

Agrani Bank cuts interest rate

Agrani Bank has decided to reduce the interest rate of agricultural and agro-based industrial credits by 1 per cent to 2 per cent.

The interest rate has been cut to help implement the government's plan of employment generation and poverty reduction by bringing dynamism in the activities of rural economy of the country, says a press release.

With this, the interest on almost all the agricultural loan schemes of the bank will come down to 10 per cent.

The reduced rate will be effective from September 1, 2003.

Khulna chamber polls on Jan 17

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

The biennial election of the executive committee of Khulna Chamber of Commerce and Industry will be held on January 17 next year.

According to election schedule announced recently, the last date for submission of nomination papers is on December 11 and last date for withdrawal is on December 21 this year.

The voters' list will be published on November 23. Deputy Commissioner of Khulna Md Restadul Islam, who took over as administrator of the chamber in June through a commerce ministry order, announced the election schedule recently.

The executive committee will elect a president and two vice presidents on January 19 next year. The election of chamber was last held in 1996.

JOBS, Dutch govt agency to help PPE growth

JOBS, a project funded by USAID, and an agency of the Netherlands government have teamed up to establish PPE (personal protective equipment) as an export generating industry in Bangladesh.

CBI, the Netherlands government agency, and JOBS (Job Opportunities and Business Support) will provide technical and marketing assistance to local producers of PPE like hand-gloves, caps and masks, says a press release.

As part of the plan, Marechal Desmet, PPE consultant from CBI, visited selected potential protective garment producers in Bangladesh recently.

SMC launches ORSaline Fruity

Social Marketing Company (SMC) has announced the introduction of a new flavoured ORSaline in the market.

The brand name of the product will be 'ORSaline Fruity'. It is a line extension of ORSaline, says a press release.

ORSaline Fruity will be the only brand produced under British National Formulary (BNF) and approved by the Directorate of Drug Administration of Bangladesh.

Since it is produced under BNF, one sachet of ORSaline Fruity needs to be reconstituted in 250 ml or one glass of pure water.

The brand will initially be made available in two flavours -- mango and orange from today.

Fear creeps into US recovery

AFP, Washington

Fear is creeping into the celebrations over an upswing in the US economy.

Recovery signs are abundant, from surging consumer spending to rising factory output and most economists forecast a gradual economic pickup in the second half of 2003 and in 2004.

Investors, glimpsing better times ahead, sent Wall Street's blue-chip Dow Jones industrial average up 90.76 points, or 0.97 per cent, to 9,412.45 on Monday, the highest finish in more than a year.

But in the shadows, higher oil prices, the still-large portions of industry lying idle, unemployment and rising market interest rates are leading some analysts to squeeze the champagne cork back into the bottle.

Past experience of the shocks from the September 11 attacks, a stock market slump and corporate scandals, combined with new risks, have raised questions about the longer-term durability of the recovery.

MCCI urges govt

Take initiative to appoint PSI firms without delay

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) has urged the government to start the process of appointing PSI firms without further delay.

The MCCI, in a recent letter, requested the finance minister to direct the National Board of Revenue (NBR) to take the initiative to continue for 'hassle-free' import valuation system by the PSI (pre-shipment inspection) companies.

"This is necessary for the sake of revenue collection and hassle-free release of imported goods. The terms of the existing PSI agents expired long time back and they have been given extension twice," said the MCCI.

The NBR advertised to appoint PSI agents and received

responses from five companies under two envelopes system. A bid evaluation committee was formed drawing members from the finance and commerce ministries, MCCI, the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) with Member Customs, NBR as convener.

The bids were evaluated by the committee and only two companies were found technically qualified. The committee submitted its report to the finance ministry seeking advice whether it will open the financial bids of two qualified bidders or it will go for a fresh tender.

All the three disqualified bidders were notified of the reasons for their disqualification.

But one of the disqualified bidders who scored hardly any mark in evaluation and whose paid up capital is US\$ 100 went to the

High Court and obtained an injunction and also a direction that its financial offer has to be opened and evaluated.

Since the committee did not open any financial bid the question of opening of financial bid of the disqualified bidder was irrelevant, the MCCI said.

"We suggest the NBR send a suitable reply to the High Court through its lawyer as the HC did not give the NBR an opportunity to appear and explain its views," the MCCI said.

"We feel that in view of the reported reluctance of the customs officials in continuation of the PSI scheme, NBR has not taken any initiative, as far as we are aware either in vacating the injunction or inviting a fresh tender," the chamber added.

