

Domino's Bangladesh posts record orders in first week

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Domino's Pizza, a globally leading pizza company based on retail sales, has received over 7,000 orders in the first week of operations in Bangladesh, breaking a global record of the brand across its network in 85 countries.

The company's operations in Austria made the previous record of over 4,000 orders in the first seven days of starting business, Domino's said in a statement yesterday.

Domino's Pizza opened its first store in Dhaka's Dhanmondi through a joint venture between the master franchisee Jubilant FoodWorks Ltd (JFL) and the local operator Golden Harvest QSR Ltd.

JFL is one of India's largest food service company and the local operator is a part of the leading Bangladeshi business group Golden Harvest.

"The Jubilant management team together with their local operator Golden Harvest brings extensive operational experience, and we're fortunate to have them bring this experience to Bangladesh," said Joe Jordan, executive vice president of Domino's International.

"We are delighted to share that

Domino's Pizza Dhaka has witnessed the highest pizza orders ever to be registered by any new store globally in its first week," said Pratik Pota, CEO and whole time director at Jubilant FoodWorks.

"This achievement is a reflection of the acceptance of our pizzas, both international bestsellers as well as the ones specially developed for the Bangladesh market, and our attractive value for money pricing."

Pota said his company is looking forward to growing its presence in Bangladesh. "This is an amazing feat that Domino's Pizza has achieved in Bangladesh," said Rajeeb Samdani, managing director of Golden Harvest.

"This record reflects the love of the Bangladesh pizza lovers towards Domino's. We are humbled to have been an integral part of it."

Samdani said they aim to be number one in Bangladesh's pizza market.

More than half of Domino's global retail sales come from international stores, according to the statement.

Founded in 1960, Domino's Pizza has over 15,900 stores in over 85 markets. It had global retail sales of over \$13.5 billion in 2018, with nearly \$6.6 billion in the US and more than \$6.9 billion internationally.

Over 9m bills paid thru' GPAY in 2018

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Grameenphone's digital wallet platform GPAY registered over nine million bill payments in 2018, transacting approximately Tk 1,050 crore.

Aligning with 28 nationwide utility concerns, GPAY has served close to one crore households, the mobile phone operator said in a statement yesterday.

Launch in 2009, the service is described by Grameenphone Deputy CEO Yasir Azman as a "convenient, future proof, digitised solution to pay different utility bills, buy train tickets".

He said the bill payment service saves time and cost, benefits utility service providers and reduces revenue loss.

GPAY wallets can be refilled from MobiCash retail outlets, GPAY partner bank accounts and Grameenphone centres.



PORCELANOSA

Ariz Izura, CEO of Porcelanosa Bangladesh, and Muneesa Asaf Ally, CEO of Renaissance Decor Ltd, sign an agreement in Dhaka recently for the latter to sell Porcelanosa products.

Jute millers call for lifting source tax

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The BJMA demanded formation of a Tk 10,000 crore low-cost fund for the development of the jute industry in which 4 crore people, including farmers and workers, were directly and indirectly involved.

Farmers, mainly in Dhaka, Khulna, Rajshahi and Rangpur divisions, grow jute and harvest 15 lakh tonnes of it annually. Mills consume 10 lakh tonnes of the natural fibre to make yarn and twine, sacks and bags to mainly cater to international markets.

Some 2.5 lakh tonnes of raw jute are exported and the rest is used by growers, the Bangladesh Jute Spinners Association estimated.

Crop protection association gets new exec committee



AKM Azad

Md Habibur Rahman

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AKM Azad of AM Traders and Md Habibur Rahman of BASF Bangladesh Limited have recently been elected chairman and secretary general respectively of Bangladesh Crop Protection Association (BCPA).

The association elected Md Mizanur Rahman Khan of The Limit Agroproducts Limited as vice chairman at its 39th annual general meeting at The Westin Dhaka.

Mohammed Shaifullah Biswas became joint secretary general while SM Khaled organising secretary.

The BCPA also elected Md Serazul Islam and Md Kabir Uddin as publicity secretary and treasurer respectively.

