

Islami Bank opens 12 sub-branches

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Islami Bank Bangladesh launched a total of 12 sub-branches with modern banking facilities in 11 districts across the country.

The sub-branches are located at the ECB Chattar in Dhaka, Upashahar and Tanore in Rajshahi, Galachipa in Patuakhali, Amtoli in Barguna, Mohammadpur in Magura, Hili in Dinajpur, Zakigonj in Sylhet, Atrai in Naogaon, Ataikula in Pabna, Kalamarchara in Cox's Bazar, and Reazuddin Bazar in Chattogram.

Mohammed Monirul Moula, managing director and CEO of the bank, virtually inaugurated the sub-branches as chief guest from the bank's head office in Dhaka

yesterday, said a press release.

"Trusted by 2.30 crore customers, the bank is significantly contributing to the economic development of the country with the highest deposit, investment, import, export and the collection of maximum remittance," said Moula.

"The bank is playing a leading role in creating a cashless society, as announced by the government, through the use of the bank's Cellfin app and other digital products and services."

He mentioned that the bank has provided investments through its 'Rural Development Scheme' to 1.7 million customers, of which 92 percent are women, across 34,000 villages.

Employment opportunities for more than 1 crore people



PHOTO: ISLAMI BANK BANGLADESH

Mohammed Monirul Moula, managing director and CEO of Islami Bank Bangladesh, cuts a ribbon to virtually inaugurate the bank's 12 sub-branches from its head office in Dhaka yesterday.

have been created through large and small industries, SMEs and other projects that the bank has invested in.

Muhammad Qaisar Ali, JQM Habibullah and Md Altaf Hossain, additional managing directors of the bank, attended

the programme as special guests. Md Maksudur Rahman, senior executive vice-president of the bank, presided over the event, where Md Nayer Azam, Mohammad Jamal Uddin Mazumder, Abul Faiz Muhammad Kamaluddin,

Mohammed Shabbir, Kazi Md Rezaul Karim and Miftah Uddin, deputy managing directors, alongside Taher Ahmed Chowdhury, CAMLCO of the bank, and Md Mizanur Rahman Bhuiyan, executive vice-president, were also present.



ATM Tahmiduzzaman, deputy managing director and company secretary of United Commercial Bank (UCB), and Faruk Ahmed, vice-chairman of Bidyanondo Foundation, exchange signed documents of a memorandum of understanding at the bank's head office in Dhaka yesterday.

PHOTO: UNITED COMMERCIAL BANK

UCB inks deal with Bidyanondo Foundation

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United Commercial Bank (UCB) yesterday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Bidyanondo Foundation, a charitable organisation.

ATM Tahmiduzzaman, deputy managing director and company secretary of UCB, and Faruk Ahmed, vice-chairman of the foundation, inked the MoU at the bank's head office in Dhaka, the bank said in a press release.

According to this memorandum, UCB will provide financial assistance to the foundation for the establishment of special storage facilities for agricultural produce conservation.

Rejaul Karim Siddique, coordinator of UCB's agro CSR project and presenter of the "Matir O Manush" programme on Bangladesh Television, and Abul Kalam Azad, executive vice-president and head of brand marketing and corporate affairs division of UCB, attended the event.

Among others, Mohsinur Rahman, executive vice-president and head of the SME banking division of the bank, Saiful Islam, finance officer of the foundation, and Nitish Goldar, food officer, were also present.

Midland Bank strikes MoU with Zoomlion

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Midland Bank recently signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Zoomlion Heavy Industry Bangladesh Co, a construction equipment manufacturing company and subsidiary of Zoomlion China.

Mohammad Javed Tarek Khan, head of the institutional banking division of the bank, and Simon Zheng, country head of Zoomlion Heavy Industry Bangladesh Co, inked the MoU at the bank's corporate head office in Gulshan, read a press release.

Under the MoU, Zoomlion Heavy Industry Bangladesh will use the robust online cash management solution of MDB, "Midland Cash Management

(MCM)", to conduct their daily business and cash management activities nationwide.

