

Al-Arafah launches Islamic Wallet

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Al-Arafah Islami Bank in association with Dmoney Bangladesh yesterday launched an "Islamic Wallet", which it terms as the country's first Shariah- and mobile phone-based enabler of digital financial services.

The mobile app is said to facilitate fast, secure and hassle-free online financial transactions and account management such as cash-in and cash-out, fund transfers from bank accounts and cards and access to a range of lifestyle services.

It offers four payment combinations, the bank said in a statement.

One is at the person-to-business level such as bill payments and for food delivery, mobile top-ups, insurance premiums and loan instalments while another is at person-to-government such as government duties, taxes, fees etc.

It is also possible to make business-to-person payments such as payroll and commission disbursement alongside government-to-person payments such as subsidies, freedom fighter allowances, social welfare payments and endowments.

Al-Arafah bank said the wallet activities would regularly be monitored by a Shariah supervisory council to ensure adherence with the bank's Shariah guidelines.

Inaugurating the app at Le Méridien Dhaka, Bangladesh

Bank Governor Fazle Kabir said Bangladesh's foreign currency reserve stood at \$32 billion while the economy was the 39th largest in the world.

Al-Arafah's Chairman Abdus Samad Labu said the bank was working to ensure equity and justice for sustainable and balanced growth and socio-economic development and facilitate the formation of a cashless society in Bangladesh.

Managing Director and CEO

Farman R Chowdhury said the launch of "Islamic Wallet" would be one step forward towards fulfilling the dream of achieving a "Digital Bangladesh" in a Shariah-compliant manner.

He said this product would certainly act as a catalyst to achieve the goal of bringing in more and more of the unbanked and under-banked people under the banking umbrella as this would offer a full lifestyle solution.

Anjan Chowdhury, chairman of Dmoney, said they were proud to have supported the Al-Arafah in leveraging Dmoney's technology platform to serve the needs of Shariah-based customers through a modern banking app.

Al-Arafah Senior Executive Vice President Syed Masodul Bari and Dmoney Bangladesh Co-Founder and Managing Director Aref R Bashir jointly introduced the app's features.



Bangladesh Bank Governor Fazle Kabir, centre, attends the launch of Al-Arafah Islami Bank's "Islamic Wallet" at Le Méridien Dhaka yesterday.

Emirates brings forward fourth daily service launch to March 29

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Emirates is set to bring forward the launch of its fourth daily service between Dhaka and Dubai to March 29 next year from June 1 as announced two weeks ago, driven by robust demand and healthy forecasts.

The new addition will boost Emirates' weekly services from 21 to 28, the airline said in a press release.

From the airline's hub in Dubai, customers will enjoy connections to more than 150 destinations spanning six continents on the airline's global route network.

Saeed Abdulla Miran, Emirates' country manager for Bangladesh, said: "Since we announced our fourth daily, we have experienced healthy forward bookings and seen a significant uptake in demand for the service."

"It is a sign of the country's strong economic growth, the rapidly increasing trade and business interests globally, and Bangladeshi travellers' desire to explore the world. This has inspired us to bring forward

our launch to March 29."

He said the airline is always at the forefront to support and meet the growing needs of the people and businesses within the shortest possible time.

"With this service, our leisure and business customers will benefit from a more varied and flexible schedule, as well as smooth and seamless connectivity to Europe, the Americas, Africa and the Middle East."

The new service will be operated by a Boeing 777-300ER in a two-class configuration, featuring 42 business class seats and 310 economy class seats. This will add 280 tonnes

of cargo capacity each way, every week. Emirates SkyCargo currently offers more than 800 tonnes of cargo capacity every week. Emirates has gradually grown its services to Dhaka over the years: from two weekly services in 1986 to three daily services in 2013 to keep up with customer demand.

In the last 33 years, the airline has flown more than 9.9 million passengers between Dubai and Dhaka.



