



Govt to appoint int'l operator for New Mooring terminal

DWAIPAYAN BARUA, Ctg

The government is going to appoint an international operator to run New Mooring Container Terminal (NCT) of the Chattogram port.

The cabinet committee on economic affairs in a meeting yesterday approved a proposal of Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) in this regard.

The committee approved implementing the CPA's proposal regarding appointment of an international standard private operator for operation and maintenance of New Mooring Container Terminal and Overflow Container Yard as per the Procurement Guidelines for Public Private Partnership Project, 2018.

The government is currently in talks with Dubai-based global terminal operator DP World to run the NCT.

The government is currently in talks with Dubai-based global terminal operator DP World to run the NCT

Two years back the Dubai-based company expressed interest to invest \$1 billion in port construction and management, container terminals and the container supply chain infrastructure of Bangladesh.

In January 2020, DP World submitted a formal proposal to the government focusing on the Chattogram port's management and container terminal.

In August last year a delegation led by Rizwan Soomer, the chief executive officer of DP World's Subcontinent, met State Minister for Shipping Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury and expressed their interest in the Chattogram port and its bay-terminal operations and integrated logistics support.

Rizwan Soomer visited the country last week and again met the state minister at his office on March 19.

Contacted, CPA Chairman Rear Admiral M Shahjahan said DP World has sent proposals showing

READ MORE ON B3



Shoppers browse clothes at a retail store in the capital's Dhanmondi area yesterday. Although Eid is still a month away, people have started to visit fashion outlets to buy lifestyle items as some have long shopping lists while others want to avoid the crowd that markets and malls usually see in the two weeks to Eid day.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Fashion brands expect huge Eid sales as Covid fear goes away

MAHMUDUL HASAN

Though Eid is still a month away, shopping centring the festival has already begun as consumers are flocking to fashion outlets to buy lifestyle items.

Retailers have worn a festive look, decorated their shops and introduced new collections as they think shoppers' sentiments have been positive despite the persisting economic woes. Fashion outlets expect huge sales this season.

Shoppers will have to pay extra for their purchases as the price of the clothing items has gone up by 15 to 20 per cent due to the hike in raw material costs.

Industry people say although shoppers flocked to the markets ahead of Eid last year as well, there was some uncertainty and the fear of catching Covid-19.

"This is going to be the first Eid since the beginning of the pandemic when customers will feel no worry about the virus. So, we are expecting a great sales season," said Shaheen Ahmmed, chief executive officer of Anjan's,

one of the top fashion brands with 21 outlets.

Anjan's outlets are selling saris, tops and salwar kameezes for women, panjabi for men and kids' items. There are handmade ornaments and other products as well.

"Festivals are celebrated in Bangladesh with great fervour, and shopping is an integral part of the festivities. So, people set aside some budget for Eid shopping, no matter what the economic condition is," Ahmmed said.

The positive vibe would come as a relief for shop owners who have fought an uphill battle to

stay afloat since the pandemic hit the country three years ago as the outbreak of the lethal pathogen hit sales hard in all four Eid festivals in the first two years.

The sales during the season of festivals account for more than a third of lifestyle retail sales in Bangladesh, according to industry people.

In recent years, shopping aimed at Eid-ul-Fitr, one of the most significant festivals for Muslims worldwide that marks the end of Ramadan, starts 15 days prior to the fasting month.

Rehnuma Khan, a homemaker who was purchasing products from Yellow's Mirpur outlet

yesterday, said that her Eid shopping had just started.

"As I usually do all the shopping for my family members, I have begun early. Apart from family members, I will also have to buy items for relatives."

Adnaan Monowar, a private sector employee, came to an outlet of Aarong yesterday with his wife and daughter.

"Shopping in the fasting month is a bit difficult. So, I want to complete Eid shopping before Ramadan," he said.

However, people mainly throng to shopping malls after the first week of Ramadan and it continues even in the wee hours of Eid day.

According to Mohammad Ashrafur Alam, CEO of Aarong, the lifestyle brand started selling Eid items on March 8.

"We have already received a huge response from our customers."

Aarong has 26 outlets in big cities and will open two more stores during Ramadan in Kushtia and Tangail.

READ MORE ON B3

Top officials of UFS laundered Tk 170cr

Finds BSEC, will file case against the executives of the asset management firm

AHSAN HABIB

The Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC) has decided to file a case against some top officials of an asset management company for laundering Tk 170.69 crore from four open-ended mutual funds.

Mutual funds pool money from investors to channel them into securities such as stocks and bonds. Open-ended mutual funds are not listed with the stock market but one can buy and sell them at a fund manager's office.

The stock market regulator found that the officials of Universal Financial Solutions (UFS), including Managing Director Sayed Hamza Alamgir, had first misappropriated the money in 2022.

The four funds are UFS Bank Asia Unit Fund, UFS-IBBL Shariah Unit Fund, UFS-Padma Life Islamic Unit Fund and UFS Popular Life Unit Fund.

Of the amount, Tk 58.90 crore was embezzled in the pretext of investments in short-term debt securities, Tk 47.92 crore in fixed deposit receipts and Tk 63.87 crore through illegal withdrawals or transfers after the sale on listed securities.

In addition, the four mutual funds were overcharged by an estimated Tk 5.82 crore, said the inquiry report.

