



Mangoes of the “Gobindabhog” variety grown in the Satkhira region are being sold at Tk 150 per kilogramme from a rickshaw van at the north gate of Baitul Mukarram National Mosque in Dhaka yesterday. There is only a week or two to go before the mango season, when truckloads of the juicy delicacy will start arriving in the capital from major growing regions of Rajshahi, Chapainawabganj and Dinajpur with varieties having exotic names like Fazlee, Langra, Gopalbhog, Himsagar, Khirsapat, Ashwina, Khisanbhog, Kohitoor, Mohanbhog and Misribhog.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

GE to offer advanced gas turbines

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

General Electric (GE) is planning on offering use of advanced gas turbine technologies, capable of burning blends of hydrogen and natural gas, to lead an energy transition in Bangladesh and decarbonise it further, according to its senior officials in Dhaka yesterday.

“GE remains committed to leading a new era of clean energy in Bangladesh,” said Deepesh Nanda, CEO GE Gas Power South Asia, at a seminar on “Powering Smart Bangladesh” at InterContinental Dhaka.

“Today, the GE’s technology is powering multiple power plants in the country and our power services are helping the power plant owners to use the fuel efficiently while generating electricity at lower cost,” he said. The GE is offering its wide portfolio of heavy-duty and aeroderivative gas turbines to meet specific powering requirements, such as balancing the grid and improving reliability of the power plant, he added.

“We are prioritising introduction of policy interventions that can support the development of clean energy infrastructure in Bangladesh,” said Md Habibur Rahman, power secretary. “... and contribute towards economic growth of the country by effectively meeting the power demand in future,” he said.

“We are also keen to invest in technologies that are already tested and can help Bangladesh to reduce carbon emissions quickly,” he said.

“Switching to hydrogen fuel for power generation in future is one such example, where global companies like the GE, having tremendous experience in the field, can collaborate with us in the sustainable development of Bangladesh’s power sector,” Rahman said in a statement.

Bida adds four new services to OSS portal

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (Bida) has added four new services to its One Stop Service (OSS) portal.

The services are: the use of VIP lounge of Bida at the airport and providing waiver of condition 7, single process (name clearance, company

Along with the four new services, a total of 67 services will be available on OSS now

registration and payment) of the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms and the issuance of possession certificate of Chattogram Development Authority (CDA).

Bida’s Executive Chairman Lokman Hossain Miah launched the services at the conference room of Bida yesterday.

Along with the four new services, a total of 67 services, including 20 services of Bida and 47 services of other 22 organisations, will be available on the OSS platform now.

Investors will now be able to get access to more services from their home without physically visiting the Bida office, Miah said.

The investors can now easily apply to get their desired services in just 10 minutes from any part of the world, he said.

Text or email will be sent to the applicant in a short time if the required documents are not submitted with the application, the Bida executive chairman said.

Miah pointed out that during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s recent visit to Japan, top companies of that country, including Mitsubishi, expressed their interest to invest in Bangladesh at the special economic zone for Japanese companies.

The Bida does not work only for attracting foreign investment, rather it is also committed to extend equal services to the domestic investors, he said.

“We have been able to create a red-tape-free investment environment. Now we have to use our time wisely. The more transparent investment services we can provide in a short period of time the more Bangladesh will advance.”

Khandaker Azizul Islam, executive member of Bida, also spoke.

Uttara Bank’s profit rises nearly 20% in Jan-Mar

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Uttara Bank Limited’s profit rose 19.72 per cent year on year in the January-March quarter of the current financial year.

Thus, the consolidated earnings per share of the private commercial bank rose to Tk 0.85 in the first quarter from Tk 0.71 in the identical period of 2022, according to the unaudited financial statements.

Uttara Bank clocked a Tk 270.37 crore profit in 2022, up 21.74 per cent from a year earlier.

Its consolidated net operating cash flow per share stood at a negative Tk 4.67 in January-March of 2023, down from a negative Tk 8.32 a year earlier.

The consolidated net asset value per share rose to Tk 32.65 on March 31 this year from Tk 29.54 on the same day last year.

Shares of Uttara Bank traded at Tk 22 on the Dhaka Stock Exchange yesterday.

National Life Insurance’s profit up 50% in 2022

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

National Life Insurance Company Ltd posted a 50 per cent year-on-year increase in profit to Tk 62.73 crore in 2022.

The profit stood at Tk 41.67 crore in 2021.

The insurer, thus, reported consolidated earnings per share of Tk 5.78 for the last financial year, which was Tk 3.84 in 2021.

The consolidated net asset value per share surged to Tk 68.22 last year from Tk 52.65 in 2021 while the consolidated net operating cash flow per share slid to Tk 24.10 from Tk 37.40 during the period.

The board of directors has recommended a 38 per cent cash dividend for the year that ended on December 31, the highest in seven years, data from the Dhaka Stock Exchange showed.

Shares of National Life Insurance traded at Tk 179 yesterday, unchanged from a day earlier.

Rupee hits over two-week low

REUTERS, Mumbai

The Indian rupee fell to a more than two-week low on Tuesday on the back of dollar purchases by importers and short covering by traders, with a rise in US yields also adding to the pressure.

The rupee ended at 82.0375 per US dollar, compared with its close of 81.7950 in the previous session. The demand for dollars might be due to purchases by importers, said Anand James, chief market strategist at Geojit Financial Services.

An uptick in the USD/INR was brewing, with the 81.6 support level having held firm for the last two weeks, James said.

US banks may tighten lending standards on sector worries

AFP, Washington

US banks tightened lending standards in the first few months this year, and expect this to continue over the rest of 2023, said a Federal Reserve survey released on Monday.