Founded in 1992 in China, Zoomlion Heavy Industry Science & Technology Co is mainly engaged in the research and development and manufacturing of construction machinery, agricultural machinery and other high-tech equipment and new construction materials.

Among others, Prashanta Kumar Saha, head of the corporate liability unit of the bank, and Md Sakhawat Hossain, chief business officer, and Hasan Intiaj Islam, human resource and admin supervisor of the construction equipment manufacturing company, were also present.



Mohammad Javed Tarek Khan, head of institutional banking division of Midland Bank, and Simon Zheng, country head of Zoomlion Heavy Industry Bangladesh Co, exchange signed documents of a memorandum of understanding at the bank's corporate head office in Gulshan recently.

PHOTO: MIDLAND BANK

Dollar hits one-month high

REUTERS, Singapore/London

The dollar rose on Tuesday as investors tempered their expectations for a March rate cut from the Federal Reserve, while the pound and yen fell as inflationary pressures subsided.

Against a basket of currencies, the dollar rose 0.47 percent to 103.13, a one-month high. It gained 0.2 percent overnight in subdued trading during a US public holiday on Monday.

The euro fell 0.54 percent to \$1.0892, set for its steepest one-day percentage drop in two weeks.

Comments from European Central Bank officials downplaying the idea of early rate cuts overshadowed the outlook for borrowing costs globally.

The ECB's Joachim Nagel said it was too early to talk about cuts, and his Austrian colleague Robert Holzmann said markets should not bank on borrowing costs falling this year.

"The hawkish ECB commentaries last night have fuelled concerns that market pricing for the Fed rate path may also be aggressive," said Charu Chanana, head of currency strategy at Saxo in Singapore.

"Some safe-haven demand also likely to be at play with Red Sea disruptions escalating."

US bond yields rose on Tuesday after Monday's holiday, with the 10-year up 6 basis points at 4.004 percent, supporting the dollar.

Jane Foley, head of FX strategy at Rabobank, said a bleak outlook for Germany's economy, which shrank 0.3 percent last year, was likely another factor weighing on the euro.

"With budget cuts coming, it doesn't look good for the German economy in terms of growth for the year ahead," she said.

ECB data on Tuesday showed consumer expectations of euro zone inflation three years ahead fell sharply in a November poll to 2.2 percent, from 2.5 percent.

Sterling was last down 0.53 percent at \$1.266 after data showed British wage growth slowed sharply in the three months through November, supporting the idea that the Bank of England will cut rates heavily this year.

The dollar was 0.49 percent higher against the Japanese yen, at 146.52 yen to the dollar. The yen fell after figures showed Japan's wholesale price index stayed flat in December from a year ago, with the rate of change slowing for the 12th straight month.

PRICES OF KEY ESSENTIALS IN DHAKA CITY			
	PRICE (JAN 16, 2024)	% CHANGES FROM A MONTH AGO	% CHANGE FROM A YEAR AGO
Fine rice (kg)	Tk 62-Tk 75	5.38 ↑	3.01 ↑
Coarse rice (kg)	Tk 50-Tk 52	2.00 ↑	4.08 ↑
Loose flour (kg)	Tk 45-Tk 50	0	-20.83 ↓
Lentil (kg)	Tk 105-Tk 110	0	4.88 ↑
Soybean (litre)	Tk 155-Tk 160	0	-6.80 ↓
Potato (kg)	Tk 50-Tk 60	10.00 ↑	144.44 ↑
Onion (kg)	Tk 70-Tk 90	-36.00 ↓	100.00 ↑
Egg (4 pcs)	Tk 42-Tk 45	0	6.10 ↑

SOURCE: TCB

China to uphold top position in shipbuilding: experts

ANN/CHINA DAILY

China will continue to uphold its dominant position in the global shipbuilding market this year, leveraging its robust supply chain capabilities and focusing on intelligent and green advancements, market watchers and shipbuilders said.