"The committee was surprised to see that almost the full misappropriated amount has been laundered in different ways," it said.

The committee was formed to dig deeper after it preliminarily found that Tk 158 crore of UFS Asset Management's funds had been misappropriated.

The BSEC found that Alamgir is mainly liable for the laundering incident as he was the main signatory who embezzled the funds and transferred it to his associates.

READ MORE ON B3



powering with safety

Flame Retardant Cables

TRUSTED PROTECTION FROM SHORT CIRCUIT FIRE

STOCKS	
DSEX ▲	CASPI ▲
0.13% 6,215.30	0.13% 18,374.47

COMMODITIES	
Gold ▲	Oil ▼
\$1,976.83 (per ounce)	\$70.16 (per barrel)

ASIAN MARKETS			
MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI
▼ 0.50% 57,925.28	▼ 0.17% 27,419.61	▼ 0.06% 3,219.00	▲ 0.29% 3,286.65



Although milk, eggs and meat are being sold by the government in different places of Dhaka in a bid to ensure stable prices this Ramadan, many low-income people are still unable to afford such daily necessities.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

‘Affordable’ prices still out of reach for many

Govt starts selling milk, eggs and meat across Dhaka

MD ASADUZ ZAMAN

The Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries yesterday started selling milk, eggs and meat at “affordable prices” across 20 locations inside Dhaka in a bid to stabilise the market during Ramadan.

The ministry took this initiative as proteins such as chicken and beef as well as other daily necessities have become costlier in recent times.

But even though the rates are said to be affordable, such items remain out of reach for low-income groups in the country.

The ministry has fixed the price of beef at Tk 640 per kilogramme (kg) while mutton is Tk 940 per kg, dressed broiler chicken is Tk 340 per kg, milk is Tk 80 per litre and eggs are Tk 10 per piece.

Fisheries and Livestock Minister SM Rezaul Karim inaugurated the sales programme at the Department of Livestock Services in Dhaka.

Soon after the programme was inaugurated, many low-income people rushed to a sales point in the capital's Khamarbari area. However, they expressed frustration over the prices on offer and requested government subsidies to bring them within reach.

Speaking at the event, Karim said foodstuff are being

READ MORE ON B3

Gold price changes for fourth time in a week

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

In less than a week, Bangladesh's jewellers have revised gold prices four times on the ground of changes in prices of pure gold in the domestic market, reflecting high volatility.

Bangladesh Jewellers' Association (Bajus) yesterday hiked the rate of each bhoori of gold by 1 per cent or Tk 1,166 a day after reducing prices to Tk 96,461 per bhoori (11.664 grams).

Buyers had to purchase gold at Tk 96461 a bhoori on Thursday.

From tomorrow, buyers will have to pay Tk 97,627 per bhoori of gold from the local market, said Bajus in a press release.

On March 18, the association increased prices of the popular metal to a historic high of Tk 98,794 a bhoori citing higher cost of pure gold in the local market.



Farmhands take away sacks of onion harvested in Faridpur's Saltha upazila. Farmer Mafiqul Islam of Khoar village spent Tk 37,000 this year cultivating the vegetable on one bigha of land and hopes to get a yield of 70 maunds (one maund equals around 37 kilogrammes). Currently, onion is selling for Tk 850 to Tk 1,000 per maund in the local market. Some 22.68 lakh tonnes were produced around the country in fiscal year 2020-21, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. The photo was taken a couple of days ago.

PHOTO: SUZIT KUMAR DAS

Another gloomy week for stocks as confidence crisis lingers

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Stocks in Bangladesh remained in the red in the past week while turnover dropped over 30 per cent owing to a crisis of confidence among people.

The DSEX, the benchmark index of Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE), edged down by 4.94 points, or 0.08 per cent, to 6,215. The DS-30, the blue-chip stock index, dropped 1 point to 2,218.

The benchmark index ended in the negative territory for a second consecutive week as apprehensive investors continued to go on a selling binge of major sectors' stocks, said International Leasing Securities in its weekly market review.

Most investors remained pessimistic and reluctant to make fresh investments in stocks as they could not clearly foresee the market moving in a

certain direction, it said.

They preferred holding onto cash ahead of holy Ramadan as they are concerned over where inflation would reach during the month and so their participation was thin throughout the week, it added.

The average turnover decreased by 30.63 per cent compared to that in the previous week to stand at Tk 352.4 crore.

The stock market is suffering mainly due to a confidence crisis of people and absence of institutional investors, said a stockbroker.

The confidence crisis mainly arose from the present macroeconomic scenario that remains depressed amid the Russia-Ukraine war, he said.

So, performances of listed companies may drop. On the other hand, institutional investors are also not buying shares due to the presence of the



floor price. "Then, how will the market rise?" he asked.

At the end of July last year, the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC) set the floor price of every stock to halt the free fall of the market indices amid global economic

uncertainties.

The floor price was the average of the closing prices on July 28 of the year and the preceding four days.

However, in last December, the stock market watchdog lifted the floor price for 169 companies

in order to bring vibrancy to the market.

Afterwards, the index started falling every day and so the floor price was reintroduced in March again.

If the floor price prevails in the market and investors do not see any big potential, they will not participate and the index will continue to fall, the broker added.

