A worker checks on the molting status of crabs to harvest soft-shell ones stocked individually inside perforated plastic boxes at a farm in Datinakhali village of Satkhira's Shyamnagar upazila. Soft-shell crab does not refer specifically to any particular species but to the physiological state of any crab that has just undergone molting. They are considered a culinary delicacy with high market value, often ranging up to seven times the price of comparable hard-shell crabs, according to a 2018 study. The photos were taken recently. PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Walton to make mobile phone circuit boards

MAHMUDUL HASAN

The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) has recently decided to give approval to Walton Digi-Tech Industries to locally manufacture printed circuit boards (PCBs) specifically for handsets.

This will enable the local electronics manufacturing giant to become the first Bangladeshi company to make the product at home.

A PCB is made of insulating material on which various electronic components such as processors and sensors are placed to be connected and controlled using conductive pathways etched on its surface.

It supports compact, layered designs to fit within the profiles of slim devices and is crucial for reliability, durability, and performance, impacting overall device functionality and user experience.

Walton already manufactures PCBs for computers, mobile phone chargers and batteries. This will be its first facility manufacturing multilayer PCBs for mobile phones.

The company will get preliminary approval to import raw materials and make the PCBs for six months and if the quality checks out during this time, it will get final approval.

Such approval would open a path to enhance value addition in the manufacture of mobile phones in Bangladesh, which is mainly dependent on imports for the majority of components.

The value added by PCBs may represent around 5 percent to 7 percent of the total manufacturing cost of a mobile phone, depending on the device's specifications and features, according to industry people.

It is a good step for increasing value addition in the local mobile manufacturing industry, said Brig Gen Mohammad Moniruzzaman Jewel, director general of the BTRC's Spectrum Division.

Walton manufactures numerous electronics and digital devices that require PCBs.

The company will get preliminary approval to import raw materials and make the PCBs for six months and if the quality checks out during this time, it will get final approval.

If other companies source PCBs from Walton, it will save a significant amount of foreign currency for the country, he added.

Earlier, at the end of February, a delegation comprising BTRC officials, led by the Spectrum Division commissioner, visited Walton's manufacturing facility and prepared a report.

According to the report, they found adequate equipment, space, testing devices and manpower for the manufacture of the PCBs for mobile phones.

Manufacturing PCBs would enable Walton to qualify for VAT rebates.

To qualify, a manufacturer must not only establish a facility adequately equipped to produce the PCBs, chargers, batteries, housings and casings but also produce at least 50 percent of their components.

Walton Digi-Tech Industries started its journey in 2018 through the manufacture of desktop computers, laptops, mobile phones, networking devices, monitors, projectors, motherboards, data storage devices, peripherals, wearables, workstations and tablet PCs.

HC orders to conclude ex-Robi CEO's case in three months

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The High Court has directed a Dhaka court to conclude the trial of a case filed by Robi Axiata's former CEO Mahtab Uddin Ahmed against the mobile operator within three months.

Ahmed lodged the lawsuit against the telecom operator and its board chairman and former group CEO, seeking Tk 227 crore in retirement benefits and compensation for his "wrongful dismissal" in May 2022.

The HC order came recently after Robi had moved a civil revision petition before it against an order passed by the Joint District Judge's Court in Dhaka that hasn't considered the additional issues proposed by the operator.

Ahmed lodged the lawsuit seeking Tk 227 crore in retirement benefits and compensation for his "wrongful dismissal" in May 2022

The HC bench of Justice Md Mozibur Rahman Miah and Justice Md Bashir Ullah accepted all the proposed issues presented by Robi in addition to the issues framed earlier by the lower court.

The apex court also instructed the Dhaka court to finish the trial in three months considering the overall facts and circumstances of the case, said Ashfaqur Rahman, a lawyer for Ahmed.

Mamum Chowdhury, who represented Robi, said, "Upon hearing from both parties, the Hon'ble High Court Division was pleased to dispose of the rule with a direction upon the subordinate court to consider and frame the issues that were suggested by Robi."

