

Prime Bank inks deal with Star Tech

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Prime Bank signed an agreement with Star Tech Ltd, a computer and tech retailer in the country, at the former's head office in Dhaka recently.

Under this agreement, the bank's credit cardholders will enjoy equal monthly instalment facility of up to 12 months at zero percent interest.

Moreover, new credit cardholders will enjoy discounts of up to 15 percent on online purchases from the tech retail company. Nazeem A Choudhury, deputy managing director of the bank, and Sheikh Shohel Akhter, assistant general manager (finance and accounts) of the tech retailer, signed the deal, said a press release.

Masudul Haque Bhuiyan, head of cards and alternative delivery channel of the bank, and Aminul Karim Khan, manager of human resources department of the tech retailer, along with other high officials of both organisations were present.



Nazeem A Choudhury, deputy managing director of Prime Bank, and Sheikh Shohel Akhter, assistant general manager (finance and accounts) of Star Tech, exchange signed documents of an agreement at the former's head office in Dhaka recently.

PHOTO: PRIME BANK

India seeks more natural gas

REUTERS, Singapore

India is seeking additional volumes of natural gas and has asked utilities to expedite completion of power plant maintenance, as part of emergency steps to stop electricity outages, according to a government note seen by Reuters.

The move follows extension of an emergency law that forces power plants running on imported coal to maximise output, as record power demand in August due to unusually dry weather, and a sharp decline in hydro and wind energy output resulted in the country's widest electricity shortage in 16 months.

"States may ensure that all gas based power plants with whom they have power purchase agreements must be brought into use, during high demand days and non solar hours," the power ministry note dated September 5 said.

Record power demand due to unusually dry weather and a sharp decline in hydro and wind energy output resulted in a huge electricity shortage

"All efforts to be made to bring back the units under forced outage as quickly as possible," it said, adding states should try to expedite commissioning of new renewable and thermal power plants.

The move could boost demand for natural gas, and push India to seek more LNG cargoes on the spot market. India's LNG imports have fallen for three consecutive financial years ended March 2023, government data shows.

"Additional arrangement for gas, for running gas based stations, from GAIL with tenders for advanced procurement for generation has been planned, during upcoming high power demand months," the ministry said.

India's power demand has been growing rapidly after the pandemic, with strong economic growth boosting demand from factories and the summer heat increasing household consumption.

Coal accounted for over 73 percent of India's power generation during the year ended March 2023, while renewable energy sources including wind and solar make up over 11 percent of total generation.



Naveedul Islam Khan, country director of Hemas Consumer Brands, and actress Nusrat Imroz Tisha exchange signed documents of an agreement at a hotel in Dhaka recently.

PHOTO: HEMAS CONSUMER BRANDS

Tisha becomes brand ambassador of coconut oil brand Kolombo

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Hemas Consumer Brands recently signed an agreement with actress Nusrat Imroz Tisha to make her brand ambassador of the company's newly launched coconut oil brand "Kolombo".

Naveedul Islam Khan, country director of the consumer brand company, and actress Tisha, signed the deal to this end at a hotel in Dhaka, said a press release.

"I am very delighted to represent 'Kolombo'. I am sure that by ensuring and maintaining its quality, this brand will definitely win the hearts of the consumers within a short period of time," said the actress.

"Nusrat Imroz Tisha is a very popular and talented actress of the country who is loved by everyone. We strongly believe that her association will help the brand "Kolombo" connect better with the consumers," said Khan.

Keyed up by the success of "Kumarika", a coconut oil brand, the company launched "Kolombo" in the local markets.

AB Bank signs MoU with Trinamul Nari Uddokta Society

STAR BUSINESS DESK

AB Bank Ltd signed an agreement with Trinamul Nari Uddokta Society at the bank's head office in Dhaka on Tuesday.

Under this agreement, the bank will provide training to the women entrepreneurs and provide them loan facilities on easy terms and conditions.

Iftekhar Enam Awal, head of corporate and SME of the bank, and Himangshu Mitra, chief executive officer of the society, inked the deal, said a press release.

Tarique Afzal, president and managing director of the bank, and other senior officials of both the organisations were present.



Iftekhar Enam Awal, head of corporate and SME of AB Bank, and Himangshu Mitra, chief executive officer of Trinamul Nari Uddokta Society, sign an agreement at the bank's head office in Dhaka on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AB BANK

Asian markets drop as oil spike fuels inflation worry

AFP, Hong Kong

Most Asian markets fell Wednesday as a jump in oil prices to 10-month highs rekindled worries of another US Federal Reserve interest rate hike.

The selling came after US traders returned from a long weekend to spark a sell-off after Saudi Arabia and Russia said they would extend crude output cuts to the end of the year.

The news, which surprised some owing to the length of time, sent both main oil contracts to levels not seen since November, with Brent above \$90 for the first time this year. They were marginally higher Wednesday.

The price spike hit hopes the Fed's monetary tightening drive was over following a string of data indicating more than a year of rate hikes had managed to bring inflation down from four-decade highs and softened the labour market.

Observers said higher energy costs would complicate the central

bank's work as they accounted for a large part of the surge in prices in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"Rising oil prices are officially the new inflation stoker," said Stephen Innes at SPI Asset Management. "Everyone notices that this rally feels different, suggesting that 'Oil', the Great Inflationary Dragon, is not yet slain." Meanwhile, US monetary policymakers offered differing outlooks on the way forward.

