

## Competition Commission gets new chairperson

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Pradip Ranjan Chakraborty, former secretary of the planning commission, has been appointed as the new chairperson of Bangladesh Competition Commission (BCC).

The commerce ministry made the announcement of the appointment through a notification on November 7.

In May 2020, Chakraborty was appointed as the member (secretary) of the planning commission.

Later, he also served the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division as secretary.

Finally, he went to retirement while serving as secretary of the planning commission.

Chakraborty obtained his bachelor's and master's degrees in zoology from Dhaka University and he will be entitled to the benefits of the rank of secretary in his new post at Bangladesh Competition Commission.



A man parks a car remotely with 5G technology at the Apsara Conference, a cloud computing and artificial intelligence conference, in Hangzhou, China's eastern Zhejiang province, on November 3.

PHOTO: AFP

# Bangladesh lacks use cases for 5G

Experts say at Robi's 25th anniversary event

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Creating scalable 5G use cases for business is the main challenge for a meaningful commercial rollout of the service in Bangladesh, according to experts.

"There are still very minimal use cases in the country as local industries are yet to change their mindset on 5G, making it harder to introduce this technology," said Khaled Mahmud, an associate professor of the Institute of Business Administration at the University of Dhaka.

Most countries have already completed research and development projects to tailor their 5G use cases. However, Bangladesh's progress is not as satisfactory in this area, he added.

Mahmud made these comments while delivering a presentation at an event on "5G: Possibilities, Challenges and Way

Forward" jointly organised by the Telecom and the Technology Reporters' Network Bangladesh (TRNB) and Robi Axiata.

The event was held to celebrate the mobile network operator's 25th anniversary at a hotel in Dhaka yesterday.

The overall ecosystem in Bangladesh is not ready to deploy 5G in full-scale but advanced industries and factories could adopt the technology on a case-to-case basis.

He suggested a 5G deployment approach on a use case maturity basis and limited scale deployment.

"Regulators of respective sectors should collaborate and formulate policies to encourage industries to adopt 4G and 5G technologies. So, incentives for organisations adopting 5G solutions are needed," Mahmud said.

Telecom Minister Mustafa Jabbar said the use case for business and customers' readiness should be considered before rolling out 5G.

Shyam Sunder Sikder, chairman of the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), said they are ready to provide all kinds of support to mobile network operators to bring 5G technology to the country.

"Many of the stakeholders in this sector are not ready for 5G as they need to be prepared," he added.

Mohammed Shahedul Alam, chief corporate and regulatory officer of Robi Axiata, said there is huge potential to introduce 5G in the country.

"So, both the telecom industry and consumer segment need to tap into this potential," he added.

Alam went on to say that Robi is working

towards launching 5G technology.

"But if stakeholders do not collaborate in creating 5G use cases, we will not be able to properly reap the benefits of this technology," he said.

Robi is the second largest mobile network operator in Bangladesh. On a year-on-year basis, the number of customers of Robi, which operates under brand names Robi and Airtel, increased 5.2 per cent to 5.49 crore in August.

Axiata Group Berhad of Malaysia holds a controlling stake of 61.82 per cent in Robi Axiata while Bharti Airtel of India holds 28.18 per cent and the general public holds the remaining 10 per cent.

Rashed Mehedi, president of the TRNB, and Masuduzzaman Robin, general secretary, also spoke at the event.

## Indo-Bangla pharma posts 80pc profit fall

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Indo-Bangla Pharmaceuticals Limited has reported an 80 per cent decline in profit in the year that ended on June 30.

The drug maker made a profit of Tk 2.56 crore in 2021-22, way lower than Tk 13.7 crore it generated a year earlier.

The company reported earnings per share of Tk 0.22 for the last financial year against Tk 1.18 in 2020-21.

The EPS decreased mainly as turnover dropped by 38.04 per cent in comparison to the previous year, said Indo-Bangla Pharmaceuticals in a post on the Dhaka Stock Exchange yesterday.

"Turnover during the year decreased due to the discontinuation of nine listed products and the changing of the marketing policy of the company."

The net asset value per share of Indo-Bangla Pharmaceuticals slipped to Tk 13.98 from Tk 14.29 and the net operating cash flow per share fell to Tk 0.79 from Tk 1.30 a year earlier.

The board of directors has recommended a 1 per cent cash dividend for 2021-22.