Over the past week, paper rose 2.9 per cent, jute advanced 2.4 per cent and services grew 2.4 per cent while IT dropped 2.2 per cent, life insurance fell 1.4 per cent and general insurance declined 0.7 per cent.

Investors' activities were mostly concentrated on pharmaceuticals (13.2 per cent), IT (12.6 per cent) and food (12.5 per cent) sectors.

The port city bourse recorded a 21.8 points increase in its broad based index, CASPI.



Sheikh Nadir Hossain Lipu, chairman of Milk Vita (Bangladesh Milk Producers' Co-operative Union), inaugurated Lohagora branch of Premier Bank at Lohagora Bazar in Norail recently. Syed Nowsher Ali, additional managing director of the bank, and Tareq Uddin, executive vice-president, were present.

PHOTO: PREMIER BANK



Rafiqul Islam, managing director of Shimanto Bank, and Shahnaz Khan, managing partner of Kay Kraft, exchanged signed documents of a memorandum of understanding over discounts at the bank's head office in Dhaka recently. Khalid Mahmood Khan, partner of Kay Kraft, along with senior officials from both organisations were present.

PHOTO: SHIMANTO BANK



AZM Shofiuddin Shamim, a director of South Bangla Agriculture & Commerce (SBAC) Bank, inaugurated an agent banking outlet of the bank at Ashwadia Bazar of Barura upazila in Cumilla recently. Md Abdul Matin, deputy managing director of the bank, and Mohammad Shafiul Azam, senior vice-president, were present.

PHOTO: SBAC BANK

Shwapno targets

FROM PAGE B4
"Retail is not just about transactions; it is also about experience."

Currently, Shwapno is one of the top 10 brands across all categories and the number one superstore brand in Bangladesh as per Bangladesh Brand Forum, a think-tank.

Started in 2008, the retail chain serves more than 60,000 households each day by offering items ranging from daily essentials

growers for contract farming to source farm produce, particularly vegetables. It has been part of global Good Agriculture Practice for the last four years.

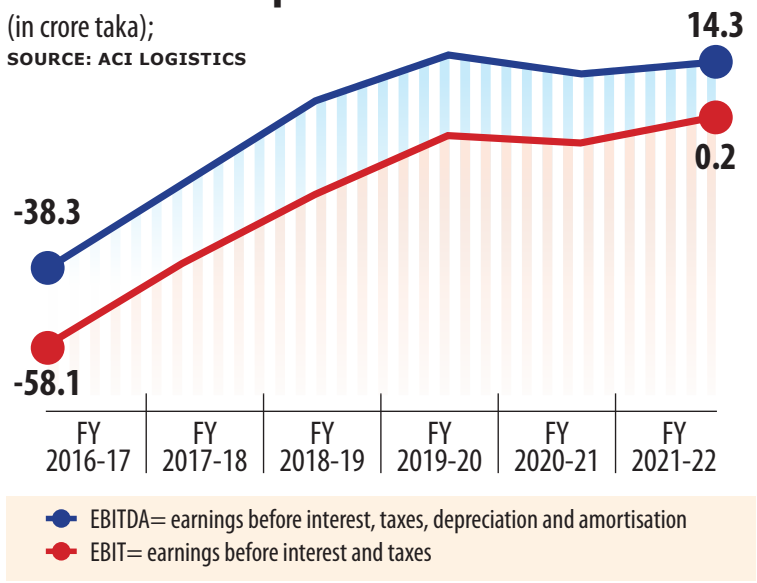
Nasir said that modern retail would have grown at a faster pace had there been no discriminatory policy of the National Board of Revenue.

At present, customers have to pay a 5 per cent value-added tax while shopping from supermarkets.

EBITDA of Shwapno

(in crore taka);

SOURCE: ACI LOGISTICS



and groceries to apparel, home décor and electronics through its outlets in 58 districts. It enjoys over half of the market share in the supermarket segment.

"We have spent a lot of time creating this brand," said Nasir, who has been leading the retail chain for the last 10 years. He said it was challenging in the initial years and the retail chain had to work a lot to create acceptability among customers.

"We had to focus on creating acceptability and making it powerful. We had to create new designs for the new stores so that our customers get an experience of comfortable and easy shopping."

Over the years, Shwapno has also established direct contacts with

They don't have to count the same if they buy items from unorganised groceries. Yet, customers come to supermarkets for other tangible and intangible benefits, according to Nasir.

"Consumers ultimately get more value by shopping with us. There are a number of intangible benefits. The shop is hygiene."

However, there are still challenges when it comes to providing services to customers.

"Retail is a service-oriented industry and we need to train up all of the people involved in the trade. It would have been very helpful if there was an academy to create efficient human resources for the retail sector," Nasir said.

Pran gets BSTI halal certificate

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Agro-food processing company Pran has achieved halal certificate issued by the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI) in favour of its 96 products under 18 categories on Wednesday.

Eleash Mridha, managing director of Pran Group, received a certificate from Nurul Majid Mahmud Humayun, minister for industries, for the products of Pran Agro Limited at a programme held at the ministry's conference room in Dhaka, said a press release.

As there is a huge demand for halal products in the international markets, the BSTI started providing halal certificates for various products to expand the export of those products in global markets, it added.

Among others, Kamal Ahmed Majumder, state minister for industries, Zakia Sultana, secretary to the ministry, and Abdus Sattar, director general of the BSTI, were present.

