



Development works are currently underway at the Saidpur airport in Nilphamari to ready the facility for international flights. With construction of a new terminal almost complete, the airport will soon be able to handle up to 610 passengers at a time. The picture was taken recently. PHOTO: EAM ASADUZZAMAN

Saidpur airport to boost connectivity with Nepal, Bhutan

Officials say as development work underway

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

Efforts to turn Saidpur airport in Nilphamari into an international airport are underway as making it a key transit point would boost connectivity with Nepal, Bhutan and the Seven Sister states of India, according to government officials.

The northernmost airport in Bangladesh sits on 136.56 acres of land some 260 kilometres away from Dhaka by air with flights requiring about 48 minutes to reach the capital.

Having started functioning as a domestic airport in 1979, Saidpur airport has since become one of the country's busiest landing strips with roughly 30 flights plying the Dhaka-Saidpur-Dhaka route each day.

National flag carrier Bangladesh Biman and private operators US Bangla Airlines and Novoair operate flights on the 6000-foot-long runway, said Suplob Kumar Ghosh, manager of Saidpur airport. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina

announced plans to ready Saidpur airport for international flights back in 2018 and accordingly, development work is now ongoing.

Once complete, it will become the country's fifth international airport, he added.

As per official estimates, it takes between 30 and 50 minutes to travel to Nepal, Bhutan or the Seven Sister states of India from Saidpur airport.

Pradeep Kumar Gywali, the foreign minister of Nepal, made a proposal to use the airport for meeting with his local counterpart during a visit to Bangladesh in February 2020.

After the meeting, AK Abdul Momen, the foreign minister of Bangladesh, said the government has decided to expand Saidpur airport to facilitate flights from Nepal and thereby improve connectivity, trade and tourism with the country.

Karma Tshering, the secretary of economic affairs of Bhutan, had spoken with Tipu Munshi, the commerce minister of Bangladesh, on using Saidpur airport

for the same purpose during a visit in September this year.

Bilateral trade and connectivity with Bhutan would increase tremendously if Saidpur airport and its nearby land ports were used properly, Munshi said after the meeting.

Sources at the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism have informed that a South Korean consultancy was appointed to conduct a survey on how to upgrade Saidpur airport and has already submitted its report.

As such, a masterplan has been chalked out to acquire 912.90 acres of land surrounding the airport.

Yasir Arefin, the deputy commissioner of Nilphamari, said the initial work for land acquisition is complete.

"As per the prime minister's directive, the process is ongoing to turn Saidpur airport into an international one," said Md Mahub Ali, the state minister for civil aviation and tourism.

He went on to say that the Covid-19 pandemic and current global economic

crisis have slowed the work.

"But it will gain momentum after the situation improves," Ali added.

Saidpur airport's Manager Ghosh then said the construction of a top-notch domestic terminal is almost complete. Once ready, the airport will be able to accommodate 610 passengers at a time instead of 200 at present.

In addition, a report submitted at a recent meeting of the parliamentary standing committee on the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism showed that the length of the runway will be 12,000 feet once upgradation is complete.

Mostofa Shohrab Chowdhury Titu, president of the Rangpur Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said they would have bigger scope to trade with foreign countries if Saidpur airport is turned international.

"We will get scope to send our products, particularly agro products, to Nepal, Bhutan and northeast India if cargo flights operate from the airport," he added.

Malek, Elahi elected as MTB chairman, vice-chairman



Md Abdul Malek

Syed Manzur Elahi

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Md Abdul Malek was recently elected as the chairman of Mutual Trust Bank.

Malek was serving the bank as vice-chairman for the last two years, a press release said.

He was the chairman of Sheltech Consultants (Pvt) Ltd.

Malek obtained a bachelor's degree in civil engineering from the Bangladesh University of Engineering & Technology.

Syed Manzur Elahi, founding chairman of MTB and Pioneer Insurance Company, has been elected as vice-chairman of the bank.

Elahi served as the chairman of the MTB board executive committee.

He is the chairman of various concerns of Apex Group, Grey Advertising (Bangladesh), Quantum Consumer Solutions, Manusher Jonno Foundation, Sunbeams School and MTB Foundation.

He is the managing director of International Publications, director of the Credit Rating Agency of Bangladesh and the Central Depository Bangladesh, chairman of the board of trustees of East West University, member of the board of trustees of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, the Diabetic Association of Bangladesh and the Bangladesh Freedom Foundation.

He did an MA in economics from the University of Dhaka.