Simplify rules of origin for LDCs

Dhaka Declaration prepared at LDC garment workers' forum

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Participants from least developed countries at the international solidarity forum for garment workers yesterday sought duty and quota-free access for all products including readymade garments to developed countries to sustain in post-MFA era.

They also sought simplified rules of origin to match industrial policies of LDCs to raise their market share in world trade.

The proposals were included at the Dhaka Declaration prepared after the two-day International Solidarity Forum for Garment Workers of LDCs, participated by representatives from the LDCs.

Some delegates from Japan, Australia and US also participated at the forum.

The forum was organised by Bangladesh Garment Workers Protection Alliance (BGWPA), a platform of 19 garment workers' associations, with a view to highlighting rights of workers and their interest for a secured livelihood.

Convener of BGWPA and also Executive Director of Nari Uddog Kendra Masuda Khatun Shefali read out the declaration held at Bangladesh Institute of Administration and Management (BIAM).

Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS) Secretary General Nazrul Islam Khan and Kormojibi

Nari President Shirin Akher were present.

The forum observed the condition of garment workers in each participation country is almost same.

"We have decided to form Asian Garment Workers Action Alliance (AGWAA)," said Shefali.

The forum also stressed on the movement of natural persons, particularly unskilled and semi-skilled service providers, to the markets of developed countries.

Five papers on various issues, like WTO regime, human rights, trade liberalization and workers' interests, were presented in three plenary sessions of the conference.

Procurement of 4 gantry cranes Govt decides to float fresh tender

SHAHIDUL ISLAM, Chittagong

The government has cancelled a tender to procure four gantry cranes at a cost of Tk 100 crore through a Japanese firm.

The government has also decided to go for a fresh tender in this regard, sources said.

They said the Executive Committee on National Economic Council (Ecneec) at a meeting on Sunday in Dhaka took the decision. Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman presided over the meeting.

Two years back the first international tender was floated. But the bidding was cancelled and later re-tender was sought nearly six months back, sources said.

Sources said loading and unloading of goods in the premier seaport often experience unwanted delay in the absence of gantry cranes.

Port officials say container handling efficiency will be increased by at least four times through procurement of the cranes.

Six international firms had qualified for the re-tender and the CPA had accepted two of those project proposals. They were Hyundai Company of Korea and Mitsubishi of Japan.

Afterwards, Mitsubishi was awarded the contract and a supply order was sent to Purchase Committee by CPA two months ago for final approval of the government that sat on Sunday and rescinded the CPA proposal.

The Sunday meeting also decided to call second re-tender for the project.

When asked, Project Director Khairul Mostafa said the final decision of the Purchase Committee on four gantry cranes project is yet to reach them.

Biman may go public

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Biman Bangladesh Airlines may go for floating shares to raise funds.

A proposal will soon be sent to the policy makers for a decision in this regard.

State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Mir Mohammad Nasiruddin said this at the 12th anniversary of The Bangladesh Monitor, a tourism related newspaper in Bangladesh, on Monday.

The audience praised the Monitor for playing a role in promoting the tourism industry both in home and abroad.

The state minister said tourism industry of Bangladesh has great potentiality. "But, foreign tourists

face different obstacles when they want to visit Bangladesh."

The state minister called for issuing on-arrival visa at the airport.

The state minister also said price of liquor in Bangladesh is very high which discourages tourism.

After the initiatives of declaring Saint Martin's Island as a 'special tourism area', land ministry claimed the ownership of the island, he said. The forest ministry also claimed it. "So, the tourism ministry has to discard the project," he said.

Editor of Monitor Quazi Wahidul Alam said without improving tourist infrastructure, the tourism industry will not take off.

Euro-zone industrial output slips again

AFP, Brussels

The euro-zone industrial sector remained in a sluggish mood in June, with production edging lower for the second straight month, the EU statistics office Eurostat said on Tuesday.

Industrial production in the 12-nation zone fell by 0.1 per cent in June, following a 0.9-per cent decrease in May.

Output fell in June by 1.6 per cent on an annual basis.

For the full 15-member European Union (the euro-zone plus Britain, Denmark and Sweden), industrial production rose by 0.3 per cent in June from May, but dropped by 0.7 per cent compared to June 2002.

The euro zone's monthly decrease in June owed in large part to a 1.3-per cent fall in the production of capital goods, those used in the production of other goods.