BGMEA, EBL launch co-branded Visa credit cards

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Eastern Bank Limited (EBL) and the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) in association with Visa have launched co-branded credit cards.

The co-branded cards, exclusively designed for the BGMEA in two variants -- Platinum and Signature -- will provide financial solutions to its employees and member organisations with a safer and more convenient payment option.

Faruque Hassan, president of the BGMEA, inaugurated the products at a programme held at the bank's head office in Dhaka yesterday, said a press release.

"Our collaboration with EBL has always been strong, and we're excited to expand it with this new offering. We are committed to strengthening our partnership with EBL to bring more value to our members through innovative solutions," said Hassan.

PRICES OF KEY ESSENTIALS IN DHAKA CITY			
	PRICE (MAR 23, 2023)	% CHANGES FROM A MONTH AGO	% CHANGE FROM A YEAR AGO
Fine rice (kg)	Tk 60-Tk 75	0	3.85 ↑
Coarse rice (kg)	Tk 46-Tk 50	-4 ↓	3.23 ↑
Loose flour (kg)	Tk 55-Tk 58	-2.59 ↓	54.79 ↑
Lentil (kg)	Tk 95-Tk 100	0	0
Soybean (litre)	Tk 168-Tk 172	0	0
Potato (kg)	Tk 16-Tk 20	-14.29 ↓	-10 ↓
Onion (kg)	Tk 35-Tk 40	15.38 ↑	-6.25 ↓
Egg (4 pcs)	Tk 45-Tk 47	-5.15 ↓	26.03 ↑

SOURCE: TCB



Nuruddin Md Sadeque Hussain, managing director (current charge) of Southeast Bank, virtually inaugurated the operation of 8 agent banking outlets recently. The outlets are Abu Taher Metal Works, Alif Enterprise, M/S Fatema Pharmacy, M/S Samia Computer IT, NRS Enterprise, Al Amin Jewelers, Pal Boundary Net Factory and United Trading. The bank officials and the outlet proprietors connected to the ceremony.

PHOTO: SOUTHEAST BANK



Chowdhury Akhtar Asif, additional managing director of Mutual Trust Bank, exchanged signed documents of an agreement with Abdur Rouf Talukder, governor of Bangladesh Bank, at the BB headquarters in Dhaka recently over disbursing loans for export-oriented and production-based industries under a Tk 5,000 crore "Green Transformation Fund" of the central bank.

PHOTO: MTB

Walton brings European brand's AC to local customers

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Walton Hi-Tech Industries, a powerhouse in the electronics and home appliance markets of Bangladesh, recently launched a premium category air conditioner (AC) designed by European brand ACC.

"We released ACC brand's AC in the domestic market to increase our share of customers in the premium segment," said Md Tanvir Rahman, chief business officer of Walton's AC division.

Walton launched the new product through an event held at its corporate office in the Bashundhara Residential Area of Dhaka last week.

The company aims to increase its share in the Tk 5,000 crore domestic AC market as the sector has been growing by about 20 per cent annually over the past eight years, including the pandemic period.

According to market insiders, around six lakh ACs were sold in 2022.

Rahman then said that while the ACC brand's AC is being locally manufactured and marketed, the design and technology come from the origin company.

Regarding the price, he said consumers can purchase the 1.5 tonne inverter AC for Tk 84,900, which is a reasonable price since it is locally manufactured.

He then said customers can primarily purchase the ACC brand's AC from Walton Plaza at divisional cities while units will eventually be available at all Walton Plazas across the country.

According to a press release, buyers of this AC will get to experience the benefits and real taste of using an international brand as the units were built with advanced technologies that meet western standards.

With an aesthetic design and advanced features, ACC brand's AC was released according to the needs and demands of elite customers.

Rahman went on to say they selected the 1.5 tonne AC for local launch as their share in this market segment is almost 50 per cent of the total demand. However, he said they will launch one and two-tonne ACs of ACC gradually.

ACC is a highly popular and reputed global brand. Since 1968, the company has been providing quality products to customers in Europe. The model of ACC brand's AC is ASI18BHBI-TRDD. The COP of the 18,000 BTUs or 1.5 tonne unit is 4.25 W/W.

The AC features an inverter compressor, pro-clean and plasma care technology, five-inch integrated TFT display, R-32 refrigerant, louvered fin and many other advanced components and technologies.



Micro merchants were previously required to pay a 0.7 per cent charge for each transaction through Bangla QR, which is a quick response based digital payment solution.

PHOTO: STAR

Cashless Bangladesh gets a boost

Central bank's Bangla QR transactions charge-free for micro merchants

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh Bank yesterday took new measures to gear up for the "Cashless Bangladesh 2023-27" programme by offering charge-free transactions through Bangla QR to micro merchants.

Micro merchants were previously required to pay a 0.7 per cent charge for each transaction through Bangla QR, which is a quick response based digital payment solution.

Now, they are allowed to settle such transactions without any charge, according to a central bank notices issued to all banks and non-banks in the country.

A Bangladesh Bank official said if micro merchants like street vendors are compelled to pay the charge, then they might not show interest in using the platform.

And considering how a majority of micro merchants are underprivileged, the central bank has asked lenders not to take the charge and instead list it as

a corporate social responsibility (CSR) expenditure, he added.