Indo-Bangla Pharmaceuticals is one of the oldest medicine manufacturers in Bangladesh. It began its journey in 1954 in Barishal as Indo-Pak Pharmaceutical Works.

After independence, the government took control of the company and in 1982, the government sold it through auctions, according to the company's website.

Indo-Bangla Pharmaceuticals shares lost 8.99 per cent on the DSE yesterday.

## Associated Oxygen posts 24pc lower profit in FY22

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Associated Oxygen Limited (AOL) reported nearly 24 per cent lower profit in the last financial year of 2021-22 for the economic slowdown, the impacts of the Russia-Ukraine war and lower sales of medical oxygen.

The producer and supplier of industrial and medical gases made a profit of Tk 18.33 crore in the financial year that ended on June 30, down from Tk 24.04 crore a year earlier.

The company reported earnings per share of Tk 1.67 for 2021-22 from Tk 2.19 in the previous financial year.

In a filing on the Dhaka Stock Exchange yesterday, AOL blamed the slowdown in economic activities, the war and the failure to sell medical oxygen in large volume for the improvement in the coronavirus situation for the decrease in the EPS.

The net asset value per share rose to Tk 18.56 from Tk 18.29.

The net operating cash flow per share improved to Tk 3.11 from Tk 2.57 during the period, thanks to an increase in the collection from customers and a decrease in operating expenses, selling and distribution expenses.

## City Bank inks deal with Trust Axiata Digital

STAR BUSINESS DESK

City Bank has signed an agreement with Trust Axiata Digital (TAD) at the bank's head office in Dhaka recently.

Mashrur Arefin, managing director of the bank, and Dewan Nazmul Hasan, chief executive officer of TAD, inked the deal, a press release said.

Under the agreement, City Bank will facilitate online digital collections and payments to Trust Axiata Digital through the bank's digital platform.

Tahsin Haq, head of corporate cash management of the bank, and Arup Haider, head of retail banking, along with other senior officials from both the organisations were also present.

## BB relaxes rules

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ongoing project does not require additional funds," he added.

However, Golam Moazzem, research director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), said the central bank's latest move goes against its previous initiative to form a green fund for financing eco-friendly projects.

"Relaxing the single borrower exposure limit raises questions whether it was eased to provide special privileges to certain groups or individuals," he said. "And at this moment, when there is surplus power generation capacity and the country suffers from shortage of foreign currency, easing the lending rule is unacceptable."

Moazzem went on to say the operational cost to run a coal-based power plant should be met under the current 25 per cent limit for lending to single borrowers.

"Existing provisions were sufficient to accommodate operative costs. So, there is no requirement to further ease these provisions," he added.

## Wheat flour price

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in Chattogram were selling Indian wheat at Tk 1,920 per maund (around 37 kgs), and Canadian variety at Tk 2,430.

"The prices have risen due to dwindling supply," said Razib Das, owner of Ahmedia Traders.

The prices of both Indian and Canadian wheat have climbed by Tk 50 per maund in just one week, he said.

Meghna Group of Industries bought Russian wheat at \$400 per tonne recently whereas it was \$300 in April, said Taslim Shahriar, senior assistant general manager of the conglomerate.

He said the opening of letters of credit has turned complicated amid the volatility in the dollar market.

Bangladesh is facing a shortage of US dollars owing to depleting foreign currency reserves, caused by escalated import bills against lower export and remittance receipts.

## Units in Nilphamari

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as power disruptions while ditches in internal roads hinder movement.

"And due to the lack of a proper drainage system, wastewater and chemicals remain stagnant everywhere, which becomes worst in the rainy season," he added.

In addition, some factory owners reported theft from a number of industrial units as there is no boundary wall around the facility.

"So, we've asked the authority to address these problems, but the situation has only changed a little as pace of repairing work is slow," Islam said.

Abul Kalam Mintu, general secretary of the factory owners' association, said despite these drawbacks, their relationship with the BSCIC authority is one of cooperation.

Mintu then informed that officials of the environment department often visit their factories and accuse them of violating rules that they were not

And Shahriar warned that there was no possibility of wheat prices going down anytime soon.

"You will have to buy flour at a higher price in the coming days. Consumers should prepare accordingly," he said.

According to a report by the Bangladesh Trade and Tariff Commission, Bangladesh imported 33.04 lakh tonnes of wheat in the first nine months of 2022, which was 14.11 lakh tonnes less than the volume of the cereal brought in during the same period of 2021.

