

Brac Bank adopts digital processes to promote sustainability

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Brac Bank's SME business is taking steps towards reducing paper usage and promoting environmental sustainability by adopting various digital processes.

The bank now digitally conducts the performance management of 2,800 field-based business development managers (BDMs) and relationship officers (ROs) instead of traditional paper-based methods, said a press release.

"The bank strives to contribute to reducing the carbon footprint of Bangladesh through sustainable initiatives and aims to achieve paperless

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banking, instilling a culture of sustainability within the bank to inspire a positive impact on the environment," said Syed Abdul Momen, deputy managing director of the bank.

Moreover, the bank has replaced hardcopy letters with digital modes of communication, such as SMS, for deferral, loan call-off reminders, counseling, and annual target communication.

These digital initiatives have resulted in significant paper and person-hour savings while reducing turnaround time and providing greater convenience for the bank's field-level teams.

As a member of the Global Alliance for Banking on Values, Brac Bank is committed to the principles of people, planet, and prosperity and working towards making the environment cleaner and more habitable for all.



Women of Kashipur village in Sylhet's Balaganj upazila weave a unique mat, known as "shital pati" in Bangla, characterised but its ability to naturally stay cool. Artisans here need five to seven days to make a big mat using stalks of a reed-like plant called murta spending Tk 800 to Tk 1,000. Demand for the mat peaks during summer when it sells anywhere from Tk 1,500 to Tk 10,000. Around 200 murta can enable creating a regular mat and a prayer mat and artisans demand preservation of fresh water swamp forests and homestead forests for easy availability of the raw material. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

WEEKLY STOCKS

Market maintains flat trajectory

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Major indices of the stock market in Bangladesh have maintained a flat trajectory for about eight months now, providing little scope for investors to register gains or even losses.

This is because the floor price mechanism has made the market static as share values are maintained at certain levels rather than being decided by demand and supply, according to a merchant banker preferring anonymity.

And as the market has lost its natural course, investors are staying away for being unable make money by anticipating potential ups and downs, he said.

The merchant banker went on to say that only a few individual investors are currently participating in the market while most institutional investors remain on the sidelines.

The DSEX, the benchmark index of the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE), yesterday shed 8.51 points, or 0.14 per cent, to close the week

at 6,207 points.

Average daily turnover of the DSE, which indicates trade volume, spiked 16 per cent to Tk 409 crore over the past five sessions compared to the week before.

The Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission set floor prices for every stock at the end of July last year in a bid to halt the freefall of market indices amid global economic uncertainties.

And although the market regulator had lifted the floor prices of 169 companies in December, it later reintroduced the mechanism in March this year.

The stock market ended the week with a negative stance amid quarter-ending sell-offs among investors, International Leasing Securities said in its weekly market review.

The prime index went downward during the first two sessions of the week but it mostly recovered during the later sessions.

Investors preferred to take position on the last day of the week based on the news that

government would approve the draft bill of Banking Companies Act.

As per the proposed amendment, non-listed corporate bonds and debentures will be excluded from banks' investment portfolio.

This will act as a catalyst for the development of the bond market as well as create more room for banks to invest in the secondary market, it added.

Sectoral performance showed a mixed pattern. Among the sectors, IT rose 3.6 per cent, service and real estate advanced 2.1 per cent, and tannery edged up 1.8 per cent.

However, paper and printing declined 4.5 per cent, pharmaceuticals and chemical fell 0.6 per cent and bank slid down 0.5 per cent.

Market movement this week was driven by negative changes in the market cap of pharmaceuticals, bank, and paper and printing scrips amid positive changes in the market cap of IT, services and real estate, and miscellaneous scrips, Shanta Securities said in its weekly market review.

Wahida joins Agrani Bank as DMD

STAR BUSINESS DESK



Wahida Begum has joined Agrani Bank Limited from Ansar VDP Unnayan Bank as a deputy managing director (DMD) on Tuesday.

Wahida was working for Ansar VDP Unnayan Bank in the same post of deputy managing director, said a press release.

She started her career at Rupali Bank Limited as a senior officer (probationary) in 1998 and worked in different capacities.

She was the chief executive officer of Rupali Securities Limited at a stage of her career.

Wahida obtained her graduation and postgraduate degrees in economics from Jahangirnagar University.

Brac Bank, Nucleus Software win fintech award

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Brac Bank and Nucleus Software Exports Ltd have jointly won a "Best Implementation in Transaction Banking" award at IBS Intelligence Global FinTech Innovation Awards 2022 for FinnAxia, a transaction banking and supply chain finance solution for small and medium enterprises.

The award recognised the rapid implementation of FinnAxia to support the bank's strategy of venturing into the supply chain financing market to provide seamless solutions for all its end customer offerings, said a press release.

The completely automated and paperless solution is now enabling the bank to onboard customers faster and provide services in 4 minutes and 52 seconds.