A quick response (QR) code is a type of barcode that stores information as a series of pixels in a square grid that can easily be

A Bangladesh Bank official said a majority of banks, payment service providers and payment system operators initially did not show interest in embracing Bangla QR when the platform was introduced two years ago

read by smartphones.

Essentially, any smartphone with a built-in QR scanner can be used to scan QR codes through the camera to make payments whereas a proprietary code can only be scanned via a specific application.

A Bangladesh Bank official said a majority of banks, payment service

providers and payment system operators initially did not show interest in embracing Bangla QR when the platform was introduced two years ago.

So, the central bank has recently taken several initiatives to popularise digital transactions.

The lenders, which have taken part in the Cashless Bangladesh program, will also be allowed to show other expenditures under their CSR allocation.

For instance, accommodation and transport costs can be considered as CSR expenses when officials of the lenders visit remote areas of the country to set up Bangla QR.

The central bank on March 19 said that micro merchants who have to maintain personal retail accounts will not have to keep any minimum deposit or face any account maintenance fee.

In November 2020, the central bank allowed micro and underprivileged businesses to open personal retail accounts to bring millions of small traders into the digital payment ecosystem.

Nagad offers customers chance to win BMW car

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Leading mobile financial service provider Nagad has come up with a mega offer of winning a BMW car for its customers ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr.

Besides, the company has also opened opportunities for its customers to win a plethora of gifts, including Toyota car, motorbikes, smartphones, notepads, refrigerators, televisions, smartwatches, headphones and many more.

The offer went live today and will continue until June 30 of this year, Nagad said in a statement yesterday.

To become eligible for such exciting offers, customers will have to buy products worth a minimum of Tk 500 from specific merchants using their Nagad wallets.

Every hour 10 customers will get a cashback of up to 100 per cent or a maximum of Tk 2,000 on Nagad payments from 10 am to 11.59 pm during each campaign day. The cashback amount will be sent to their Nagad wallets the next working day, according to the press release.

During this Eid campaign, a customer will enjoy cashbacks a maximum of three times, while they will be eligible for the mega offer for once.

A customer winning a mega gift will be informed through Nagad's customer service representatives and he/she will get to know about it through a text.

Mentionable, Nagad authorities will have a final call with respect to cashbacks and mega offers.

The MFS provider reserves all rights to change, amend or cancel the campaign's terms and conditions at any time without any prior notice.

Besides, Nagad's regular cashback of up to 22 per cent will continue on shopping online and the purchase of goods from a few specific merchants alongside the mega offer.

Besides, customers can avail of a cashback of up to Tk 100 for purchase of grocery items worth Tk 1,000 through Nagad from specific shops.

Talking about the mega offer, Tanvir A Mishuk, founder and managing director of Nagad Limited, said, "We always work for our customers and their welfare. That is why we regularly come up with various products, services, and offers to make their life easier as well as entertain them."

ACI Tire Solutions begins journey with LingLong Tire

STAR BUSINESS DESK

ACI Tire Solutions, a subsidiary of ACI Group, has begun its journey in the tyre industry with "LingLong Tire".

Subrata Ranjan Das, executive director of ACI Motors Ltd, inaugurated the solutions, said a press release. The company is expecting to bring more of the world's top class tyre brands in the near future.

Officials of ACI Motors and reputed business personalities of the tyre business from Dhaka and all over the country were present.

Govt to appoint int'l operator for New Mooring

FROM PAGE B1

interest to run NCT, the proposed Bay Terminal as well as Patenga Container Terminal.

There is still a long way to go, he said, adding that the proposal would now be placed with the PPP Authority which would appoint an international transaction adviser.

The international transaction adviser would formulate a business case and financial model and then prepare a request for proposal, said Shahjahan.

Based on reports from the transaction advisor, the CPA would go into negotiations with the interested firms, he said.

On whether only foreign operators would be eligible to send proposals, the CPA chairman said the firm should be a firm of an international standard.

If local firms have experience in operating port terminals in different

countries, they will also take part in the negotiations, he said. Currently no local firm has such eligibility.

The CPA chairman said it had heard that some local firms were also trying to run such operations abroad and there was still time for completing all the procedures for the appointment.

Local firm Saif Powertec is currently operating NCT.

Construction of the terminal having five jetties was completed in 2007 while Saif Powertec Ltd has been operating two jetties -- No 2 and 3 -- of the terminal since May 2007 on an ad hoc basis.

The CPA through two separate tenders appointed Saif Powertec Limited as an operator for NCT jetty No 2 and 3 and Saif Powertec Ltd's joint venture with two other firms -- A&J Traders and M/s MH Chowdhury Limited -- as operator for jetty No 4 and 5.

Fashion brands expect

FROM PAGE B1

Khalid Mahmood Khan, a co-founder of clothing brand Kay Kraft, describes sales in recent months great.

"So, we are expecting a good turnout during Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Azha."

This year, people will finally be able to celebrate Eid with open hearts as there will not have to worry about the virus, said Monnujan Nargis, CEO of Le Reve, also a fashion brand.

Online-based lifestyle brands have also ramped up their preparation.

Nashid Andalib Nikita, the owner of the Facebook-based fashion brand Kabbo Konna, says she has already sourced most of the products from craftsmen.

"I hope the sales will accelerate from the second week of Ramadan."

