



SOCIAL ISLAMI BANK

A total of 50 mango cultivators of Kalaroa in Satkhira availed agricultural loans at 4 per cent interest from a government stimulus package under a joint initiative of Social Islami Bank and Solidaridad Network Asia. Kalaroa Upazila Nirbahi Officer Md Jubayer Hossain Chowdhury and Md Nurul Islam, deputy director of the Department of Agricultural Extension in Satkhira, attended the programme.



MERCANTILE BANK

Mercantile Bank Chairman Morshed Alam inaugurated the bank's 22nd anniversary celebrations launching an "MBL Rainbow" mobile banking app at its head office yesterday. Managing Director and CEO Md Quamrul Islam Chowdhury was present.

Pubali Bank chairman reelected

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Pubali Bank recently witnessed the unanimous reelection of the chairman of its Board of Directors.

The chairman, Monzurur Rahman, has 53 years' experience in banking and insurance and is also chairman of Rema Tea Company, says a press release.

He was an independent director of Lafarge Holcim Bangladesh and an elected member of the executive committee of Bangladesh Association of Publicly Listed Companies.

Rahman obtained a graduation degree from the University of Calcutta.



Monzurur Rahman

City Bank gets FinanceAsia title

STAR BUSINESS DESK

City Bank has been named "Best bank in Bangladesh 2021" by Hong Kong-based international publication FinanceAsia recently.

The title, awarded for the seventh time since 2012, recognises its performance, banking service innovations, financial growth during pandemic-hit 2020 and competence in serving customers and investors, says a press release.

"This recognition is a testament to the strong foundation on which this institution has been built and also our commitment to the valued customers," said City Bank Chairman Aziz Al Kaiser.

Airlines press US on refusal to lift Covid-19 travel restrictions

REUTERS, Arlington

Major airlines are pressing the United States government on its decision not to move quickly to relax Covid-19 restrictions that block travelers who have been in much of Europe and elsewhere even as other countries began to ease prohibitions.

On Monday, the heads of several major airlines as well as the chief executives of Heathrow Airport and industry group the US Travel Association will hold a virtual news conference to push for removal of travel restrictions between the United States and the United Kingdom.

On hand will be the CEOs of American Airlines, IAG unit British Airways, Delta Air Lines, United Airlines and JetBlue Airways Corp. The airline CEOs on May 11 had called for a summit between US officials, UK officials, and airlines to discuss how to "expeditiously reopen transatlantic travel."

Since March 2020, the United States has barred nearly all non-US citizens who have been in the UK within the last 14 days from entering the country. Most US travelers visiting the UK must quarantine for 10 days upon arrival.



REUTERS/FILE

Travellers wearing protective face masks to prevent the spread of the coronavirus disease reclaim their luggage at the airport in Denver, Colorado, US on November 24, 2020.

Airline and administration officials say no change is expected in the near term but add it is possible the restrictions could be removed as early as July 4 or thereabouts, but they caution no decisions have been made. On Friday, France said

vaccinated Americans starting on June 9 will be able to travel to the country. United said it would resume Paris flights from Washington in July and Delta said it was adding flights to France as well.

At a press event at Washington

National Airport on Friday, American Airlines President Robert Isom said, "We know there is tremendous pent-up demand for service." Isom said the airline has "a lot of capacity to be ready to go" for European travel. Asked if July 4 would be too late for

European summer travel, Isom said: "We're going to take it whenever it comes."

Airline officials had held out hope earlier that by late May, the United States would have lifted travel restrictions on the United Kingdom and Ireland, where new Covid-19 cases have plummeted.

The travel restrictions also apply to most non-US citizens in Brazil, South Africa, India and Iran. The Biden administration held a call with British officials on Thursday, people briefed on the matter said, but the White House gave no indication it is planning to lift restrictions.

The White House, which is focused on boosting US vaccination rates and reducing Covid-19 cases, declined to comment on Friday.

President Joe Biden is certain to face questions about the issue from foreign leaders when he travels to Europe next week.

"We certainly understand the desire of many Europeans to come to travel the United States and vice versa," White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said May 21.

"We can't respond to public pressure or even emotion. We have to rely on the guidance of our health and medical experts."



UJJWALA

Afroza Parveen, managing director and co-founder of Ujjwala, and Moriam Javed Juhi, head of City Bank's dedicated banking platform for women City Alo, recently signed a memorandum of understanding facilitating loans for women entrepreneurs on easy terms for business expansion and skills development.



BEACON PHARMACEUTICALS

Md Ebadul Karim, managing director of Beacon Pharmaceuticals and lawmaker of Brahmanbaria-5 constituency, hands over health safety equipment to Shibganj Municipality Mayor Syed Monirul Islam for residents of the area in Chapainawabganj district.

