

Standard Bank holds 379th board meeting

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Standard Bank Ltd yesterday organised the 379th meeting of its board of directors at its head office in Gulshan, Dhaka.

Kazi Akram Uddin Ahmed, chairman of the bank, presided over the meeting, where Kazi Khurram Ahmed, vice chairman of the bank, Kamal Mostafa Chowdhury, Ferdous Ali Khan, Ashok Kumar Saha, Ferozur Rahman, Md Manjur Alam, SAM Hossain, Mohammed Abdul Aziz, Mohammed Shamsul Alam, Gulzar Ahmed, Md Zahedul Hoque, AKM Abdul Alim, Md Abul Hossain, directors, were present.

Among others, Najmul Huq Chaudhury, Golam Hafiz Ahmed and AKM Delwer Hussain, independent directors, Md Habibur Rahman, managing director and CEO, Md Touhidul Alam Khan, additional managing director, Mohammad Rafiqul Islam, deputy managing director and chief operating officer, Md Mohon Miah, head of business development and head of the bank's shariah secretariat, and Md Ali Reza, acting company secretary, were also present.



Kazi Akram Uddin Ahmed, chairman of Standard Bank, presides over the 379th Board of Directors' meeting of the bank at its head office in Gulshan, Dhaka yesterday.

PHOTO: STANDARD BANK

Britain to start talks with Turkey on free trade deal

REUTERS, London

Britain said on Tuesday it intends to start talks with Turkey over refreshing its bilateral free trade deal, with a view to including services and the digital sector in any future agreement.

Britain already has a free trade agreement (FTA) with Turkey, which was rolled over when Britain left the European Union, which the trade ministry said was now outdated.

A review of that agreement has resulted in both sides concluding that there is room for it to be improved with a new deal, the ministry said, although negotiations are not expected to formally begin until next year.

The countries have a trading relationship which was worth 23.5 billion pounds (\$30.7 billion) last year. Business and Trade Secretary Kemi Badenoch said Britain would use the talks to tailor a new FTA to Britain's economic strengths.

"I look forward to using the deal to deepen the UK-Turkey trading relationship, drive economic growth and support businesses up and down the country," she said in a statement.

MGI holds dealers' confce of cement brands in Thailand

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Fresh Cement and Meghnacem Deluxe, two cement brands of the Meghna Group of Industries (MGI), recently organised a "Dealers' Conference 2023" in Pattaya, Thailand to recognise more than 100 top-performing dealers for their brands.

Mohammed Khurshed Alam, executive director of MGI, Md Shah Jamal Sikder, chief sales officer, Md Rahmotullah Khondoker, chief accounts officer, and Kazi Md Mohiuddin, senior general manager, were present, according to a press release.

Fresh Cement was used in three of the most significant bridges, including Kanchpur, Meghna and Gumti, along with Matarbari power plant and some of the other mega-projects in Bangladesh, the company said.



Mohammed Khurshed Alam, executive director of the Meghna Group of Industries, poses for photographs with top-performing dealers of Fresh Cement and Meghnacem Deluxe of the MGI at the dealers' conference in Pattaya, Thailand recently.

PHOTO: MGI

PRICES OF KEY ESSENTIALS IN DHAKA CITY			
	PRICE (JUL 18, 2023)	% CHANGES FROM A MONTH AGO	% CHANGE FROM A YEAR AGO
Fine rice (kg)	Tk 60-Tk 75	0	-2.88 ↓
Coarse rice (kg)	Tk 48-Tk 52	2.04 ↑	0
Loose flour (kg)	Tk 50-Tk 52	-4.67 ↓	20 ↑
Lentil (kg)	Tk 90-Tk 100	0	-11.63 ↓
Soybean (litre)	Tk 162-Tk 165	-4.39 ↓	-4.45 ↓
Potato (kg)	Tk 38-Tk 42	9.59 ↑	45.45 ↑
Onion (kg)	Tk 60-Tk 65	-13.79 ↓	31.58 ↑
Egg (4 pcs)	Tk 46-Tk 50	3.23 ↑	23.08 ↑

SOURCE: TCB

Seven Rings Cement organises sales confce

STAR BUSINESS DESK

The Seven Rings Cement brand organised the "4th Sales Conference 2023" at Sea Pearl Beach Resort & Spa in Cox's Bazar recently.