Brands also sell products online. Sharifun Reba, a director of Sara

Lifestyle, says it is providing free delivery and exchange facilities during online purchases.

"We are providing 10 per cent discounts on online purchase as well."

The customers of the lifestyle brand, which has 12 showrooms, will get 20 per cent cashback of up to Tk 300, if shoppers pay the bills through mobile financial service operator Nagad.

Aarong's Alam said the price would be a bit higher this year than last year since raw material prices had increased significantly.

"On top of that, we have raised the salary of our artisans this year so that they don't face economic hardships. But we haven't increased the price of the products that much."

Khan of Kay Kraft said clothing brands are trying to keep the price hike to a minimum level.

'Affordable' prices still out of reach for many

FROM PAGE B1

sold as a part of their efforts to keep the prices of meat, milk and eggs stable while also helping people meet their daily nutrition requirements.

Still, some people left the sales point empty handed. Of them, Fazar Ali, who is a rickshaw puller, came from Hemayetpur.

"Buying beef at Tk 640 per kg is too expensive for us. Besides, it is still about equal to the current market price," Ali said.

"I came after hearing that each kg was selling at Tk 320, but it was only for half," he added.

Ali then said he only buys meat for his four-member family ahead of major occasions. For example, the last time he bought the protein was on the occasion of Shab-e-Barat.

Another buyer named Amit, who hails from Dhaka's Mohakhali, said the government rates are a kind of eyewash.

"They are selling these items at almost the market price. It should be reduced more," he said while queuing at the sales point.

According to data of the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh, the price of each kg of beef is Tk 720-750, broiler chicken Tk 250-270, mutton

Tk 1,100 and egg Tk 11.25 to Tk 11.75 per piece.

Faridul Islam Mukul, who came to the spot from Tejgunipara, said none of the rates could be considered as an affordable price.

"It's just a little less than the prevailing market price," he added.

On the other hand, Faruk Hossain, another buyer, appreciated being able to buy meat in half-kg packs.

"If we want to procure half a kg of broiler chicken, we are usually refused by the shop owner," he said.

Karim, the fisheries and livestock minister, has also said that prices would change as per the market situation.

"It may reduce but it won't increase," he added.

Asked if any government subsidy is being given for these items, Karim said they are not allowing any subsidy and neither are they doing any business here.

He went on to say that the main aim of this initiative is to provide an example that proves such business can be carried out with transparency.

Sales of these three products will begin at 9:00am every day and continue until the 28th day of Ramadan.

Top officials of UFS laundered Tk 170cr

FROM PAGE B1

Mominul Hoque, its chief investment officer, Sakib Al Farouq, manager, and Md Hafizur Rahman Rajib, head of fund operation, were also found to be involved in the fraudulent activities.

The BSEC in a press release yesterday said it has decided to file the case under the money laundering prevention act 2012.

It also decided to issue a show cause notice on the then officials of the custodian department of the Investment Corporation of Bangladesh for their failure in preventing the fraudulence.

The BSEC also said it was going to urge Financial Reporting Council to take action against the auditors of the asset management company as they failed to detect the irregularities.



Morshed Alam, chairman of Mercantile Bank, handed over a cheque worth of Tk 5 lakh to Colonel Md Anwar Uz Zaman, executive director and principal of the Proyash Institute of Special Education and Research, at the bank's head office in Dhaka yesterday. Md Anwarul Haq, chairman of the bank's executive committee, MA Khan Belal, chairman of Mercantile Bank Securities, Akram Hossain (Humayun), Mosharref Hossain and Mohammad Abdul Awal, directors, and Quamrul Islam Chowdhury, managing director of the bank, were present.

PHOTO: MERCANTILE BANK



Md Mehmood Husain, managing director of National Bank, cuts a cake at the bank's head office in Banglamotor, Dhaka yesterday celebrating the bank's 40th anniversary. Syed Rois Uddin and Hossain Akhtar Chowdhury, deputy managing directors, and the executives of various divisions and departments of the bank were present.

PHOTO: NATIONAL BANK

Govt bringing another LNG shipment from spot market

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The government is going to bring another shipment of liquefied natural gas (LNG) from the international spot market, the fifth since February, at a cheaper rate to boost electricity production ahead of the Boro and summer season.

The cabinet committee on purchase in a meeting yesterday approved the procurement of 33.60 lakh MMBtu of LNG from Excelerate Energy LP of the US for Tk 578.65 crore.

This time the price of the super-chilled fuel was \$13.69 per MMBtu.

It was \$14.66 on March 10 when Bangladesh bought the same amount of fuel from Switzerland-based TotalEnergies Gas & Power. In the first week of March the country bought the fuel from Singapore-based Vitol Asia at \$16.10.

The LNG prices in the global market were driven up by the Russia-Ukraine war last year and it reached a record \$70 per MMBtu in August.

The higher prices forced Bangladesh to pause the purchase of LNG from the international spot market to save its foreign currency reserves.

Since the beginning of 2023, the LNG prices plunged by more than 70 per cent from August's record on slower demand and high inventory levels in Europe and North Asia.

With the summer and irrigation season coming up, Bangladesh ramped up its participation in the international spot market for LNG, issuing tenders regularly from the first week of February after seven months of pause.

When Bangladesh halted spot LNG purchases in June, it had paid \$24.25 per MMBtu.