The association's other executive committee members are Ataur Rahman Khan, M Sayeduzzaman, AKM Shahadat Hossain, Md Reaz Uddin Ahmed and Md Mahbubur Rahman.

Uber wants mobile pay in Mexico

REUTERS, Acapulco, Mexico

Various companies in Mexico, including Uber Technologies Inc., have shown interest in using a new mobile payments system developed by the country's central bank that seeks to promote financial inclusion, the head of the bank said on Friday.

Banco de Mexico Governor Alejandro Diaz de Leon said in an interview with Reuters that the bank was seeking to educate companies about how the program could potentially be used.

Malaysia a top country for Bangladeshis

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According to him, the number of travellers would have surely increased had the crash not occurred.

Tour operators said only Biman Bangladesh Airlines runs Dhaka-Kathmandu flights, the fare for which was comparatively high. This is another reason for the gradual drop in the number of Bangladeshi tourists, they said.

Rana says that Nepal has attractions different from those in the rest of the world alongside similarities in cultures, two aspects that would prove key to raising traveller numbers.

If more flights are available, people will visit Nepal more and more, he said. The Bangladesh Tourism Board has no reliable data on outbound tourists, said the board's Assistant Director Mohibul Islam, reasoning that it was of no concern for them.

Md Jamil Fazal, business development manager of Connecting 365 Limited, which works directly with the Thai Tourism Authority, said the Thai embassy provides 200 visas to Bangladeshis on an average every day.

He further said around 60,000 Bangladeshis visit Thailand every year, a good number of which were for medical treatment.

Tour operators also mentioned of Dubai and Egypt, saying the destinations were becoming popular destinations for Bangladeshis, a shift from the conventional options chosen in neighbouring countries of Asia.

A senior official of Mountain Club Tours said they ran at least 120 packages to Dubai every month while almost 70 to Egypt. According to the fair organisers, 41 entities such as tourism organisations, airlines, tour operators, hotels, resorts, online booking portals and healthcare service providers from seven countries, including Bangladesh and Indonesia, displayed their products and services.

Nepal joined the fair as a partner country.



SOUTHEAST BANK

Alangir Kabir, chairman of Southeast Bank, and KM Mozammel Hoq, executive director of the bank's foundation, pose at Officers' Club Dhaka with select meritorious HSC level students who received the foundation's scholarships.

New budget to cross Tk 5 lakh crore

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"The government wants to make visual progress in construction of some important mega projects like the Dhaka Metro Rail, Padma Bridge Rail Link and Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant -- they will need big allocations in the next budget."

So the projected size of the next budgetary allocation is not too high considering the demands of the mega projects and other expenditures of the government, he added.

The total outlay for the annual development programme will be Tk 1.98 lakh crore in fiscal 2019-20, up 20 percent year-on-year.

"Whether or not the size of the budget is Tk 5 lakh crore or less is not what matters for the economy," Hussain said.

Past experience shows the large gap between the original size of the budget and its actual realisation limits the former's relevance to no more than mere symbolism.

For instance, in fiscal 2016-17 a Tk 3.41 lakh crore budget was announced but it was revised down to Tk 3.17 lakh crore. But in the end Tk 2.69 lakh crore was used.

Similarly, last fiscal year the budget was originally fixed at Tk 4 lakh crore only for it to be trimmed down to Tk 3.71 lakh crore. Eventually, Tk 3.21 lakh crore was put to use, according to data from the finance ministry.

"It will indeed be refreshing if we see a shift in emphasis from the sheer size of the original budget to greater focus on expenditure prioritisation, revenue mobilisation and improving implementation," Hussain said.

The new finance minister has the opportunity to make a paradigm shift in the budgetary process, starting from reducing the inordinate length of the budget speech to making every word in the speech count by backing it up with an expenditure programme.

He can craft a resource mobilisation effort that will increase the tax-GDP

ratio by making the taxation regime more efficient and taxpayer friendly, the World Bank economist said.

According to preliminary estimates, the revenue collection target for next fiscal year will likely be Tk 3.78 lakh crore, of which the National Board of Revenue will shoulder Tk 3.25 lakh crore.

Meeting this target is largely dependent on the implementation of the VAT law from next fiscal year, said NBR officials. Kamal has already hinted that the VAT law will take effect from next fiscal year, with the highest slab brought down to 10 percent from 15 percent to appease the business community.