Tamim Iqbal Khan, captain of the Bangladesh cricket team at One Day Internationals and the brand ambassador, and over 500 employees from around the country participated in the conference, where the best sales executives were awarded, said a press release.

Ikram Ahmed Khan, chairman of parent company Shun Shing Group's Bangladesh operations and managing

director of Shun Shing Group, Hong Kong; S Raihan Ahmed, vice chairman for the Bangladesh operations, Tahmina Ahmed, managing director, Shakib Pasha, deputy managing director, Sanjida Kamal Pasha, Arusha Ahmed Khan and Saif Rahman, directors, and Md Kausar Alam, group chief financial officer and company secretary, attended the conference.

Nantu Kumar Dey, chief technical officer, Md Harun-Ur-Rashid, chief marketing officer, Md Kamrul Ahsan, chief operating officer, and ABM Itteker Alam Siddiqui, general manager, were present.



Ikram Ahmed Khan, chairman of Shun Shing Group's Bangladesh operations, attended a sales conference of the Seven Rings Cement brand at Sea Pearl Beach Resort & Spa in Cox's Bazar recently when sales executives were awarded.

PHOTO: SEVEN RINGS CEMENT

Global stocks drop as China growth worries offset Fed rate hopes

AFP, Hong Kong, China

Most Asian markets sank Tuesday as further weakness in China's economy fuelled worries about the effects on global growth, overshadowing optimism that the United States is winning its battle against inflation and could avoid a recession.

Regional traders extended Monday's retreat sparked by disappointing second-quarter data out of Beijing that missed forecasts badly and highlighted the tough job officials face in getting the country's post-Covid recovery back on track.

And while there is an expectation that fresh stimulus measures are in the pipeline, analysts warned that leaders were limited in how far they could go.

The figures came after last week's reports showing inflation had flatlined, suggesting China was on the brink of a period of painful deflation, while exports plunged for a second straight month.

"You're gonna see some stimulus coming in, which means that the second quarter may have been more of the low, the third quarter a bit

better," Joyce Chang, global head of research at JPMorgan, said on Bloomberg Television.

"But we've taken half a percent off of China's growth and I think that the deflation risks are there."

Hong Kong led losses Tuesday, shedding more than two percent following a five-day rally, as it reopened a day after being shut because of a severe storm.

Shanghai, Sydney, Seoul, Singapore, Manila, Jakarta, Wellington and Taipei also dropped, though Tokyo, Mumbai and Bangkok edged higher. Paris dipped in the morning, while Frankfurt was flat and London edged up.

The losses came despite a positive lead from Wall Street.

In a report on China, Alicia Garcia Herrero and Jianwei Xu at Natixis CIB said in a report: "We are conservative about the extent of the policy support down the road. Fiscal policies may not be easily implemented in the current situation, given the already high public debt and the reduced efficiency of these policies."

They said there was a possibility that the central bank would cut

interest rates again and lower the amount of cash lenders must keep in reserve, allowing them to provide more loans.

But they added: "The effectiveness of the monetary policy space may be limited due to the lack of investor confidence. Currently, the market is awaiting further regulatory relaxation on key sectors, such as the real estate sector, which could help bolster investors' confidence."

Meanwhile, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen warned about the effects of China's weakness on the global economy.

"Many countries do depend on strong Chinese growth to promote growth in their own economies, particularly countries in Asia, and slow growth in China can have some negative spillovers for the United States," she said in a Bloomberg Television interview.

However, she did say she was optimistic about the outlook for the US economy, which she described as being on a "good path".

"Growth has slowed, but our labour market continues to be quite strong. I don't expect a recession," she added.

Will China ever get rich?

FROM PAGE B4

China's National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) did not reply to Reuters questions on growth prospects, structural weaknesses and reform plans.

NDRC head Zheng Shanjie, in a July 4 article in the official "Qiushi" magazine, made a rare reference to the middle-income trap, saying China needed to "accelerate the construction of a modern industrial system" to avoid it.

Zheng was referring to developing nations' struggle to transition from mid- to high-income levels due to rising costs and declining competitiveness.

China's workforce and consumer base are shrinking while the cohort of retirees is expanding. "The demographic problem, hard landing of the property sector, heavy local government debt burden, pessimism of the private sector as well as China-U.S. tensions do not allow us to hold an optimistic view towards mid- to long-term growth," said Wang Jun, chief economist at Huatai Asset Management.

China's National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) did not reply to Reuters questions on growth prospects, structural weaknesses and reform plans.