If the price stays at less than \$20 per MMBtu, Bangladesh is likely to end up purchasing 10 to 12 shipments between February and June.

Meanwhile, the committee approved a proposal of the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) to purchase 8,000 tonnes of lentil at Tk 91.14 per kilogramme from Indian firm UMA Expo Pvt. Ltd.

The purchase of 30,000 tonnes of granular urea fertiliser from Karnaphuli Fertilizer Company Limited for Tk 105.43 crore was also approved at the meeting.

Each tonne of the fertiliser will cost \$327.62 whereas the rate during a previous purchase from the same company was \$330.62.

The committee also approved the purchase of 40,000 tonnes of diammonium phosphate fertiliser from Morocco-based OCP, SA.

The cost of the fertiliser this time will be \$610 per tonne whereas the rate during a previous purchase from the same company was \$710.

Simtex Industries ordered to restructure board

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC) has ordered Simtex Industries to restructure its board in order to ensure effective corporate governance.

The stock market watchdog asked the textile company to remove its existing independent directors Md Akram Hossain and Shah Md Asad Ullah, nominated director Sharif Shahidul Islam and chairman Md Sarwar Hossain.

The company was also asked to form the board with five independent directors, namely: Shobod Deb Nath, Kawser Ahmed, Md Abdul Kaium, Abid Al Hasan and Sheikh Mamun Khaled and make Khaled chairman of the new board.

The BSEC issued an order on Wednesday saying that the decision was taken for the sake of the investors and development of the securities market.

Simtex Industries is now traded at the bourse as a 'B' category share as it disbursed dividend lower than 10 per cent in 2022.



Two customers shop at an outlet of Shwapno, the largest retail chain in Bangladesh, in the capital recently. Shoppers in the cities and urban centres across the country are increasingly turning to superstores to purchase grocery items, baked, canned and packaged goods, clothing products, and even kitchenware. So, Shwapno plans to raise the number of its stores by 10 times to 3,000 in the next three to five years.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Shwapno targets massive expansion

SOHEL PARVEZ

Shwapno, the largest retail chain in Bangladesh, plans to raise the number of its stores by 10 times to 3,000 in the next three to five years to meet the growing demand for comfortable shopping among urbanites and become a profitable entity by increasing sales volume.

The supermarket chain also hopes that more investors will join its franchise model.

Under the model, investors get 40 per cent of gross profit from the operation of stores. From the profit, investors clear rents, utility and other bills. After meeting all the expenses, investors enjoy 30-40 per cent return on their investments, turning the franchise model an attractive business for many.

"We are developing a different model. We already have more than 300 stores and these will behave like hubs and they can create spokes around them," said Sabbir Hasan Nasir, executive director of ACI Logistics Ltd, the operator of Shwapno, in an interview with The Daily Star.

He explained the reason for fixing such a big target.

"Our learning curve has changed. Our business model is more solidified and now we have to replicate."

"The core need of people is convenience and value that we have been able to offer to customers. The offers customers will get from our stores will not get elsewhere. As we buy in large quantities, we can have better deals," said Nasir.

He says the more Shwapno

grows, the stronger relationship it will have with customers, which will allow it to unveil more offers.

"So, we believe in three to four years, Shwapno will reach break-even."

Shwapno posted an operating profit for the first time in the last financial year

Its target is to elevate the EBITDA to 6-7 per cent on the back of increased sales volume.

The top official of ACI Logistics shares the optimism at a time when urbanites are showing a growing interest in supermarkets or modern retail for convenience and ease in buying items as opposed to visiting wet markets.

The size of Bangladesh's retail market is \$18 billion and it is growing by 7.5 per cent annually.

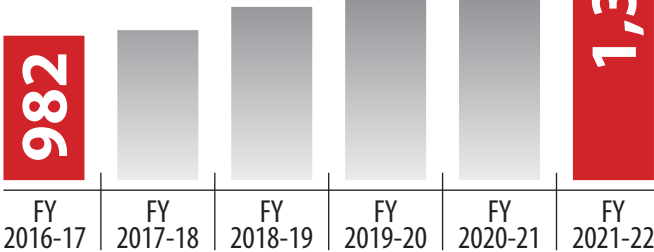
On the other hand, the size of the overall supermarkets,



ANNUAL SALES OF SHWAPNO

(In crore taka)

SOURCE: ACI LOGISTICS



of 2021-22. It was more than Tk 6 crore, according to the latest annual report of ACI Ltd, which owns 76 per cent of ACI Logistics.

The retail chain's revenue grew 1 per cent year-on-year to Tk 1,388 crore in 2021-22.

Its losses stood at Tk 135 crore at the end of the financial year, an improvement from the Tk 142 crore it lost the previous year.

At present, Shwapno's earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortisation (EBITDA), a measure of core corporate profitability, is 1.5-2.5 per cent. It has been registering positive EBITDA for the last four years.

including the branded segment is \$400 million. It is growing by more than 12 per cent annually and taking market share of traditional retail.

Nasir said a niche market has already developed for upper-income groups. There is another group of shoppers who buy products for their regular needs.

"This market is very big and neighbourhood groceries are redesigning themselves following the supermarket models to attract customers. We see an impact of supermarkets here."

As the prospect for growth brightens, Shwapno looks to tap.

