

Cos get gold medals for export performances

PM distributes national export trophies for 2001-02, 2000-01, 1999-2000, 1998-99

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Top exporters received a boost yesterday when Prime Minister Khaleda Zia distributed national export trophies for four financial years.

Thirteen companies received gold medals for their export performances in 2001-02, 10 in 2000-01, 13 in 1999-2000 and 11 in 1998-99.

Companies that received trophies in 2001-02 are the Civil Engineers Ltd in the readymade garment sector; RA Dyeing and Printing Industries (Pvt) Ltd in hosiery, specialised garments and knitwear products; International Shrimps Exports (Pvt) Ltd in the frozen food; AK Jute Trading Co in raw jute; Janata Jute Mills Ltd in jute goods; MM Isphahani Ltd in tea; BT Creation in handicrafts; British American Tobacco Bangladesh Company Ltd in agro-based; Apex Tannery Ltd in leather processing,

Picard Bangladesh Ltd in leather goods; Agricultural Marketing Co Ltd in agro-processing; Alif International in industrial products and Crown Enterprise in others items.

The companies that won gold medals in the 2000-01 fiscal included Pacific Jeans Ltd, Shamim Composite Mills Ltd, Delta Fish Ltd, Janata Jute Mills Ltd, James Finlay Ltd, British American Tobacco Bangladesh Company Ltd, Shinepukur Ceramics Ltd, Apex Tannery Ltd, Lalmai Footwear Ltd and Bengal Plastic Industries Ltd.

The companies that got gold medals in the 1999-2000 financial are Opex Fashion Ltd, KDS Garments Industries Ltd, Delta Fish Ltd, FR Jute Trading Co Ltd, Janata Jute Mills Ltd, Conexop, British American Tobacco Bangladesh Company Ltd, Monnu Ceramic Industries Ltd, Dhaka Hide and Skins Ltd, Picard Bangladesh Ltd,

Thaipoly Shaoon (Bangladesh) Ltd, Beximco Pharmaceuticals Ltd and Fexinco.

The gold medal winners for the 1998-99 fiscal are Pacific Jeans Ltd, Rahima Aziz Knitspin Ltd, Chabi Fish Processing Industries Ltd, AK Jute Trading Co, Mico Jute and Bag Corporation, Core-the Jute Works, Mansur General Trading Company, Bay Tanneries Ltd, Apex Footwear Ltd, Beximco Pharmaceuticals Ltd and Fexinco.

Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, Commerce Ministry Advisor Barkat Ulla Bulu, Commerce Secretary Suhel Ahmed Chowdhury and EPB Vice-president Habib Abu Ibrahim also spoke at the function.

Speaking at the ceremony, the commerce minister said the government can create congenial atmosphere for businessmen and provide policy supports to them, but their duty is to go ahead with the

success.

Khosru said the government has established Foreign Trade Institute, where both public and private sector people participated in its formation, for building capacity for government officials and businessmen.

"Any businessmen intended to go abroad can get training in any subject from this institute," the commerce minister said.

Commerce ministry advisor Bulu urged businessmen to ensure the quality of the products before export. "You, the exporters, have the responsibility to improve the country's image abroad," he added.

The commerce secretary said the country saw nine per cent increased growth in exports during 2002-03 over the previous year.

He said this year the export target has been fixed at \$7439 million.

BCI seeks more duty-free access to Pakistan

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh Chamber of Industries (BCI) President AK Azad urged the Pakistani government to allow duty-free access of more Bangladeshi products to Pakistan.

He also urged the Pakistani investors to invest in Bangladesh's textile, infrastructure, power generation, telecom, transport, backward linkage industries, agro-based industries, computer software and pharmaceuticals.

The BCI president made the call when Manzur Shafiq, high commissioner for Pakistan to Bangladesh, met him in Dhaka on Wednesday, according to a press release.

The Pakistani high commissioner said Bangladesh is an underdeveloped country and since there is 'no minimum environment for local investment here', foreign investment cannot be expected.

However, Shafiq assured the BCI chief of considering setting up joint ventures in jute, shipping and textile industries.

The meeting also attended by Waqar Ahmed Shah, commercial secretary of Pakistani High Commission, BCI Vice-president AM Badruzzaman and BCI directors MA Shahid, Jahangir Alam, Delwar Hossain Reza and Sirazuddin Ahmed.