Fed Governor Christopher Waller said decision-makers had room to stand back to assess the impact of past tightening, telling CNBC: "There was nothing that is saying we need to do anything imminent anytime soon." But Cleveland Fed boss Loretta Mester said she could "well imagine, from what I see so far, that we might have to go a bit higher".

Rates are already at a two-decade high, and some analysts warn that further increases could risk tipping the world's top economy into recession.

Rupee weakens for third day

REUTERS, Mumbai

The Indian rupee weakened for a third straight session on Wednesday as elevated US Treasury yields and rising global crude oil prices weighed on the local unit.

The rupee closed at 83.1325 against the US dollar, down 0.11 percent from its close of 83.04 on Tuesday. During the session, the currency dropped to 83.18, its lowest level in more than 10 months.

The rupee could take a breather tomorrow, a foreign exchange trader at a foreign bank said.

Expectations that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) may step in to defend the rupee around the 83.20-25 levels and a slight reversal in crude prices could support the local unit, the trader added.

Import of woven fabrics

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the last six months. He also pointed to shorter lead times and rising competition as another factor.

Citing the example of a major Spanish brand, Mahin said it wants deliveries within a maximum of two weeks. As a result, local garment makers buy the fabrics from the local markets instead of importing it, he said.

The forecast is that there is pressure from a lot of work orders up to October and production capacity in his mill may go up to 80 percent to meet the demand, he said.

In case of knitwear, local spinners for many years have been able to supply more than 90 percent of the raw materials. So, they have been able to enjoy a shorter lead time for a long time.

AK Azad, chairman and chief executive officer of Ha-Meem

Group, said the demand for non-denim fabrics produced locally has been rising mainly to maintain the lead time because the business was shifting from China to Bangladesh.

International retailers and brands want delivery of goods at the earliest, he said.

Monsoor Ahmed, chief executive officer of the BTMA, said sourcing of fabrics from the domestic markets reduced lead time significantly.

More importantly, garment makers can also buy fabrics through deferred payments and frequently seek replacements for the fabrics in case of quality issues, which would not have been possible in case of imported fabrics, he said.

Bangladeshi knitwear items have been performing strongly for many years because of the local availability of raw materials, said Md

Fazlul Hoque, managing director of Plummy Fashions Ltd.

They are beating the odds of not having the geographical proximity with major export destinations and not even having direct shipping lines, he said.

In case of woven items, the same may happen soon, he said.

"We are reducing dependence on imported fabrics," said Faruque Hassan, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

Many composite mills can supply garments even with 30 days of lead time as they have raw materials on hand. But such cases are rare, he added.

BTMA President Mohammad Ali Khokon said the demand for locally-made woven fabrics has been increasing but a clearer picture would be available after the next quarter.



People take pictures of the Beijing Stock Exchange.

PHOTO: AFP/FILE

Digital literacy, awareness

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According to him, bKash is not just a digital payment provider but a catalyst for change in Bangladesh's financial landscape.

"We are on a mission to empower people with digital financial solutions while ensuring that the transition is smooth and beneficial for all," said Ali.

Currently, bKash is running a campaign to inspire the resilience of the Bangladeshi people. The campaign titled "Amader bKash Thekay Ke" portrays the unstoppable spirit of people towards success, he said.

The campaign symbolically depicts people's indomitable strength that advancement is not limited to any particular person, rather it is for institutions, society, and the nation, he said.

"The economic development

of Bangladesh and the journey of bKash in the past 12 years are tied to the same thread. Through this campaign, bKash salutes the indomitable spirit of the people through 'Amader bKash Thekay Ke' campaign," he said.

Research conducted by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) has shown that bKash has contributed to improving child nutrition, he said.

It has enabled allowing fathers or earning members to send money instantly to the northern parts of Bangladesh, compared to the previous weekly or monthly remittance cycles, he said.

"Ultimately, bKash's primary objective is to ensure that customers feel the smoothest possible experience. We also evaluate the broader impact of our services on people's lives," he said.

Saudi, Russia extend

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distributed Sunday, noting that "although persistently poor economic data from China has continued to weigh on sentiment, there is little doubt that fundamentals are tightening."

Justin Alexander, director of the consultancy Khalij Economics, said: "The additional cuts do appear to have boosted prices and the supply is looking tight in Q4 despite rising output from Iran and some other countries."

"However, the effort has come at a cost to the kingdom, with the reduction of its supply by 10 percent (on top of the 10 percent in cuts coming from the October and April Opec+ meetings)." Saudi daily production is at approximately nine million bpd, far below its reported daily capacity of 12 million bpd.

In August, oil firm Saudi Aramco announced profits of \$30.08 billion for the second quarter of 2023, a fall of 38 percent from the same period

last year when prices surged after Russia invaded Ukraine.

The decline "mainly reflected the impact of lower crude oil prices and weakening refining and chemicals margins", the firm, the jewel of the Saudi economy, said at the time.

Aramco chief executive Amin Nasser told reporters that despite recent cuts the firm had adequate supplies to meet customers' needs.

Nasser also said the firm's "mid to long term view remains unchanged", predicting global demand to jump on the back of a broader economic recovery and highlighting demand from China that he described as "stronger than expected".

Saudi Arabia owns 90 percent of Aramco's shares and is depending on its revenue for Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's sweeping economic and social reform programme known as Vision 2030, which aims to shift the economy away from fossil fuels.