completed the remediation of safety hazard findings from the Accord initial fire, electrical and structural safety inspections, said a statement from the Accord.

However, the remediated factories will need follow-up inspection in areas like status of remediation, initial fire, electrical and structural inspection reports, escalation status and others, it said.

Following the Rana Plaza building collapse in April 2013 that killed 1,138 workers and injured 2,500, the European retailers formed a legally-binding five-year-long Accord to fix the loopholes in the areas of fire, structural and electrical safety in the garment factories in Bangladesh.

So far, the platform has inspected nearly 1,600 garment factories.

Meanwhile, the Alliance's tenure will automatically come to an end at the close of this year as it did not apply for an extension, said Tofail Ahmed, commerce minister, on Monday after a meeting with the US Ambassador in Bangladesh Marcia Bernicat.

Singer fair in Ctg today

STAR BUSINESS DESK

A three-day "Singer Fun Fair" opens at CJKS Gymnasium Hall in Chattogram today showcasing furniture, kitchen appliance and electronics.

Different discounts, such as 20 percent on furniture, alongside warranties and easy monthly instalment facilities can be availed at the fair which will remain open from 10:00am to 9:00pm, said Singer in a statement yesterday.

Premier Bank posts 43.6pc rise in profits

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Speaking at the event, the sponsors and top officials of the bank vowed to serve clients by maintaining the existing business track in the years to come.

The bank has not only played an important role to improve the country's economic and banking sectors but also conquered the hearts of the clients, they said.

HBM Iqbal said he was happy to see the accomplishment of the bank since its inception in 1999.

"We want to say thank you - to the customers who started with us and were loyal to us throughout the years.

You all are a very important part of our growth. We would not have been where we are today without you." Muhammed Ali highlighted the strategic changes in the modalities of business and the process of connecting people with the bank for greater financial inclusion.

He also focused on the bank's contribution to the SME sector and how it is helping entrepreneurs achieve dreams.

Reazul Karim thanked the bank's past and present employees for their dedication, innovation and hard work.



HBM Iqbal, chairman of Premier Bank, cuts a cake to celebrate the bank's 19th anniversary at its head office in Dhaka yesterday. M Reazul Karim, CEO, was present. Story on B1

\$850m WB-ADB loans for education, health

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Yesterday was the last working day for Azam, as he is retiring on October 27.

He went on to request the officials concerned to be more careful for proper implementation of the projects.

"The assistance for PEDP 4 will help improve primary education quality, equity, access and retention," Parkash said.

The PEDP 4 is expected to directly benefit 18.6 million students, and about 340,000 teachers and more than 65,000 schools that are under the management of the primary and mass education ministry.

The programme aims to: reduce double-shift operations at schools by recruiting more teachers and building more classrooms; step up teacher education and provide needs-based training for teachers and teacher educators; reform examinations and assessments as well as enrich teaching and learning resources such as with digital materials, according to an ADB statement.

The total cost of the PEDP 4 programme is \$14.7 billion, of which the government will provide \$13.2 billion. The ADB, the World Bank, United Nations Children's Fund and the European Union will provide \$1.38 billion.

The government and the ADB signed another loan agreement for \$110 million in additional loan for a project that is improving access to urban primary healthcare services in Bangladesh through public-private partnerships (PPPs).

The additional financing will cover the

cost of a five-year extension to assist the government to strengthen local health systems and continue to expand the PPP model of contracting to service providers, according to the ADB statement.

The Urban Climate Change Resilience Trust Fund, financed by the Rockefeller Foundation and the governments of Switzerland and the UK, will provide a \$2 million grant, to be administered by the ADB, it said.

The Bangladesh government will contribute \$30 million towards the cost of the additional financing, while the United Nations Population Fund will provide \$1.5 million in-kind technical support. The project completion date is March 2023.

The current project covers 10 cities and four municipalities representing about 17 percent of the total 57 million urban population.