NDRC head Zheng Shanjie, in a July 4 article in the official "Qiushi" magazine, made a rare reference to the middle-income trap, saying China needed to "accelerate the construction of a modern industrial system" to avoid it.

Zheng was referring to developing nations' struggle to transition from mid- to high-income levels due to rising costs and declining competitiveness.

Economists cite China's electric vehicle boom as evidence of progress, but much of its industrial complex is not upgrading at the same speed. Overseas car sales account for only 1.7 per cent of exports.

"Many observers will look at some of the companies and say, wow, China can come up with all these fantastic products, so the future should be bright. My question is: Do we have enough of those companies?" said Richard Koo, chief economist at the Nomura Research Institute.

Policymakers have said they want household consumption to drive growth, without hinting at concrete steps.

Juan Orts, China economist at Fathom Consulting, said boosting consumer demand might redirect resources away from supporting manufacturing exporters, which partly explains hesitance towards such reforms.

"We don't think authorities will commit to that path," said Orts, describing it as "the way out" of economic doldrums.

Rather, China took steps the other way.

President Xi Jinping's "common prosperity" drive against inequality has encouraged salary reductions in finance and other sectors. Deteriorating city finances prompted pay cuts for civil servants, feeding a deflationary spiral.

Zhao, a manager at a Beijing-based bank, feels she will never get rich, her salary remaining unchanged through several promotions. Instead of working hard, she said, she plans to retire in her 40s to a smaller, cheaper city.

"I missed the golden era for banks," Zhao said on the condition of partial anonymity as she was not authorised to speak to the media.

Many economists have called for better public healthcare, higher pensions and unemployment benefits, and other building blocks for a social safety net to give consumers confidence to save less.

Central bank adviser Cai Fang

called this month for consumption stimulus, including changes to China's residence permits, or hukou, which deny public services to millions of rural migrants in the cities they work in.

Zhu Ning, deputy dean at the Shanghai Advanced Institute of Finance, said improving social welfare could make growth rates of 3-4 per cent more sustainable.

Koo said China's problems are more challenging than Japan's a generation ago, giving policymakers room for error should they seize the "last chance" to reach developed-world living standards.

China, in his assessment, has a "balance sheet recession", with consumers and businesses repaying debt instead of borrowing and investing.

This, he said, is how depressions start and the only cure is "speedy, substantial and sustained" fiscal stimulus, which he did not see as forthcoming given China's debt concerns.

Beyond that, he said stimulus must be productive, and complemented by changes that allow the private sector to emerge from under the shadow of the state, including through better relations with source countries of foreign investment.

But China would need to reverse course.

Infrastructure investment in recent years has generated more debt than growth.

As major economies try to reduce dependence on China, Beijing remains locked in tit-for-tat trade battles, the latest over metals used in semiconductors.

"Every time the US announces some anti-China policy, the Chinese government comes up with an equivalent one. But the Americans are not in the middle income trap. China is," Koo said.

"If Chinese people do not reach their Chinese dreams, perhaps you will have 1.4 billion not very happy people over there, which might be rather destabilising."

Stone import thru Banglabandha

FROM PAGE B4

The tax, which should be paid online, was fixed at Rs 3,000 for 6-wheelers and Rs 5,000 for 10/12-wheelers.

On July 6, the Indian truckers under the banner of Phulbari Border Truck Owners Welfare Association suspended carrying stone to Bangladesh, demonstrated at the port area of the Indian territory and demanded imposing the same tax on Nepalese trucks.

Imports resumed on July 7 when local traders stepped in, but it got suspended again on July 11 as

Nepalese trucks were still kept out of the purview of the tax.

Nepalese, Indian traders sat with the agitating leaders of the truck owners' association on the Indian side to settle the issue, but it failed to solve the problem, said Kudrat-e-Khuda Milon, general secretary of the Importer and Exporters Group of Banglabandha Land Port.

The port wore a deserted look since the suspension of stone import on July 11, affecting the earnings of workers engaged in stone handling, said Aktarul Alam, former president

of Banglabandha Land Port Workers' Union.

He urged the government to take steps to resume the import for the sake of the port as well as the workers of the channel.

"It's an issue of the Indian territory," Showkat Ali Mia, administrative official of Banglabandha Land Port, told The Daily Star.

The suspension could not hurt export or import of other items through the port, he said, but he could not confirm when stone import may resume again.