In 2001-02, export from Bangladesh to Pakistan was \$28.604 million while import from Pakistan to Bangladesh was \$67.240 million.

FBCCI team off to Kolkata

UNB, Dhaka

An 85-member FBCCI delegation, led by its President Abdul Awal Minto, yesterday left for Kolkata to attend the 17th Industrial India Trade Fair-2003 there.

The West Bengal government, India Trade Promotion Organisation and Bengal National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BNCCI) have jointly organised the 13-day fair to be inaugurated at Kolkata Maidan today (Friday).

West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee is scheduled to inaugurate the fair in which some 40 companies from Bangladesh will participate.

During their stay in Kolkata, the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) delegation will meet the West Bengal Chief Minister and hold discussion with BNCCI business leaders on matters relating to bilateral trade and economic co-operation between the two countries.

GMG Airlines offers new package

GMG Airlines, a private domestic airline, has introduced a new package titled "GMG Trial Offer" especially for leisure travelers.

Under the offer, travelers can get discounts from 15 per cent to 30 per cent on different destinations of the airline, says a press release.

Interested travelers have to book a ticket seven days prior to their proposed date of departure and keep at least two nights gap between their first and return journey to get the offer.

Tickets for this offer can be purchased from any of the airline's sales office nationwide.

Repo auction

UNB, Dhaka

The Repo auction of Bangladesh Bank (BB) for commercial banks and financial institutions was held here yesterday.

One bid of one-day tenor amounting to Tk 100 crore was received. But the bid was not accepted, said a BB press release.

Call money rate steady at 2pc

BSS, Dhaka

The call money rate remained stable at 2 per cent yesterday as most banks had sufficient funds, fund managers said.

The call money rate yesterday ranged between 2.50 per cent and 3.50 per cent in most deals in line with its previous closing, fund managers of leading commercial banks said.

The demand for call money remained very thin as most private banks and financial institutions had adequate funds to meet their needs when banks are paying interest against their funds - mostly in idle form, a fund manager at a local bank said.

CSE too suspends trading of Confidence Cement

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Chittagong Stock Exchange (CSE) also suspended the trading of Confidence Cement Limited shares for two weeks from yesterday.

Earlier, on Wednesday the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) decided to suspend trading of Confidence Cement shares from December 18 to December 31 for conflicting information regarding its annual general meeting (AGM) and dividend.

As the DSE postponed the trading of Confidence Cement for its misinformation, which may distort price and instabilise the capital market, the CSE also suspended the cement company's trading. CSE Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Wali-ul-Marouf Matin told The Daily Star yesterday.

The CSE officials will meet the DSE officials tomorrow (Saturday) to take necessary steps against the incident, he said.

However, the DSE yesterday formally requested the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to conduct an investigation into the incident.

"We are waiting for the SEC decision," DSE CEO Salahuddin Ahmed Khan said.

While talking to The Daily Star, SEC Chairman Mirza Azizul Islam said the DSE is capable enough to take action against the company. "However, we will send a reply to the DSE letter."

The suspension came after the DSE listing committee found contradictory information in the Confidence Cement AGM notice given to DSE and the communiqué published in daily newspapers.

The company has made 'deceptive' notice as it did not mention for which the 12th AGM will be held on December 31, DSE said in a press release on Wednesday. Besides, there was no agenda in the notice regarding confirmation of audit accounts.

The AGM notice published in daily newspapers provided agenda on dividend information though the company board on December 14 did not take any resolution on the issue.

The company in its AGM notice to DSE said it will not give any dividend but in a notice published in newspapers on December 15 the company informed the board would discuss interim dividend on December 29, whereas it surprisingly declared book closure on December 23.

Confiscation of frozen food consignments Commerce ministry starts investigation

UNB, Dhaka

The commerce ministry has started investigation into the cases of confiscating 11 export consignments of frozen foods from Bangladesh to European Union (EU) for allegedly containing chemicals beyond permissible limits.

Upon receiving formal complaints from the EU, the ministry formed a six-member inter-ministerial committee to find out and take measures against those responsible, in order to check recurrence of such incidents.

The committee, headed by a deputy secretary, has already visited some mills in Khulna region. It will furnish its report to the commerce secretary shortly.