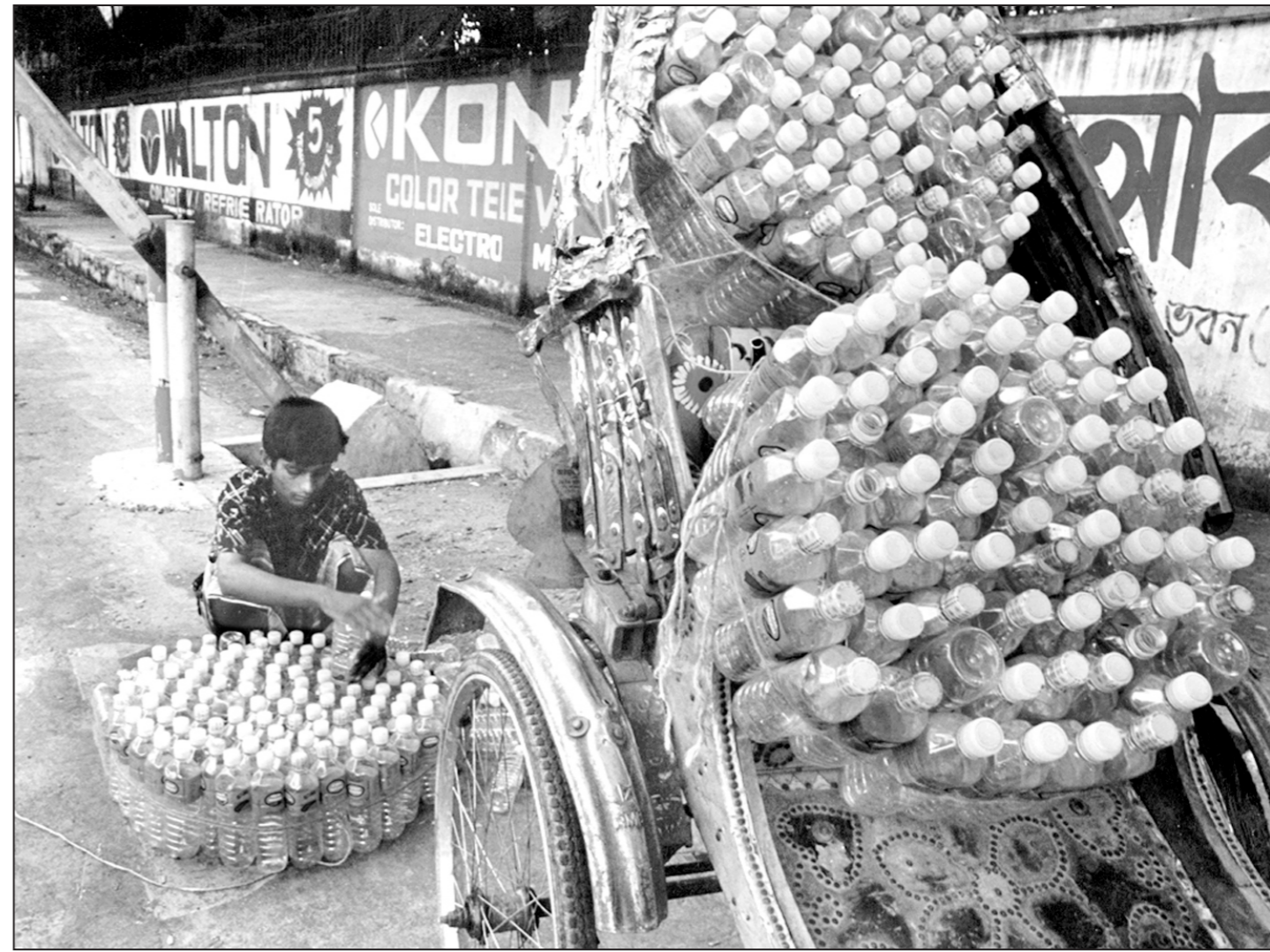
Singapore, India complete third round of trade talks

AFP, Singapore

Singapore and India have completed a third round of talks for a comprehensive economic partnership with discussions on a wide range of issues, the two countries said Tuesday.

The issues discussed during the three-day talks in New Delhi which ended Monday included financial services, free trade agreement in goods as well as areas of co-operation in telecommunications, air services, tourism, education and biotechnology, they said in a statement.

"Discussions were held on a wide range of issues relating to investment and trade in goods and services," the statement said.