Chinese shipyards have made significant strides in advancing their manufacturing technologies, particularly in high value-added segments, they said, adding that the country has demonstrated its capability in building various types of vessels — such as mega container ships, cruise liners and car carriers — and adopted green fuels, seizing more market share than its South Korean and Japanese rivals.

Their comments came as the latest data showed that China

maintained its top position in the global shipbuilding market last year, with strong growth in both output and new orders.

China's shipbuilding output reached 42.32 million deadweight tons in 2023, a year-on-year increase of 11.8 percent, according to figures released on Monday by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology. The output accounted for 50.2 percent of the global total.

Also in 2023, new orders surged 56.4 percent year-on-year to 71.2 million deadweight tons, accounting for 66.6 percent of the global total, the data showed.

Li Yanqing, secretary general of the Beijing-based China Association of the National Shipbuilding Industry, noted that China is now capable of building all major types of vessels found worldwide.

The country has essentially bridged the technological divide with South Korea and Japan in the construction of high value-added ships, such as liquefied natural gas carriers and offshore wind turbine installation vessels, he said.

Li Yunbo, a professor at Shanghai Maritime University, said that China's shipbuilding industry "has shifted toward domestic self-reliance, especially in core technologies, components and new materials". This strategy has effectively shortened the time taken for building ships and reduced project costs, he said.

Chinese shipyards have also transformed this ability into a notable advantage. By sourcing materials locally, they have stimulated the growth of their industrial chain and enhanced profitability, he added.

Annual import of consumer products

FROM PAGE B4

"With changing dietary preferences, the popularity of tree nuts is expected to increase," the report said, adding that total tax incidence (TTI) for almonds and walnuts in Bangladesh ranges from 58.6 percent to 89.32 percent.

It said the demand for imported processed fruit, specifically dates, has steadily risen during the past five years.

The USDA cited soup and other food preparations and said Bangladesh imports a variety of food preparations to meet the diverse culinary preferences of consumers, adding that imports of such items soared from 2018 to 2022.

The food preparations category encompasses beverage concentrates, soy-based food preparations, stabilisers for milk and creamer, and various food supplements, it added.

On dairy products, the report said Bangladesh's dairy market had grown to \$3 billion.

The expansion is fueled by the growing middle class, expanding urbanisation, and increasing consumption, creating market opportunities for milk and cream powder, whey, lactose syrup, malt extracts, and food preparations, said the USDA, adding total dairy product imports increased by 44 percent over the past five years.

Besides, the growth of restaurants focusing on global cuisine has resulted in an increased need for condiments and sauces.

Imported condiments and seasonings including soy sauce, tomato ketchup, mustard flour and meal, prepared mustard, and vinegar, the report said.

The US agency said market demand for bakery goods, cereals,

coffee, roasted and extracted processed vegetables, mainly onion powder, and fruit and vegetable juices was also growing.

"Increasing consumer demand for convenience, shifting lifestyles, a preference for coffee over tea, and heightened health consciousness is driving demand," it said.

Shaheen Khan, chief business development officer at Gemcon Group, which runs Meena Bazar, said the income of a section of consumers is growing.

"A section of consumers are showing interest. Aspiration among the middle class is rising. Nowadays, we see demand for barbecue-related items rise during winter," said Khan, former chief executive of Meena Bazar.

But the demand for the imported items is yet to grow among mass people. It is still urban centric, he added.

USD shortage, inflation

FROM PAGE B1

percent after remaining at more than 9 percent since March that year, showed data from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

"These factors triggered a slowdown in the demand for low displacement motorcycles," Data added.

On the other hand, demand witnessed a marked shift towards high displacement motorcycles, redefining the contours of the market in the process.

This could be because higher-income households remain somewhat immune to inflation, meaning that demand in the premium segment is more or less unaffected, Datta said.

Still, Runner's sales slumped 40 percent year-on-year to Tk 662 crore in FY23, with the company incurring losses of about Tk 96 crore, the first time it recorded a loss in at least 10 years.