"This addresses Robi's concerns and ensures that Robi's contentions and suggested issues are taken into account by the subordinate court during the course of the trial."

Ahmed was appointed as CEO of Robi as the first Bangladeshi to lead a major private mobile network company in 2016. During his tenure, he led the merger of Robi with Airtel and the listing of the company on the stock market in 2020.

STOCKS (WEEK-ON WEEK)

DSEX ▲	CASPI ▲
1.76%	1.48%
5,615.65	16,051.39

COMMODITIES (AS OF FRIDAY)

Gold ▼	Oil ▼
$2,302.57	$77.99
(per ounce)	(per barrel)

ASIAN MARKETS (FRIDAY CLOSINGS)

MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI
▼ 0.98%	▼ 0.09%	▼ 0.12%	▼ 0.26%
73,878.15	38,236.07	3,292.93	3,104.82

DESCO MIC gets Tier 3 certification

STAR BUSINESS DESK

The Dhaka Electric Supply Company Limited's (DESCO's) Master Information Centre (MIC) has received Tier 3 certification in both design and facility from the Uptime Institute of the USA.

Although numerous organisations have attained Tier III design certification, DESCO stands out as the first to secure both TCDD (Tier Certification of Design Documents) and TCCF (Tier Certification of Constructed Facility), according to a press release.

The 4,000 square foot DESCO MIC project, is led by Senior Manager Mahruba Chowdhury, a PMP certified engineer.

DESCO has fortified its infrastructure with diverse technological advancements by integrating supervisory control and data acquisition, and unified metering system and outage communication and management system. Among others, senior officials from DESCO and Oculin Tech BD were also present.

PHOTO: SOUTHEAST BANK

Nuruddin Md Sadeque Hossain, managing director of Southeast Bank, and Hasnain Rafiq, chief operating officer of FirstTrip, exchange signed documents of an agreement at the bank's head office in Dhaka recently.

Southeast Bank, FirstTrip strike deal on payment gateway service

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Southeast Bank recently signed an agreement with FirstTrip Ltd to integrate the bank's e-commerce payment gateway service with the latter's payment systems.

Nuruddin Md Sadeque Hossain, managing director of the bank, and Hasnain Rafiq, chief operating officer of FirstTrip, inked the deal at the bank's head office in Dhaka, the bank said in a press release.

Through this collaboration, FirstTrip will enable its customers to seamlessly use VISA and Mastercard for online payments.

Travel enthusiasts can now conveniently pay for a variety of services, including flight bookings, hotel reservations, holiday packages, cruise bookings, and more, with secure and efficient payment solutions provided by Southeast Bank.

Among others, Md Masum Uddin Khan and Abidur Rahman Chowdhury, deputy managing directors of the bank, along with other senior officials from both organisations were also present.

Will there be any respite

FROM PAGE B1

This is not good news for industrialists either.

Over the past two years, they had to accommodate the increased price of electricity and gas to run factories. Since January 2023, consumers have seen four rounds of hikes in power prices.

A further increase will only add to the woes of entrepreneurs.

"This is not good news at all. We have been registering increased production costs for the last two years because of higher prices of electricity, gas, and increased wages," said Md Fazlul Hoque, managing director of Plummy Fashions Ltd, a knitwear exporter.

"This is making us uncompetitive," he added.

Hoque, also a former president of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said the production cost at his factory has risen by at least 10 percent.

"This is huge from the perspective of exports," he said. "Exports of China and Vietnam are growing in the US market. Bangladesh is only losing. We are failing to compete with them."

He said the deprecation of taka over the last two years provided some benefits to exporters but they could not reap the full advantage.

"This is because we have to import raw materials for exports," he added.

Hoque said many discussions are being held with a focus on increasing revenue collection.

"And though I understand that improving revenue collection is necessary, no one is raising the issue of cost reduction," he added.

Costs are also an issue in the case of the power sector.

The government has been bearing a high burden for the high cost of electricity production and required subsidies, which are projected to be worth Tk 35,000 crore in the current fiscal year of 2023-24, mainly due to the capacity charge paid to private power producers.

