

## MoU signed to improve standards of cold storages

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Bangladesh Cold Storage Association (BCSA) has taken an initiative to develop a cold chain management system of global standard in the country.

To this end, the association has signed a memorandum of understanding with Land O'Lakes Venture37, the implementing agency of the Bangladesh Trade Facilitation Project funded by the United States Department of Agriculture, according to a press release.

Mostofa Azad Chowdhury Babu, president of the BCSA, and Michael Parr, the project director, signed the deal.

Under the MoU, work will be done to increase the technical skills of the manpower engaged in the country's cold storage industry, ensure the maximum use of technology, and improve the capacity of the existing cold storage facilities.

In addition, both parties will work to follow up-to-date commercial strategies for cold storage management and build a sustainable and profitable cold storage industry.

Babu said that through the initiative, cold storage facilities scattered across the country will be made world class.

"This will bring about a paradigm shift in the storage and supply chain management of agricultural products."

## AB Bank, NRBC Bank get nod to declare stock dividends

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AB Bank Ltd and NRB Commercial Bank Limited have received permission from the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC) to declare dividends for the financial year that ended on December 31, 2022.

In a filing on the Dhaka Stock Exchange yesterday, AB Bank said it has received permission from the regulator to declare a 2 per cent stock dividend for the year.

In another filing, NRBC Bank said the BSEC has accorded its consent for its declaration of a 4.5 per cent stock dividend for 2022.



The Swissôtel Dhaka, one of four new five-star hotels coming to Bangladesh, is seen under construction in the capital's Gulshan. Although the project, set to cost an estimated Tk 600 crore, was initially set for completion by 2021, construction faced delays due to the Covid-19 pandemic and ongoing Russia-Ukraine war.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

# Dhaka to get four more 5-star hotels

JAGARAN CHAKMA

Dhaka is set to welcome four new five-star rated hotels over the next three years as the growing influx of travellers has heightened the demand for luxury accommodation in Bangladesh.

This is a positive development for the hospitality industry as it indicates that the country is becoming a popular destination for business and leisure travellers, according to M Iblul Parvez, manager (admin) at Bengal Hotels and Resorts, a concern of Bengal Group of Industries.

Bengal Group had signed an agreement with Swissôtel Hotels & Resorts, a brand of multinational hospitality company Accor, for constructing a world-class luxury hotel in Dhaka back in December 2015.

The roughly Tk 600 crore project was slated for completion by 2021 but faced delays in implementation due to the Covid-19 pandemic and ongoing Russia-Ukraine crisis, which will increase total costs.

The property, called "Swissôtel Dhaka", will be managed by Zurich-based Swissôtel while Bengal Hotels and Resorts will oversee its day-to-day operations.

Located in the capital's Gulshan, Swissôtel Dhaka will enhance the city's reputation as a desirable destination for international events, including business conferences and meetings, Parvez said.

"It will attract high-profile guests, dignitaries, and business professionals, thereby promoting Dhaka's image as a vibrant and cosmopolitan city," he added.

Parvez then informed that they now aim to launch the hotel by 2026.

Similarly, Borak Real Estate Ltd (BREL), a concern of Unique Group, inked a hotel

management agreement with Indian Hotels Company Ltd (IHCL) on April 17 earlier this year.

As per the agreement, BREL will operate IHCL's Taj and Vivanta branded hotels in Dhaka's Gulshan.

BREL is spending more than Tk 2,000 crore, including the land price, to complete



the hotels, said Hamayet Hossain Rasel, the company's general manager for project management.

And although construction has ended, the hotels will open to the public only after internal decorations are complete after another 36 months.

Inside the Taj hotel, a Taj Club will accommodate 60 signature shops and restaurants, where internationally branded products will be available for consumers.

Sources at the Bangladesh International Hotel Association (BIHA) said the Hilton Dhaka, a concern of Hilton Worldwide, will launch in 2025 with construction currently ongoing in the capital's Gulshan.

The 250-room hotel is located on Gulshan Avenue, the central business district of Dhaka city and home to most embassies, high commissions and key multinational companies in the country.

Hilton Worldwide had signed a management contract with Premier Hotels & Resorts for managing the property back in 2012.

At present, there are nine five-star rated hotels in Dhaka, namely Westin, Le Meridien, Sheraton, Radisson, Pan Pacific, Intercontinental, Renaissance, Hotel Sarina and Amari.

According to industry insiders, Dhaka city is now capable of providing luxury accommodation to just 2,200 guests, which have been growing in number over the past decade in line with the country's economic development.

HM Hakim Ali, president of the BIHA, said business travels will increase after the third terminal of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport is launched, further fuelling the demand for luxury accommodation in Dhaka.

With this backdrop, entrepreneurs are investing in establishing five-star hotels in the city, he added.

Ali went on to say at least Tk 5,000 crore will be spent to complete these hotels, which will generate some 1,400 opportunities for direct employment.