China pushes Huarong to sell non-core units, mulls implicit support

REUTERS, Beijing

China is pushing China Huarong Asset Management Co to sell non-core assets, two people involved in the revamp told Reuters, while considering offering an implicit guarantee of the liabilities of the debt-laden bad-debt manager.

Regulators are pressing the state-controlled "bad bank", which has been trying to restructure since 2018, to sell units including a bank, a trust, an investment firm and a consumer finance firm, the sources said.

The plan, one source said, envisions the authorities informally backing \$20 billion of dollar debt coming due this year for the sprawling company, one of the nation's four giant state-owned asset managers.

News of the plan lifted dollar bonds issued by Huarong Finance, a subsidiary of the company, to near three-week highs.

Huarong's problems spooked investors in China's dollar-bond market in April after it delayed its business results, prompting ratings downgrades, warnings from global agencies and an ongoing suspension in share trading. Huarong's onshore and offshore subsidiaries have made timely repayments on maturing debt.

"The benefit of bailing out (Huarong) is great," the other source said. "So is the harm of not bailing it out." The Beijing-based company, established in the late 1990s to handle soured debts at state banks, has the Ministry of Finance as its biggest shareholder. Former chairman Lai Xiaomin was executed in January after a graft probe into the period when he expanded Huarong into a financial conglomerate.

The authorities are considering asking the other state-owned asset managers - China Cinda Asset Management, Great Wall Asset Management and Oriental Asset Management - to undertake similar streamlining after Huarong, the sources said. They asked not to be identified because the information is not public and they are not authorised to speak to the news media.

Huarong told Reuters in an emailed statement on Friday that regulators have asked it to "return to our roots, focus on our main business and build up core competitiveness."

It did not confirm or deny asset sales, saying it would make statements in the future, and did not comment on any debt guarantees.

"The company will earnestly fulfill our debt repayment obligations with a responsible attitude," Huarong said. "At the same time, the company's liquidity is in good condition and we

have made proper arrangements and adequate preparations for future bond repayment."

The Ministry of Finance and the China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission (CBIRC), Huarong's regulatory supervisor, did not immediately respond to requests for comment. The authorities have not made any final decisions on a rescue or on Huarong's long-term business development prospects, the sources said.

Regulators are waiting for the final audit results of Huarong's delayed annual report, which could be released in August, before making such decisions, the second source said.

The backing for Huarong's debt would not be a public announcement but more informal suasion from the authorities, as sometimes seen in China, to prevent creditors from taking drastic action, the first source said.

The CBIRC, for example, previously asked some banks not to withhold loans to Huarong and asked some state banks to be prepared to support it with cash, Reuters reported in April.

Following Reuters' report on Friday, a perpetual bond issued by Huarong Finance added 7.5 cents to trade at 68 cents in the dollar, while other issues maturing in 2029 and 2027 jumped 5 cents and 5.5 cents respectively, according to Refinitiv data.

Canada loses more jobs in May but summer hiring boom looms

REUTERS, Ottawa

Canada lost more jobs than expected in May amid continued lockdowns to curb a harsh third wave of Covid-19, data showed on Friday, but economists were quick to predict a rush of hiring in June as those restrictions ease.

Some 68,000 jobs were lost in May, Statistics Canada said, more than the average analyst forecast for a loss of 20,000. The unemployment rate climbed to 8.2 per cent, in line with expectations. Employment is now 3 per cent below pre-pandemic levels, Statscan said. "I am hopeful that this is the last down-print we have before we release a flurry of hiring activity starting in June," said Derek Holt, vice president of Capital Market Economics at Scotiabank.

Many Canadian provinces are easing restrictions as new Covid-19 infections plummet and more Canadians get their job. Canada has administered first doses to about 60 per cent of its adult population, with just over 6 per cent fully vaccinated.

That should bolster the reopening of "high-contact" service sectors, where employment remains furthest below pre-pandemic levels, with hiring set to ramp

up in subsequent months as businesses respond to a surge of pent-up demand.

"With households sitting on an exceptionally large stockpile of savings built up during the pandemic, that recovery could accelerate relatively quickly over the summer," said Nathan Janzen, senior economist at RBC, in a note.

While the Canadian economy has not weathered the third wave of infections quite as well as it did the second, the expected second-half boom should allow the Bank of Canada to look past the disappointing May numbers, economists said. "The Bank of Canada will fully look through it," said Holt. "(The data) will be less choppy as we go into the second half of the year."

The Bank of Canada is expected to taper its asset purchase program again in the third quarter and has signaled it could start hiking rates as soon as late 2022.

Part-time and full-time employment both dropped in May, and jobs were lost in the goods sector for the first time since April 2020. Long-term unemployment held relatively steady, while the participation rate for core-age women fell for the second consecutive month in May, dipping back below pre-pandemic levels.