"We would like to see a budget that sets expenditure and financing targets based on historic performance, economic conditions and stakeholder expectations. In short, we would like to see a budget that marries good economics with good politics," Hussain added.

Trump says nominating fierce Fed critic to Fed board

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump said Friday he intends to nominate a fierce critic of the Federal Reserve -- who has frequently been proven wrong in his dire predictions -- to serve on the central bank's board.

Controversial economist Stephen Moore, who in December called on Trump to fire Fed Chairman Jerome Powell for "wrecking the economy," served as an economic adviser during Trump's presidential campaign.

"It is my pleasure to announce that @StephenMoore, a very respected economist, will be nominated to serve on the Fed Board," Trump tweeted. "I have known Steve for a long time -- and have no doubt he will be an outstanding choice!"

Moore will first have to be vetted and then confirmed by the US Senate before joining the Fed's seven-seat board. He would fill one of two openings.

Fed governors serve a single 14-year term but the terms run independent of the individual, so

nominees often have the opportunity to serve longer if they also fill out an unexpired term.

The nomination of a critic of the institution would be in line with Trump's habit of putting agencies in the hands of people who either have no experience in the area or oppose the policies of the agency.

But it would be a dramatic departure for the independent and autonomous Federal Reserve. Trump has also veered sharply from recent tradition by openly criticizing the Fed's policies.

He has called the central bank the biggest threat to the economy and in an interview with Fox Business Network on Friday he said US GDP growth "would have been over four (percent) if they didn't do all of the interest rate hikes."

The Commerce Department reported last month that the US economy grew at 2.9 percent, the fastest rate since 2015.

The Fed raised the benchmark interest rate four times last year, but since December has said clearly that it will remain on hold for the foreseeable future.

It also has been reducing the size of its massive holdings of securities built up during the aftermath of the financial crisis -- something Trump also hammered.

Moore criticized the Fed's purchases of securities -- an untested policy known as quantitative easing -- saying the US was on the verge of hyperinflation. In fact inflation remained worryingly absent which caused the Fed to move very slowly until last year.

One Kansas newspaper stopped publishing Moore's column, claiming it found major factual errors in a 2014 column.

US budget deficit hits record in February

AFP, Washington

The US budget deficit hit a record in February amid a large decline in corporate tax receipts, according to the Treasury Department's monthly report.

The deficit last month jumped nine percent or \$19 billion to \$234 billion compared to February 2018, as gross corporate taxes fell 13 percent, Treasury reported.

So far in the fiscal year, which began October 1, the deficit is nearly 40 percent higher than in the same five month period of the prior year, at \$544 billion.

President Donald Trump has strenuously defended the massive corporate tax cuts approved in December 2017, saying they would boost growth, but Treasury said corporate tax collection had fallen 23 percent so far this fiscal year.



REUTERS/FILE

A pedestrian walks past the Federal Reserve Board building on Constitution Avenue in Washington.

Banks' capital base shrinking fast

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In a further indication of the progressively precarious state of the banking sector, ten banks, including six state-owned ones, ended up with a capital shortfall of Tk 26,690 crore last year.

The banks are: Sonali, BASIC, Janata, Agrani, Bangladesh Krishi Bank, Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank, Bangladesh Commerce Bank, ICB Islamic Bank, National Bank of Pakistan, and AB Bank.

AB Bank entered the negative territory for the first time in recent years as the lender faced a host of financial scams in the last two to three years.

The image of the country's banking sector will become sallow if the capital base is not strengthened, said Syed Mahbubur Rahman, chairman of the Association of Bankers, Bangladesh, a platform of private banks' chief executive officers.

"The foreign banks and businesses will shy away from our financial sector if the unpleasant situation persists."

He went on to urge the failing lenders to take prompt measures to build up their capital base.

The majority of the private lenders have been able to manage their required capital but the state-owned ones were unable to, casting a pall over the entire banking sector, he said.

The lenders should also issue right shares or offer stock dividends instead of cash to give a boost to their capital base, said Rahman, also the managing director of Dhaka Bank.