The commerce ministry advised all concerned to take extra care in using fish feed and processing materials at various levels of frozen food processing.

Frozen foods are the second-biggest export earner of the country with an average \$ 300 million turnover, and the EU is its main destination.

Of the 11 consignments, 6 were seized in the UK and four in France and the rest one in some other destination.

Commerce Secretary Suhel Ahmed said so far there had been no evidence that the consignments contained something prohibited. "Maybe, in this case some materials like antibiotic were found at higher level. Anyway, we're serious about it and taking steps," he told the news agency yesterday.

The official investigation team is now in Khulna for having a spot account, he said.

Officials and frozen-food exporters said that such materials are often found in even higher proportions in export consignments of frozen foods from other exporting countries, including China, Thailand, Vietnam and

India.

Antibiotics and antibacterial materials are used everywhere in shrimp farming and processing--these are very likely to exist in the processed foods up to certain level and, sometimes, beyond the accepted limits, they argued.

At present, there is no laboratory in the country to measure the limit of these preservatives in the processed food items. However, the government recently set up a modern laboratory that will go into operation in next two months.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Frozen Foods Exporters Association president Quazi Monirul Haque alleged that immediately after getting complaints from the EU, the Ministry of Fisheries hastened to order 8 processing plants to suspend their production and export.

He regretted the suspension on export since official investigations into the complaints have not yet completed.

2 ADB-funded projects awarded

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh Resident Mission of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) yesterday awarded two projects as the country's best performing ADB-funded projects for 2003.

Southwest Flood Damage Rehabilitation Project (SFDPR) (LGED Component) and Rural Infrastructure Improvement Project (RIIP) were given the awards in recognition of their excellent teamwork, initiatives, cooperation and transparency in procurement of civil works.

ERD Secretary Mirza Tassaduq Hussain Beg and ADB Country Director Toru Shibuchi handed over the awards to the two projects. SFDPR Project Director Abdus Shaheed and RIIP Project Director Saidul Haque accepted the awards on behalf of their respective teams.

The ADB Resident Mission has instituted Performance Recognition Award Programme to recognise each year the outstanding performance of the project directors/coordinators and project teams, said a press release.

Quasem Drycells declares 10pc cash dividend

Quasem Drycells Limited has declared a 10 per cent cash dividend for the shareholders for 2002-2003.

The dividend was approved at the 22nd annual general meeting of the company held at Gorai in Tangail on Wednesday, says a press release.

Presided over by Chairman of the company Seleena Begum, the meeting also adopted the balance sheet and the profit and loss account for the year 2002-03.

The company earned a net profit of Tk 25,004 million in the year 2002-03 against Tk 26,661 million in the preceding year.

StanChart, Executive Motors sign deal

Standard Chartered Bank has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Executive Motors Ltd, sole distributor of BMW cars in Bangladesh, to give auto loan at a 14 per cent preferential rate to customers of BMW cars.

Mashul Haque Chowdhury, head of Secured of Standard Chartered Bank, and Moklesur Rahman Pintu, managing director of Executive Motors Ltd, signed the MoU on behalf of their organisations recently in Dhaka.

Among others, Hans Jurgen Geus, manager of Technical Support, BMW Asia (Pvt) Ltd, Tahia Khalil, head of Priority Banking, and Tareq Reaz, manager-Auto Loans of Standard Chartered Bank, were present.

Moreover, the customers of BMW vehicle financed by the bank will get privilege at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel.



Prime Minister Khaleda Zia speaks at the National Export Trophy Distribution Programme-2003 jointly organised by the Ministry of Commerce and Export Promotion Bureau in Dhaka yesterday. Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, Commerce Ministry Advisor Barkat Ulla Bulu, Commerce Secretary Suhel Ahmed Chowdhury and Export Promotion Bureau Vice-president Habib Abu Ibrahim are also seen in the picture.

Bangladesh in WSIS: Lies and statistics

FROM PAGE 12

While the three-day Plenary and high-level roundtables were progressing, various agreements were signed. Such accords included a \$400,000 grant by the US government for ICT development in low-income countries. Bangladesh took no initiative to get a slice of that deal. The government is also unaware of the billion dollars co-operation agreement between Microsoft and UNDP to bring ICT skills to underserved communities.