However, there is still a lack of skilled professionals for hotel and hospitality management, forcing owners to hire foreigners in capacities such as general manager and chef to operate the hotel.

Ali believes the sector will continue developing day by day as the country's economy is growing despite the Covid-19 fallout and ongoing Russia-Ukraine crisis.

## Syndicates behind price hike of onion

### Says Razzaque

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU

Although Bangladesh has a sufficient amount of onion in reserve, prices of the bulb have suddenly increased due to the formation of syndicates among related businesses, according to Agriculture Minister Muhammad Abdur Razzaque.

"There is sufficient onion production in the country but a section of businesspeople is responsible for the recent price hike," he said.

Razzaque made this comment while inaugurating modern storage facilities in the Sujanagar and Santhia upazilas of Pabna, the biggest onion producing district, yesterday.

Speaking to reporters after the inauguration, he stressed the need for proper storage facilities for the crop as huge amounts are wasted each year due to rot.

"We already introduced modern onion storages in Pabna, Rajbari, Faridpur and other areas. We aim to provide such facilities across the country so that farmers can easily preserve their crops," Razzaque said.

Asked about the recent hike in onion prices, he said the crisis would soon be resolved. However, a decision on imports will only be taken after closely examining the market situation.

On the other hand, farmers are pleased with the current prices as they are getting between Tk 2,500 and Tk 2,700 for each maund (37 kilogrammes) of onion.

"We are collecting information about the total supply of onion in the country and will decide on imports after examining the real picture," the agriculture minister said.

"The government is determined to save the farmers, so we will do nothing against their interest," he added.

## Mutual cooperation to attract more US investment

### AmCham president says

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Mutual cooperation between Bangladesh and the US may attract more investment in diversified segments and contribute to the former's transition to a developing nation, said AmCham President Syed Ershad Ahmed at a discussion.

The US is the single largest export market for Bangladeshi goods in the world and the bilateral trade volume in fiscal year 2022-23 was approximately \$14 billion, he informed.

The American Chamber of Commerce in Bangladesh (AmCham) organised the discussion styled "Bilateral Trade Relations for Driving Growth" at The Westin Dhaka on Monday.

The US is still the largest contributor to foreign direct investment in Bangladesh and the biggest source of remittance too, he added.

"The fact is that partnerships are critical and we value the mutual cooperation between the US and Bangladesh," said Ahmed.

Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh Chairman Zaidi Sattar supplemented on the role of World Trade Organization and how both the US and Bangladesh could act in the days ahead in the evolving geo-political environment.

Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association President Faruque Hassan shared improvements Bangladesh made in the last decade on ensuring a safe working place.

He suggested considering a preferential tariff regime similar to the generalized system of preferences for Bangladesh once it makes the United Nations status graduation from a least developed country to a developing nation in 2026.

## 'Worst yet to come' for Europe energy shortages

### Qatar minister says

AFP, Doha

Qatar's energy minister warned on Tuesday the "worst is yet to come" for Europe's oil and gas shortages, saying a warm winter had prevented greater difficulties in recent months.

Saad al-Kaabi and his Saudi counterpart Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman said a lack of investment in oil and gas, as the world tries to transition to cleaner fuels to prevent global warming, risked causing an energy crunch.

"The only thing that saved humanity and Europe this year was a warm winter, and the slowdown in the economy," Qatari Energy Minister Saad Al-Kaabi told the Qatar Economic Forum.

"If the economy starts churning back up in (2024) and you have just a regular winter, I think the worst is yet to come." After Russia's invasion of Ukraine sparked an energy supply crisis, Europe dodged serious problems this past winter largely because of milder-than-expected temperatures.

But Kaabi and Prince Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest oil exporter, both told the conference further problems were looming.

"If (European leaders have) a proper plan and sit down with producers, and oil and gas companies are not demonised, reality will kick in and we'll have a sensible solution," Kaabi said. Qatar has announced a series of major gas supply deals and is engaged in developing North Field, which contains the world's biggest natural gas deposits, raising its production to 126 million tonnes per year by 2027.



The headquarters of the European Central Bank (ECB) in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany. Economic growth in the eurozone edged down in May to a three-month low because of a drop in industrial production, according to a closely watched survey published on Tuesday. PHOTO: AFP/FILE

## India's palm oil imports set to fall to 27-month low

REUTERS, Mumbai

India's palm oil imports in May are set to fall to their lowest in 27 months as its rare premium other edible oils prompted buyers to cancel cargoes and replace them with soybean and sunflower oil, dealers and cargo surveyors said on Tuesday.

The surprising drop in palm oil imports by India, the world's biggest importer of vegetable oils, could bring down palm oil prices. Malaysia and Indonesia, the two largest global producers, may lower their palm oil offers to regain market share from other edible oils.

The benchmark palm oil contract for August delivery on the Bursa Malaysia Derivatives Exchange fell 1.85 per cent to 3,365 ringgit a tonne after Reuters reported the drop in Indian imports.