With a production capacity of around 500 units per day, Runner manufactures nine series of motorcycles that come in 40 models with engine displacements of 50 to 200 cubic centimetres.

Runner also produces five models of three-wheelers powered by liquified petroleum gas and diesel.

But despite having suffered a tough year in fiscal 2022-23, industry people believe the business will have huge potential in the coming years thanks to the introduction of supportive policy measures.

The industry has already witnessed fresh investments of around Tk 2,500 crore ever since the formulation of the Automobile Industry Development Policy 2021, they said.

As per the policy, motorcycle manufacturers alongside three-wheeler and four-wheeler assemblers can enjoy reduced tariff on raw material imports.

With an annual production capacity of about 2,400 units, Aftab Automobiles currently assembles private and commercial vehicles designed by Japan's Toyota and Hino brands.

The company's sales soared 66 percent to Tk 118 crore in FY23,

registering increased profit of Tk 41 lakh compared to Tk 10 lakh the year prior.

Shafiqul Islam, chairman of Aftab Automobiles, informed that the commercial vehicle segment is facing a volatile business environment in a rapidly changing and competitive landscape.

The nationwide lockdowns due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the impacts of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war have had a distressing effect across all sectors of the automobile industry, he said.

"However, we believe the present impact is temporary. We predict to overcome the current economic environment within the next year," Islam added.

He also said the construction of the Padma Bridge and other major infrastructure projects would have a huge economic impact on the country and its automobile industry.

The Padma Bridge connected the country's southwestern region to the capital and, as a result, a revolutionary change occurred in the transport sector.

So, as transport companies are operating on new routes, there is growing demand for air-conditioned and non-air-conditioned buses, Islam added.

IFAD Autos saw its sales slip 4 percent year-on-year to Tk 903 crore in FY23, incurring losses of Tk 15 crore for the first time in at least 12 years. The company logged profits of Tk 41 crore in fiscal 2021-22.

IFAD Autos imports different models of finished vehicles manufactured by Ashok Leyland alongside completely knocked-down units and spare parts of the Indian brand.

The company also deals in Farmtrac brand agro-machinery and the related spare parts imported from Escorts Limited.

Sales of another listed automaker, Atlas Bangladesh, nosedived 98 percent year-on-year to Tk 1.54 crore in FY23, when it incurred losses of Tk 9.6 crore following losses of Tk 4.8 crore the previous year.

Fears disrupt

FROM PAGE B4

Vessels supplying liquefied natural gas (LNG) from Qatar are among the many ships forced to sail around Africa via the Cape of Good Hope. That diversion can add about nine days to the normally 18-day trip from Qatar to northwest Europe.

Four tankers used for shipments of Qatari LNG have resumed course after pausing for several days, LSEG shiptracking data showed on Tuesday.

LNG tanker Al Rekyat has resumed sailing through the Red Sea and is heading to Qatar, the data showed, after having been stopped since January 13 along its Red Sea route.

The vessels Al Ghariya, Al Huwaila and Al Nuaman, loaded with Qatari LNG, were also on the move, but had changed course to head south even though they are still signalling the Suez Canal as their destinations, the data showed. Attacks by Yemen's Houthis militants on ships in the Red Sea are disrupting maritime trade through the Suez Canal, with some vessels re-routing to a much longer East-West route via the southern tip of Africa.

LNG shipments

FROM PAGE B4

He added: "(Military intervention) will not bring an end for this, will not contain it. So the contrary, I think will create... a further escalation."

His comments come after US and British forces hit scores of targets across Yemen on Friday following weeks of attacks by the Iran-backed rebels in response to Israel's war with Hamas militants in the Palestinian territory.

Then on Sunday, US forces shot down a Houthi cruise missile targeting an American destroyer, and on Monday a US-owned cargo ship in the Gulf of Oman was hit by another Houthi missile.

The Houthis had been targeting what they deemed Israeli-linked shipping but after Friday's attacks, they declared US and British interests "legitimate targets".