Cisco and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) will open internet training centres in developing countries. Hewlett-Packard had agreed to provide low-cost products to overcome the barrier to ICT. Handwritten texts, for example, will be recognised for e-mail transmission. Our ICT ministry has not even persuaded to tap these opportunities for Bangladesh.

ITU will harness 57 internet training centres across 47 countries and multipurpose community telecentres for the delivery of health-related information. It will also supply e-government and e-learning project design and implementation. The World Health Organisation (WHO) is contributing health experts and content for websites and courses. Funds will also be used for electronic applications and other access-widening projects. The Bangladesh government's delegates have no clue about this prospect.

To bring faster, cheaper and more reliable communication to remote, mountainous areas of Bhutan, the Indian government will help deliver e-post services to the Bhutanese Postal Service via a US\$ 400,000 satellite network and solar panels power system. Another \$40,000 comes from ITU with the remaining \$10,000 in in-kind contributions from Bhutan Telecom and Post. Our ICT ministry took no effort to explore such opportunities for Bangladesh.

It is worthwhile to mention that neither our prime minister nor the ICT minister had met any ITU official during the three days in

Geneva. The PM prioritised campaigning for Bangladesh in the race of secretary general's position in the OIC. That was her prerogative.

But what our ICT minister and his hoards of officers were doing? They had pretended to conquer the world by dishing out a booklet titled, "ICT in Bangladesh: Vision and Reality". This expensive and colourful publication is packed with misinformation, which is grossly detrimental as well as embarrassing for Bangladesh.

Page 16 of the ICT ministry's publication says the optical fibre network of Bangladesh Railway was built "with assistance from the German government." But the truth is that Norway had provided "untied grant" of Tk.1.25 billion (125 crore) in 1985 to build this first of its kind telecom infrastructure in South Asia.

GEC-Plessey Telecom of UK had commissioned the entire optical fibre network for railway on turnkey basis. Bangladesh government must seek apology for the ICT ministry's ungrateful distortion of Norway's lone financial contribution to this landmark infrastructure project.

The ICT ministry's lack of knowledge about the telecom sector gets further exposed, as page 16 of its booklet says the Railway's network is "the only fibre optics capacity in Bangladesh." The fact is -- however inefficient and corrupt it has been -- the BTB has succeeded to digitise its entire transmission backbone long time back. So far it had laid almost 1,500 kilometres high-capacity optical fibre networks across the country. Rolling out of further networks is progressing under various projects.

The ICT ministry is also ignorant about the private sector's telecom infrastructure of Bangladesh. In pages 13 and 14, the booklet describes the transmission resources of private mobile operators. But the ministry has not at all mentioned the 250 kilometres long Dhaka-Chittagong and 150 kilometres long Dhaka-Mymensingh digital microwave transmission

links of AKTEL.

The ICT ministry's inhibition to recognise the reforms in fixed telephone connection charges is deplorable. The government had slashed 46 percent connection charge in Dhaka and Chittagong in 2002. Such reduction is 57 percent in other districts and divisional headquarters while the charge has been dropped to 73 percent in the rural area. Such micro reforms in the telecom sector to fulfil the universal service obligation remain unrecognised in the booklet.

The ICT ministry is quite vocal about protecting the intellectual property rights. But the ministry itself has pirated various data while incorporating its publication. Bureaucrats of the ICT ministry have demonstrated their height of arrogance by not stating the data sources in its publication. Data acquisition and vehicle requisition are absolutely different businesses.

The ICT ministry has also made itself a laughingstock with obsolete data of "Total revenue in packaged software market" in page 27. It shows the US and global software market status between 1997 and 1999 only. As if nothing had happened in the global software industry during last four years.

The ICT ministry's booklet boasts of a list of countries where Bangladesh, reportedly, exports software. But the ministry is completely mum about earnings from such exports. This booklet has been published to allure the potential ICT investors as well as to appraise the world of the ICT status of Bangladesh. This effort is feared to be counterproductive due to its unforgivable inconsistencies. Interested readers may explore it.

However, while concluding her Plenary address in WSIS, the prime minister said, "We need to demonstrate progress before we meet again in Tunis in 2005." If the government continues with the current outfit of its ICT ministry the PM's desired progress, during next two years in ICT, will be inevitably towards the opposite direction. Believe it or not.