PRICES OF KEY ESSENTIALS IN DHAKA CITY			
	PRICE (MAR 30, 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	-4.2 ↓	59.15 ↑
Lentil (kg)	Tk 95-Tk 100	0	0
Soybean (litre)	Tk 170-Tk 175	1.47 ↑	15.38 ↑
Potato (kg)	Tk 22-Tk 25	17.5 ↑	11.9 ↑
Onion (kg)	Tk 30-Tk 45	25 ↑	0
Egg (4 pcs)	Tk 45-Tk 47	5.75 ↑	31.43 ↑

SOURCE: TCB



Emranul Huq, managing director of Dhaka Bank, and Mollah Mohammad Majnu, managing director of Crown Cement, exchanged signed documents of an agreement on distributor finance programme at the bank's head office in Dhaka yesterday. Mohammad Abu Jafar, additional managing director of the bank, Md Mostaque Ahmed and Sheikh Abdul Bakir, deputy managing directors, and Mohammad Ahasan Ullah, chief financial officer of the cement company, along with other senior officials of both the organisations were present.

PHOTO: DHAKA BANK



Md Ahsan-uz Zaman, managing director of Midland Bank, and Md Nurul Amin, executive director of Bangladesh Bank, signed a participation agreement on low-cost long-term financing for shipbuilding industry under a refinance scheme of the central bank at the BB headquarters in Dhaka on Wednesday. AKM Sajedur Rahman Khan, deputy governor of the BB, Mohammad Javed Tareq Khan, senior executive vice-president of the bank, and other senior officials from both the sides were present.

PHOTO: MIDLAND BANK

Fashion retailer H&M surprises with profit

REUTERS, Stockholm

Fashion retailer H&M reported a surprise operating profit for the December to February period as cost-cutting measures started to bear fruit despite consumers curbing spending, but said a cold spell was holding back sales in March.

While H&M showed signs of bringing its costs under control, it still struggled to compete with major rival Inditex, owner of Zara and other brands, as well as rapidly expanding fast fashion online retailers such as SHEIN and Temu. "It is more important than ever to offer customers good value for money," CEO Helena Helmersson told analysts on a call.

Unusually cold weather in many of H&M's key markets held shoppers back from buying spring clothing, the company said, denting its March sales figures. Still, shares in the company jumped by 8 per cent in early trading after the results - a move traders said was amplified by short positions on the stock.

Operating profit in the Swedish group's fiscal first quarter was 725 million Swedish crowns (\$69.73 million) against a profit of 458 million crowns a year earlier. A Refinitiv poll of analysts expected a 1.10 billion crown loss.

H&M's operating profit margin was 1.3 per cent, up from 0.9 per cent a year earlier. Helmersson said the company expects a gross margin recovery over the year and is making

progress towards its goal of a 10 per cent operating margin next year.

Analysts at Credit Suisse said it would be "very challenging" for H&M to return to a 10 per cent margin in 2024.

China remained a difficult market for the company, which was hit by boycotts there after saying it would not source cotton from the Xinjiang region over concerns about human rights abuses. Long pandemic lockdowns in China also dragged on retail performance.

"In China we are still not where we want to be," Helmersson told analysts on a call. "We are definitely going in the right direction, but rather slowly."

H&M said net sales for March were expected to increase by 4 per cent in local currencies compared with the corresponding period last year. That's a slight acceleration after sales for the first quarter were up 3 per cent from last year, but lags the competition.

"Performance was weighed by weather and could, therefore, be recovered as warmer temperatures land, but of course this result is in stark contrast to the current trading reported by Inditex," JPMorgan analyst Georgina Johanan said.

H&M said an upwards re-valuation of its stake in its majority-owned Selpy second-hand clothing platform had boosted earnings by about 1 billion crowns. Selpy, in which H&M still holds a 79.84 per cent stake, is now part of the group.

China, Brazil strike deal to ditch dollar for trade

AFP, Brasilia

China and Brazil have reached a deal to trade in their own currencies, ditching the US dollar as an intermediary, the Brazilian government said Wednesday, Beijing's latest salvo against the almighty greenback.

The deal will enable China, the top rival to US economic hegemony, and Brazil, the biggest economy in Latin America, to conduct their massive trade and financial transactions directly, exchanging yuan for reals and vice versa instead of going through the dollar.

"The expectation is that this will reduce costs... promote even greater bilateral trade and facilitate investment," the Brazilian Trade and Investment Promotion Agency (ApexBrasil) said in a statement.

China is Brazil's biggest trading partner, with a record \$150.5 billion in bilateral trade last year.

The deal, which follows a preliminary agreement in January, was announced after a high-level China-Brazil business forum in Beijing.

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva was originally scheduled to attend the forum as part of a high-profile China visit, but had to postpone his trip indefinitely Sunday after he came down with pneumonia.

The Industrial and Commercial Bank of China and Bank of Communications BBM will execute the transactions, officials said.

China has similar currency deals with Russia, Pakistan and several other countries.

Two firms to provide internet

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Summit Communications will provide internet to 1,297 unions while Fiber@Home will cover 1,307 unions, according to the statement from the finance ministry.

Phase three of the Info-Sarker project aims to ensure internet access

for 60 per cent of the country's population by establishing broadband connections in the 2,600 unions.

It also seeks to enhance the distribution of technical knowledge and provide high-speed internet facilities at the union level for connecting Union Digital Centres.