Regional economic integration hinges on political will, business initiatives

Analysts say at BISS dialogue

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Lack of political will and business initiatives are the main challenges facing the regional economic integration in South Asia despite having multi-billion dollar trade potential, analysts said at a dialogue yesterday.

"Elites are not interested in regional integration and a lack of effective initiatives from the private sector is the main obstacles to regional economic integration," said Selim Raihan, executive director of the South Asian Network on Economic Modeling.

He was addressing a session on "Potential and challenges of regional economic integration in South Asia in the new global context" of a regional dialogue.

The Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) jointly organised the dialogue on "Regional cooperation for sustainable development in South Asia" at the auditorium of the BISS in the city's Eskaton.

Intra-regional trade in South Asia remains one of the lowest in the world and accounts for about 5 percent of the region's total trade, compared to 50 percent in the East

Asia and the Pacific.

Intra-South Asian trade can grow three times from \$23 billion now to \$67 billion by reducing man-made barriers, according to a World Bank report released in October last year.

Regional connectivity and under development special economic zones will bring opportunity for Bangladesh in regional economic integration, said Raihan, who teaches economics at the University of Dhaka.

Higher aspiration among the political leaders, connectivity and people-to-people contact can play an important role for economic cooperation among the South Asian nations, said Sabyasachi Saha, associate professor at the Research and Information System for Developing Countries, India.

However, he said, countries' emphasis on ensuring win-win situation sometimes brings zero outcome.

"So, governments should play a leading role to enhance regional economic cooperation."

The non-tariff and para-tariff in cross-border trade create obstacle in bilateral trade and economic cooperation among the South Asian nations, said Chanchal Sarkar, director at the Saarc secretariat.

"Trade will double immediately if

these barriers are removed," he said.

The South Asian nations utilise only 3 percent of the total trade potential, said Posh Raj Pandey, chairman of the South Asia Watch on Trade Economics and Environment, Nepal.

So, it is very important to increase trade in the region, he said.

Shiladitya Chatterjee, adviser of the Sustainable Development Goals Centre in Assam, emphasised the role of the media to create awareness among the politicians, business community and bureaucrats on the importance of regional economic cooperation.

While moderating the session, Fahmida Khatun, executive director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said low productivity, lack of skilled human resources, and climate change adaptation will be the common issues for regional cooperation among the South Asian nations.

She said all decisions and initiatives will be executed through political willingness.

Mahfuz Kabir, research director at the BISS, Athula Senaratne, research fellow of the Institute of Policy Studies, Sri Lanka; and Shafquat Haider, chairman of the council for communication and IT at the Saarc Chamber of Commerce and Industry, also spoke.

Protect poorest from cost of climate reforms: World Bank

AFP, Madrid

GOVERNMENTS must take into account the people they govern when they move to reduce their carbon footprint, the new managing director of the World Bank told AFP on Monday, warning particularly of the economic fallout from cutting energy subsidies.

Axel van Trotsenburg, who is joining more than 50 finance ministers at the UN climate change conference COP25 in Madrid, urged countries that had committed to financing the fight against global warming to make good on their pledges.

"This COP is at an inflection point. What you are seeing around the world in social unrest will need to be taken into account," he said in an interview before the finance minister's meeting -- the first such gathering at a climate conference.

"One needs to think not only in technical terms but very much what is happening in societies themselves so climate action takes into account social components." The last 12 months have seen a wave of popular unrest as commuters and workers reliant on stable petrol prices reacted angrily to government cuts on fossil fuel subsidies.



Axel van Trotsenburg

Van Trotsenburg, a Dutch-Austrian national who took over as the bank's second-in-command in October, said it was incumbent on power holders to ensure that economic reform in the name of climate did not leave those with the most to lose footing the bill.

"We need to look very much at the political economy of the country and secondly one needs to look at the people affected," he said.

"The most vulnerable need to be shielded from the impact of these measures." He said passing reforms without due consideration could

disproportionately affect vulnerable people -- and it was understandable that this led to resistance.