The report, which is closely watched on Wall Street, comes as the financial sector contends with deposit outflow worries on the back of turmoil after the high-profile collapse of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank in March.

In recent weeks, shares of mid-sized banks suffered brutal trading days while investors remained on edge for a repeat of earlier episodes in which deposit runs precipitated or played a significant role in bank failures.

Asked about their outlook for lending standards over the rest of 2023,

“banks reported expecting to tighten standards across all loan categories,” the Fed said on Monday.

Among the most frequently cited reasons included an expected deterioration in credit quality of loan portfolios and in customers’ collateral values, alongside reduced risk tolerance, found the senior loan officer opinion survey on bank lending practices.

Other reasons included “concerns about bank funding costs, bank liquidity position, and deposit outflows,” the survey added. In the first quarter, respondents reported tighter standards and weaker demand for various types of loans to businesses and households, the report added.

“In general, the tightening in standards for business loans was more

frequently reported across the mid-sized banks,” the report said.

On commercial and industrial lending, mid-sized and other banks more often cited their liquidity positions and issues such as heightened concerns about the impact of legislative changes.

And among banks’ worries were an uncertain economic outlook.

In a separate financial stability report released Monday – the first since four regional banks failed recently – the central bank highlighted concerns over tighter credit.

“Concerns about the economic outlook, credit quality, and funding liquidity could lead banks and other financial institutions to further contract the supply of credit to the economy,” said the Fed’s report.

Wide gap in formal-informal

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It said the resumption of lax loan rescheduling and asset classification in the middle of 2022 has delayed the full recognition of distressed assets.

The NPL ratios among non-bank financial institutions are even higher than in the banking sector, going past 23 per cent in June.

“Bangladesh has made significant progress in bridging gaps between low and high-opportunity groups, particularly in the education sector. However, much remains to be done,” said Abdoulaye Seck, country director of the WB for Bangladesh and Bhutan, in the opening session of the conference.

He said South Asian countries must continue to reduce socioeconomic disparities as they lead to differences in access to jobs, earnings, consumption, and welfare, and impact overall growth.

“Inequality of opportunity is not only a matter of fairness, but it is

also a matter of efficiency. It prevents an optimal allocation of talent and reduces incentives to accumulate human capital, and derails long-term economic growth.”

Speaker of the Bangladesh Parliament Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury said inclusive growth, not just growth, is necessary for the development of the economy.

“Eradication of inequality needs to include in the arena of political economy so that inclusive growth is ensured.”

The high levels of inequality of opportunity and low inter-generational mobility in South Asia are not only unjust but also impede long-term economic growth, according to Imran Matin, executive director of the BIGD.

“Policies to address it will create a more equitable society and help unlock the region’s full potential. We should remember that lack of social progress means lack of social justice,” he added.

Govt buying sugar, edible oil

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Sugar went for between Tk 112 and Tk 115 in April, according to TCB data.

The CCGP meeting also approved a proposal for the Armed Forces Division to procure three crore blank smart cards from Bangladesh Machine Tools Factory Limited under its “Identification System for Enhancing Access to Services (2nd Phase)” project at a cost of Tk 406.50 crore.

A proposal for procuring essential medicine and laboratory equipment from Essential Drugs Company Limited and the United Nations Office for Project Services under an initiative of the Department of Health Services got approval as well.

Meanwhile, five of eight proposals from the Roads and Highways Department were approved.

Bangladesh cuts import reliance



Currently, Bangladesh is almost self-sufficient in manufacturing regular and specialised vaccines thanks to the efforts of local manufacturers.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

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Md Ahsanur Rahman, deputy manager for the vaccine segment at the company, said Bangladesh has not needed to import regular vaccines in the past three years.

The market size of vaccines in Bangladesh is around Tk 100 crore, he said. Besides, the government purchases vaccines worth around Tk 100 crore per year under the arrangement of the Unicef for its EPI (Essential Programme on Immunisation) initiative.

Popular Pharmaceuticals plans to expand its manufacturing facilities in the future to meet the growing demand.

Professor Sitesh Chandra Bachar, dean of the pharmacy faculty at the University of Dhaka, said local pharmaceutical companies are doing well in manufacturing common vaccines.

“Although they are manufacturing the generic version of vaccines, Incepta and Globe Pharmaceuticals have dedicated research and

development wings. This is a positive sign of progress made by the pharmaceuticals sector.”

Mohammad Mohiuddin, a senior manager of Globe Biotech, says the company has a full-fledged vaccine manufacturing facility.

“We are awaiting government approval to begin vaccine marketing in Bangladesh.”

He said the demand for vaccines is increasing in Bangladesh, particularly after the outbreak of Covid-19, as people’s awareness level about the benefit of vaccines against the deadly virus has gone up.

“In the past, the government used to provide vaccines free of cost. Now, many people buy vaccines that are administered against various diseases.”

For example, many women receive

DGDA’s Ayub Hossain said Bangladeshi vaccines are awaiting World Health Organisation’s maturity level 3 certification. “We are hoping to get the approval after

enacting the Drug Law.”

He said local vaccines have already passed the WHO’s quality test twice.

“Once local manufacturers receive the certification, the door for Bangladesh to export vaccines will open.”

Bapi’s Shafiuzzaman thinks the burgeoning pharmaceuticals sector of Bangladesh has immense potential to tap global opportunities in the vaccine market since the country is increasingly becoming a hub for making medicines.

At least nine companies have already received approvals from highly regulated authorities in the US, the European Union and Australia as well as the WHO.

Bangladesh exports pharmaceutical products to 151 countries, including those in the EU, Africa and Latin America as well as the US, after catering to 98 per cent of the domestic demand.

Foreign sales fetched \$188 million in 2021-22, up more than 11 per cent from \$169 million a year earlier.