CAB President Rahman said there are two ways to reduce subsidies.

"Either you increase prices or bring down the cost. There is a lack of transparency and accountability in the power sector. The question is whether the power is purchased from private producers at competitive rates. Prices may be inflated," he added.

Rahman, a former chairman of the Anti-Corruption Commission, said the government created an overcapacity for power production which led to increased cost of production.

Because of overcapacity, capacity charges are being paid to idle power plants, he said. This is one of the major reasons behind high subsidies for electricity production.

"The IMF was supposed to pay attention to these areas and suggest the government reduce overspending and ensure transparency in the sector. Instead of that, transferring the burden of subsidies onto the consumers is unjust," Rahman said.

"Increasing prices will encourage irrational expenses. However, we would have no objection if the prices are raised after addressing all these issues," he added.

"How long will the capacity charge be given?" questioned Monzur Hossain, research director of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), while urging the government to get rid of capacity payments to private power producers.

He said any spike in electricity prices affects both the rich and poor.

"But it hurts the poor more than the rich. So, the government should explore how it can provide subsidies to the poor," Hossain added.

He also questioned the timing of the plan to hike electricity prices as the economy is grappling with high inflation, sluggish domestic demand and persistent pressure on its external account.

"At present, prices are already at elevated levels. At this point, it will not be wise to hike the power tariff. Inflation will rise with the hike in the prices of electricity. This will have an economywide effect," Hossain said.

If so, common people, who have already seen a gradual deterioration of their purchasing capacity and subsequent erosion of living standards, seem to be getting no respite from the price shocks.

Rancon rolls out six models of Mercedes

FROM PAGE B1

"Although the electric car market in Bangladesh is not big, this segment will dominate in the future. Therefore, we have launched six new EVs," Chowdhury Mohammad Nabil Hasan, head of marketing at Rancon Motors, told The Daily Star.

In recent years, German automotive manufacturers Audi and BMW, and Chinese giant BYD have launched EVs in Bangladesh.

"EVs will be the future market and this segment will end cars' reliance on fossil fuels," Hasan added.

Around 120 EVs of brands such as Tesla, Audi and Porsche have been registered with the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) since September 2022 when the EV registration was introduced in the country.

The official said the government is encouraging the import of EVs, charging only 89 percent duty whereas the import tariff for cars dependent on fossil fuels ranges from 143 percent to 800 percent.

According to Hasan, Mercedes Benz EVs will be priced between Tk 2.50 crore and Tk 3.50 crore. "EVs don't need petrol or octane refills and don't require servicing like regular cars."

He believes Mercedes Benz EVs will be able to establish their footprint in the market despite higher prices.

The company is targeting businessmen and high-income individuals for the EVs.

To facilitate the move to EVs, Rancon Motors teamed up with Genex Infrastructure and set up 21 EV charging stations, including seven in Dhaka and 14 in other important locations across the country, by April 2024.

Audi Bangladesh became the maiden automotive brand in Bangladesh to launch an EV in January 2023.

Executive Motors Limited brought in the BMW i7 eDrive 50 in November 2023, making it available at a starting price of Tk 3 crore.

In March this year, BYD Auto Co Ltd, the world's largest EV maker, inaugurated its flagship model, the BYD Seal, in Bangladesh. CG-Runner Bangladesh, an authorised distributor of the Chinese company, has introduced two variants of the sedan.

Garment exports

FROM PAGE B1

wage gains," said NRF President and CEO Matthew Shay.

"In this highly competitive market, retailers are having to keep prices as low as possible to meet the demand of consumers looking to stretch their family budgets," Matthew added.

Total retail sales, excluding automobiles and gasoline, were up 0.36 percent seasonally adjusted month-on-month and up 2.72 percent unadjusted year-on-year in March, according to Retail Monitor.

That compared with increases of 0.4 percent month-on-month and 2.7 percent year-on-year in February, based on the first 28 days in February.