PRICES OF KEY ESSENTIALS IN DHAKA CITY			
	PRICE (DEC 31, 2022)	% CHANGES FROM A MONTH AGO	% CHANGE FROM A YEAR AGO
Fine rice (kg)	Tk 58-Tk 75	-4.32 ↓	5.56 ↑
Coarse rice (kg)	Tk 46-Tk 52	-4.85 ↓	3.16 ↑
Loose flour (kg)	Tk 58-Tk 62	-2.44 ↓	66.67 ↑
Lentil (kg)	Tk 100-Tk 105	-2.38 ↓	10.81 ↑
Soybean (litre)	Tk 170-Tk 180	-1.41 ↓	25.9 ↑
Potato (kg)	Tk 16-Tk 22	-19.15 ↓	0
Onion (kg)	Tk 35-Tk 48	2.35 ↑	-7.78 ↓
Egg (4 pcs)	Tk 35-Tk 38	-6.41 ↓	7.35 ↑

SOURCE: TCB



Badiur Rahman, chairman of risk management committee of Al-Arafah Islami Bank, cuts a ribbon to inaugurate the bank's 208th branch at Majidee Court in Noakhali recently. SM Jaffar, additional managing director of the bank, Md Habib Ullah, senior executive vice-president, Belal Ahmed, managing director of Zenith Pharmaceuticals, and Golam Jilani Didar, director of the Noakhali Chamber of Commerce and Industry, were present. PHOTO: AL-ARAFAH ISLAMI BANK



M Anis Ud Dowla, chairman of ACI Formulations, virtually presides over the company's 26th annual general meeting recently. The shareholders approved 25 per cent cash dividend for the year that ended on June 30, 2022. Shusmita Anis, managing director of the company, attended the meeting. PHOTO: ACI FORMULATIONS



ABM Mokammel Hoque Chowdhury, managing director of Union Bank, virtually inaugurated the bank's Munshiganj branch from the bank's head office in Dhaka recently. Md Habibur Rahman, additional managing director of the bank, and Md Nazrul Islam, deputy managing director, were present. PHOTO: UNION BANK

Flower sales bloom

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around December 31, said Mohammad Jahangir Hossain, manager of Fultala Flower Shop in Shahbagh.

That is why the demand and sale of flowers increase on this day with customer numbers starting to grow since morning, he said.

Sales on an average day can be in the range of Tk 20,000 to Tk 50,000, said Hossain.

However, on December 31, this can reach up to Tk 2 lakh to Tk 3 lakh with prices of flowers increasing by 5 per cent to 10 per cent per piece depending on the type, he said.

He believes 2023 would pass well apart from some challenges for the general elections scheduled to be held at the beginning of 2024.

Another flower seller, Mohammad Elias, at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in Agargaon said sales had slightly decreased over the last couple of months for the increase in the cost of living.

However, sales have increased since Victory Day and are expected to peak centring the night of December 31, for which he had bought flowers worth around Tk 1 lakh.

According to Bangladesh Flower Society, an association of flower traders, there are 800 flower shops in the capital and over 20,000 across the country. Of these, 450 are wholesale and the rest are retail outlets.

According to the association, around Tk 1,500 crore-worth flowers were annually sold in the country. More than 2,200 hectares of land across the country were used to grow flowers in fiscal year 2020-21, shows data of the Department of Agricultural Extension.

However, most of flowers come from Jhikargachha and areas surrounding Jashore.

Markets in Jashore see high demand for nightshade, rose, gerbera, lily, marigold, gladiolus, gypsy, calendula and chrysanthemum.

Roses are the most popular, accounting for about 30-35 per

cent of the sales, followed by gladiolus, tuberose and gerbera, according to businesspeople.

Flower farmers in Gadkhali union of Jashore are expected to rake in about Tk 35 crore in the upcoming sales season, which begins with the New Year's celebrations.

During a recent visit to a flower market in Gadkhali, each rose was found to be selling at Tk 3 while gladiolus and gerbera for Tk 8 to Tk 10.

Meanwhile, a 100-piece bunch of chrysanthemum was priced at Tk 150 while a 1,000-piece bunch of marigold Tk 300.

Prices had increased and will rise further alongside demand in the upcoming occasions, said local florist Aminur Rahman.

Preparations are good for December 31 and January 1 and hopefully sales will also be good, said Bangladesh Flower Society President Abdur Rahim.

In these two days, he expects flowers worth Tk 40 crore to Tk 45 crore to be sold across the country.

India's forex reserves slip for second week

REUTERS, Mumbai

India's foreign exchange reserves fell to \$562.81 billion in the week through December 23, the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) statistical supplement showed on Friday.

For the week ended Dec. 16, the country's reserves were at \$563.50 billion. Overall, they have declined from \$632.7 billion at the beginning of this year.

The central bank, which has on several occasions this year intervened in the spot and forwards market to protect the rupee, has said changes in reserves also stem from valuation gains or losses.



Md Kismatul Ahsan, chairman of Investment Corporation of Bangladesh, virtually presides over its annual general meeting recently. The shareholders approved 5 per cent cash and 5 per cent stock dividends for the year that ended on June 30, 2022. Md Abul Hossain, managing director, was also present. PHOTO: INVESTMENT CORPORATION OF BANGLADESH



Mohammad Masoom, managing director of Citizens Bank, inaugurates the bank's Sonakanda branch in Keraniganj's Ruhitpur recently. Waheed Imam, senior vice-president of the bank, was present. PHOTO: CITIZENS BANK



Abdul Haque, managing director of SMC Enterprise, inaugurated SMC Pharmaceuticals' 3rd annual conference at the Le Méridien in Dhaka recently. Waliul Islam, chairman of Social Marketing Company, and Siddiqui Rahman Chowdhury, director of SMC and SMC Enterprise, were present. PHOTO: SMC PHARMACEUTICALS