READ MORE ON B2

Our love for foreign CEOs over locals

MAHTAB UDDIN AHMED

In one of my expat job locations, I discovered that the status symbol of that society would be having a western CEO in their company. I observe the same infatuation with western CEOs among employers and employees in some cases in Bangladesh. But Bangladesh could produce more local CEOs and corporate leaders if local employees and employers were more supportive.

In my experience of promoting local talents to senior positions, I have found the biggest challenges from local teammates. The general attitude is somewhat like how can I report to someone who is just one of us? There are also those who pride themselves in reporting to a foreign boss. Needless to say, there are always exceptions.

I was anticipated to take up the CEO role prior to the actual time. But it could not happen because of some colleagues' concerns about me, as I was told. When I assumed the CEO role in late 2016, one of the biggest initial challenges was gaining confidence from my team.

One group wanted to override me, while the rest was caught in a dilemma of whether the first local CEO could live up to the expectations in the foreign-owned telecom sector. Fortunately, I had the full support of my Group CEO at the time, which helped me tremendously.

We often see success but not the struggle behind it.

There was a time when the top job in multinational companies (MNCs) in Bangladesh was held by expatriates. But today, many Bangladeshi CEOs in MNCs are proving to be equally or more successful in their job, breaking the earlier jinx. It is truly helping change the mindset of local employees, and if the trend continues, we can see more home-grown talents as leaders.

Another reason for selecting local CEOs or leaders against expatriates is the changes in the organisational structure in the last decade or so. In most MNCs in Bangladesh, the finance, supply chain, HR, and even part of marketing report directly to the regional functional head. Only dotted or administrative reporting is done to the local CEO. Hence, the CEO's role becomes limited only to sales and marketing (not brand often), dealing with local authorities and regulations etc.

Generally, it is beneficial for foreign companies operating in Bangladesh to have a local CEO who understands the local culture, language, and business environment. A local CEO usually has established relationships with local stakeholders, including customers, suppliers, and government officials, which can be valuable in building trust and navigating the business environment.

Additionally, a local CEO may be better equipped to understand the unique challenges and opportunities of the Bangladeshi market. This can help the company tailor its products, services, and marketing strategies to the local market and gain a competitive edge. Additionally, a local CEO would generally have an eye for national interest, unlike an expat.

However, it is important to note that every company and situation is unique, and there may be circumstances where an expat CEO may be a better fit. For instance, if the company operates in an industry that requires international expertise, such as technology or finance, an expat CEO with global experience may be more suitable. Ultimately, whether to hire a local or expat CEO should be based on the company's specific needs and its business environment.

Bangladesh is not a desired job destination for westerners or our neighbours. Hence, not the best of the expat resources would agree to get posted here. There are local leaders who can undoubtedly hold top positions, but our love for expats and the government's indifference to creating opportunities for locals hold back progress. Aligning with the "Made in Bangladesh" strategy, shouldn't we focus on "Made in Bangladesh CEOs" too?

The author is founder and managing director of BuildCon Consultancies Ltd

Fed lifts key interest rate

Voices banking sector concerns

AFP, Washington

The US Federal Reserve raised its benchmark lending rate on Wednesday, as it sought to strike a balance between curbing high inflation and averting further upheaval in the commercial banking sector.

The quarter-point increase, which was in line with expectations, lifted their interest rate target to between 4.75 and 5 per cent at the end of a two-day policy meeting, the Fed said in a statement.

The policy-setting Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) added that "some additional policy firming may be appropriate" to get to a stance that is sufficiently restrictive to bring inflation down.

The latest increase was the same size as the central bank's previous rate decision in February, and marks its ninth straight hike.

The Fed also updated its economic projections on Wednesday, slightly lowering its 2023 GDP growth projections 2023 to 0.4 per cent from 0.5 per cent in December.

Median projections for the Fed's benchmark rate at the end of this year were unchanged, while inflation expectations rose slightly.

Wednesday's decision underscores the Fed's determination to tackle inflation, which remains stubbornly above

policymakers' long-term annual target of two per cent despite the sustained effort to lower price increases.

"Getting inflation back down to two percent has a long way to go and is likely to be bumpy," Fed Chair Jerome Powell said during a press conference on Wednesday afternoon.

The Fed warned in its earlier rate announcement that the recent banking turmoil sparked by the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank (SVB) could impact the availability of credit for households and businesses, and "weigh on economic activity, hiring, and inflation."

SVB's excessive exposure to interest-rate risk left it vulnerable when the Fed began rapidly raising rates. The Californian lender was forced to realize losses on bonds it had intended to hold for a long time, which led concerned customers to rapidly pull their money from the bank, bringing about its collapse and striking fear into the financial markets.

Banking stocks tumbled in the weeks that followed, leading to the collapse of two additional regional lenders and the merger under pressure between Credit Suisse and its regional rival UBS.

In response, regulators introduced a series of policies designed to ensure that banks could access loans in a hurry if they needed, in order to avoid a repeat of the conditions that precipitated SVB's collapse.



An aerial photograph shows the Kingsbury Oil Terminal in Warwickshire, north England. Oil prices dipped to \$76.15 a barrel yesterday, having hit their lowest since late 2021 earlier this week, after Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell highlighted banking sector credit risks for the US, while crude stockpiles in the world's largest economy swelled.

PHOTO: AFP/FILE