This is expected to have a negative impact on the wheat flour market, the report said.

Bangladesh's wheat consumption is likely to drop 10 per cent to 69 lakh tonnes in the current marketing year of 2022-23, which began in July, as higher prices and lower supply are reducing consumer demand, said the US Department of Agriculture recently.

even aware of.

"This is very embarrassing for us. So, the concerned department should arrange awareness campaigns from time to time to inform us of their rules," he said.

Hosne Ara Khatun, deputy director of the BSCIC office in Nilphamari, said young entrepreneurs in the district already filed more than 100 applications for allocations of industrial plots.

To meet the demand, a proposal is under process for extending the industrial estate on 300 acres of land in the Polashbari area of Nilphamari sadar upazila.

"We do infrastructural development work every year with our limited budget, making us unable to address all these problems at the same time," she said.

"But a new project with adequate funds is in the offing for all industrial estates, including this one. Under it, we can expect a massive development," Khatun added.

REUTERS, New Delhi

India will continue buying Russian oil because it benefits the country, India's foreign minister said on Tuesday after meeting his Russian counterpart for the fifth time this year, adding that the two countries were expanding their trade ties.

Subrahmanyam Jaishankar is visiting Moscow for the first time since Russia invaded Ukraine in February. His trip comes as US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen visits New Delhi this week to hold talks with Indian officials, including possibly on capping Russian oil prices.

India has become Russia's largest oil customer after China, as its refiners snap up discounted cargoes shunned by Western buyers. Russia's share of India's oil imports surged to an all-time high of 23 per cent in September, from just about 2 per cent before the invasion.

Jaishankar was accompanied

by senior officials in charge of agriculture, petroleum and natural gas, ports and shipping, finance, chemicals and fertiliser, and trade - which he said showed the importance of ties with Russia. Both sides are keen to expand their rupee-rouble trade given Russia's problems with the dollar.

"Russia has been a steady and time-tested partner. Any objective evaluation of our relationship over many decades would confirm that it has actually served both our countries very, very well," Jaishankar said in a joint news conference with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov.

Asked about a Group of Seven plan to cap the price of Russian oil, Jaishankar said that as the world's third-largest consumer of oil and gas where the levels of income were not high, India had to look after its own interests.

"And in that respect, quite

honestly, we have seen that the India-Russia relationship has worked to our advantage," he said. "So, if it works to my advantage, I would like to keep that going."

Reuters reported on Monday that India's Oil and Natural Gas Corp had applied to the new Russian operator of the Sakhalin-1, following the exit of ExxonMobil, to retain its stake in the oil and gas project in the Far East.

India has not condemned Moscow's invasion but has called for peace and dialogue and Jaishankar reiterated India would "be supportive of any initiative that de-risks the global economy and stabilises global order".

Russia has been India's biggest supplier of military equipment for decades and it is the fourth-biggest market for Indian pharmaceutical products. Jaishankar said India needed to boost its exports to Russia to balance bilateral trade that is now tilted towards Russia.

## Economy paying the price

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Rizwan Rahman, president of the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, however, said that raising the interest rate on loans will be harmful to businesses.

"Still, the interest rate on loans should be higher than the inflation rate because we should protect both the economy and businesses. The lending rate cap can be revisited."

The businessman does not support a complete withdrawal of the interest rate cap since banks may hike the rate to 15-16 per cent overnight.

"Then, it will create trouble for businesses," he said.

## Germany to block chip factory sale to Chinese firm

AFP, Berlin

The German economy ministry has recommended that the sale of a chip factory to a Chinese-owned firm should be blocked as it poses a security threat, government sources said Tuesday.

Sweden's Silix, a unit of Chinese company Sai MicroElectronics, had been seeking to take over Dortmund-based Elmos.

But economy ministry sources said the acquisition would "constitute a threat to public order and... security."

"The ministry has therefore suggested that the federal cabinet prohibits the acquisition of Elmos,"

they said.

The ministry is headed by Robert Habeck from the Greens, one of three parties in Germany's ruling coalition.

The cabinet still needs to give final approval to block the deal.

The move came after intelligence agencies reportedly raised concerns that Chinese control of key production capacity could allow Beijing to apply pressure on Germany.

The micro-chip industry is particularly sensitive. German car giants last year saw production heavily disrupted due to chip shortages caused by supply chain problems.