According to a review in 2015, the project has been providing services to more than 23 million clients, of whom 74 percent were female and has constructed a network of 180 health facilities and 224 satellite clinics.

The project is also building experience in the management and contracting of health service delivery as well as monitoring and evaluation systems.

The review concluded that the project merits continuation and expansion to ensure that the growing demand for healthcare in urban areas is met.

The project is recognised as an innovative model of partnership between the

government, which contracts out health service delivery, and service providers (mainly nongovernmental organisations). As originally financed in 2012 with a \$50 million ADB loan and \$20 million co-financing, it is one of the largest PPP projects for primary healthcare delivery in South Asia. The rate of interest on the ADB loans is 2 percent and they would have to be repaid in 25 years, including a five-year grace period.

The Sustainable and Marine Fisheries Project will also support reforms in fisheries policies and regulations, according to the WB statement.

In 16 coastal districts, the project will set up community co-management associations with fishing communities, enabling them to adopt supplementary and alternative livelihoods.

While empowering fishing communities, especially women through skills development and nutrition awareness, the project will also establish 100 model fishing villages.

The rate of interest on the WB loan is 2.5 percent, including a service charge of 0.75 percent, interest rate of 1.25 percent and commitment charge 0.5 percent.

The rate is much higher than in previous WB loans, which carried 0.75 percent increase. The reason for the spike in interest rate is Bangladesh's higher per capita income now. The new rate became applicable for loan agreements signed after July 1.

The loan is repayable in 30 years, including a five-year grace period.

Export of agro-processed foods to hit \$1b by 2021

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He suggested entrepreneurs tap the duty-free export benefit extended by India to Bangladesh for almost all the goods.

The minister said the government provides 20 percent incentive to encourage shipment of agricultural products, including agro-processed foods.

Harsh Vardhan Shringla, Indian high commissioner to Bangladesh, said there is potential for cooperation in agro-processing between the two neighbours.

"The key word is cooperation, not competition," he said, adding that Indian companies could supply machinery for the agro-processing sector and Bangladesh firms can cater to the huge Indian market.

Bangladesh's export to India is rising, said Shringla, adding that India accepts 21 products certified by Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution.

Benoit Prefontaine, high commissioner of Canada to Bangladesh, said there is a bright prospect for food processing in Bangladesh.

Manmohan Parkash, country director of the Asian Development Bank, said agro-processing can raise food growers' income and reduce huge post-harvest losses.

People can set up small and medium enterprises across the country and give a boost to the rural economy, he said.

He said Bangladesh needs more people with appropriate technical

skills and deep knowledge of modern agro-processing practices.

He suggested making investment in research and development, adoption of latest technologies to ensure quality and make the sector competitive and pouring money in food safety, packaging and marketing to win global markets.

Parkash recommended establishment of refrigerated warehouses and fast transportation systems for perishables.

"The government may wish to set up a start-up fund to promote new ideas in the agriculture sector which can provide seed capital and mentor young entrepreneurs," he said. Pran-RFL Group Chairman and CEO Ahsan Khan Chowdhury also spoke.

Pran bags \$5.25m export orders at Paris fair

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Candy, chocolate, lollipop, juice, noodles and biscuit items were the centre of attraction among the buyers, according to a statement of the group, which took part in the fair for the ninth time.

This year, about 7,000 exhibitors from 109 countries participated in the five-day event, which started at the Nord Villepinte Exhibition Centre in Paris on

October 21.

Around 400 importers from 85 countries visited Pran's stalls at the show, Rahman said.

Pran products—which are now exported to 141 countries—have always received tremendous response from the buyers, he said.

Venezuela, Kosovo, Serbia, Costa Rica and Czech Republic have also joined the list of buyers of Pran, as they have placed orders

with the Bangladeshi company for the first time.

"We participated in the fair mainly to expand our export market," said Kamruzzaman Kamal, marketing director of Pran-RFL Group.

The fair presents a very good opportunity to Pran to market its products as traders and buyers from every corner of the globe participate in the fair, he said.