"Looking too exclusively at one measure and not taking other matters into account may backfire," he added.

Delegates are in Madrid to agree a common rulebook for delivering on the promises they made in the 2015 Paris climate agreement -- which included mitigating the worst effects of rising temperatures and helping vulnerable nations to adapt.

The key is now to decide how to fund these efforts and who should pay.

On Monday more than 50 nations -- who control around 30 percent of global GDP -- said they were accelerating their own transition towards low-carbon economies.

Governments at COP25 will also discuss how to become more ambitious in the future -- a particularly pressing matter for nations already affected by climate-related disasters.

"We would like to see ambition in action so that what you've announced, you implement, and do it well and in a timely manner," Van Trotsenburg said.

"It's more important than ever that we are making good on these commitments."



US President Donald Trump and China's President Xi Jinping pose during the G20 leaders summit in Japan.

UK economy flat-lines, hit by Brexit and global slowdown, as election nears

REUTERS, London

BRITAIN'S economy grew at its slowest annual pace in nearly seven years in October, offering a weak backdrop to Thursday's national election in which both leading parties are promising to boost growth.

The approach of a Brexit deadline and the global economic slowdown hit Britain's factories and construction industry in the month, official data showed on Tuesday.

Gross domestic product rose by 0.7 percent compared with October 2018, the weakest growth since March 2012 when Britain was still trying to shake off the effects of the global financial crisis.

In the three months to October, growth flatlined compared with the previous three-month period, the Office for National Statistics said, as expected by economists in a Reuters poll.

The economy also showed no change in monthly terms, the ONS said, weaker than a median forecast of 0.1 percent growth in the poll.

Britain's economy avoided falling into a pre-Brexit recession

over the summer when it grew by 0.3 percent in the three months to September.

But it has shown signs of slowing since then as an Oct. 31 deadline for leaving the EU - which has since been extended - approached.

Further uncertainty about the outcome of the Dec. 12 national election is likely to have caused more caution among businesses since then.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has urged voters to back him and his Brexit deal, saying it

would "unleash a great tide of investment" into Britain when it clears a currently deadlocked parliament.

But worries about a chaotic exit from the EU are unlikely to vanish even if Johnson wins the election because he has ruled

out asking Brussels to extend a transition period if a deal for future trade ties has not been agreed by the end of 2020.

The opposition Labour Party has said it will hold a fresh Brexit referendum after negotiating a new Brexit deal, potentially offsetting some of the concerns among many businesses about other Labour policies including higher corporate taxes and nationalization of some key industries.

The ONS said industrial output fell by 0.7 percent in the three months to October while Britain's large services sector grew by 0.2 percent, its weakest increase since June.

Separately, the ONS released trade data which showed Britain's goods trade deficit widened by more than expected to nearly 14.5 billion pounds in October from 11.5 billion pounds in September.

Economists in the Reuters poll had expected a deficit of 11.65 billion pounds in October.

The ONS said the approach of the Oct. 31 Brexit deadline - which has been extended to Jan. 31 - appeared to increase imports and exports in October but by less than before the original Brexit deadline at the end of March.



Customers shop at a Sainsbury's store in London, Britain.

China hopes it can reach trade agreement with US as soon as possible

REUTERS, Beijing

CHINA said on Monday that it hoped to make a trade deal with the United States as soon as possible, amid intense discussions before fresh US tariffs on Chinese imports are due to kick in at the end of the week.

Beijing hopes it can reach a trade agreement with the United States that satisfies both sides, Assistant Commerce Minister Ren Hongbin told reporters on Monday.

"On the question of China-US trade talks and negotiations, we wish that both sides can, on the foundation of equality and mutual respect, push forward negotiations, and in consideration of each others' core interests, reach an agreement that satisfies all sides as soon as possible," Ren said.

China and the United States are negotiating a so-called "phase one" deal aimed at de-escalating their prolonged trade dispute, but it is unclear whether such an agreement can be reached in the near term.