A rickshaw-puller finds it lucrative to collect empty bottles of drinking water instead of carrying passengers. He sells a bottle at Tk 0.50 to a section of unscrupulous traders who fill the bottles with running water and market. The picture was taken from BUET area in Dhaka.

Nassa Group gets supplier's award from Walmart

Compliance with standards, product quality, on time shipment earn attention

TAWFIQUE ALI

Bangladeshi garment manufacturer Nassa Group has recently received supplier's award from US retailer Walmart.

Nassa Group officials said the company received the award, International Supplier of the Year 2002, for compliance with Walmart standards, product quality, on time shipment and volume of sale.

Chairman of the group Md Nazrul Islam Mazumder said it has supplied apparels worth \$ 40 million in 2002 to Walmart. The total turnover of the group stands at around US\$ 150 million including sale in the domestic market.

The chairman said his group supplies around one million dozens of readymade apparels to Walmart each year and that the group is the single largest supplier from Bangladesh.

The group is in business with Walmart for past six years.

"Any supplier's distinction, in the eyes of Walmart, depends on the

factors like highest compliance to a set of 'buyer-defined business practice standards', on-time shipment of quality products, and volume of sale," Mazumder told The Daily Star.

Walmart, world's largest merchandise retailer, has awarded the company 'International Supplier of the Year 2002' consecutively for the second time in appreciation of its outstanding performance in delivery of quality apparel.

Mazumder said a company or a group does not necessarily qualify for the award even if it manufactures high quality products and makes shipment in due time since the product has to have a good demand in the market.

Nassa Group Managing Director Nazrul Islam Swapan attributed the success of the company to hard work, honesty, and sincerity in delivering quality merchandise.

Among other Bangladeshi manufacturers, Epic Designer too has won the same award in 2002.

Both Islam Group and Arrow Fashion won Walmart award in 1999 and Mohammadi Group in 1997, according to sources.

Nassa Group chairman said they have gone into publicity campaign through newspaper advertisements to create awareness among international buyers regarding the quality of their products.

"Following the advertisements, one buyer from Europe has expressed willingness to buy goods from us," the chairman said.

He said the publicity was aimed at making an impact on potential buyers at home and abroad to encourage them to purchase Nassa's products. "It was also intended to stir a competitiveness for excellence among the exporters."

Nassa Group presently employs some 25,000 people and had also received 'Vendor of the Year' award from K-Mart on several occasions.

Catering training institute at Uttara

A catering training institute named Cork Dhaka Catering Training Institute (CDCTI) was opened at Uttara in Dhaka on Monday.

The institute will train people to help solve the country's unemployment problem, says a press release.

Sean Moloney, a prominent person of catering industry of Ireland, is the chief instructor of the institute.

Arosh Ali, a Bangladeshi caterer who has wide experience in the Untied Kingdom and Europe particularly in Indian Restaurant in the West and Middle East, is the director (European operations) of the institute.

Irshad Hossain, director (Bangladeshi operations), is the owner of cuisine the official restaurant of the institute.

This year the institute will train 100 Bangladeshi students and provide them job in UK, Ireland and other European countries.

About 40 Bangladeshi students have already registered their names for training on the opening day.

They will get their certificates from Skerry's College in Ireland.

US treasury secretary to visit Asia next month

REUTERS, Washington

US Treasury Secretary John Snow will tour several Asian nations, including China, in the first week of September, the Treasury said Monday.

Snow will visit Tokyo on Sept. 1-2, Beijing on Sept. 2-3 and then head on to Phuket, Thailand, on Sept. 4-5 for the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, Treasury secretary said in a news release.

Snow will "encourage countries to take strong measures to increase global economic growth," Treasury secretary said.

In China, with which the United States has the biggest trade gap of any of its trading partners, Snow will meet with top economic officials.

"Secretary Snow will discuss a broad range of issues important to the country's economic relationship with the United States including a liberalisation and reform of the financial sector, trade and exchange rate issues," Treasury secretary said.

US manufacturers, which have been hard hit by the slow pace of growth of the American economy, have complained of unfair competition from abroad. Several US senators have asked treasury to look into whether China's pegging of the foreign exchange value of its currency, the yuan, has given it an unfair trade advantage.

Snow is expected to issue a periodic report by Oct 15 on whether any of the US's trade partners have tried to manipulate currencies and trade. Snow is expected to be called to Congress to testify on the matter in the fall.

In Japan, Treasury said Snow will look at prospects for Japan's economic growth and review its efforts to end deflation and deal with bad loans in its banking system.