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CHALLENGES FROM INDIA, CHINA

BB asks RMG units to up labour productivity

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The central bank has made recommendations including measures to enhance labour productivity and adoption of cost-effective technologies in the country's apparel units to face growing challenges from Indian and Chinese factories in the post-MFA era.

The Bangladesh Bank (BB) suggested increase in workers' salaries to enhance labour productivity. "Wage should be revised along with other benefits commensurate with cost of living," said the central bank.

BB in a study published in its

July-September quarterly said the higher competitiveness of Indian and Chinese units is a threat to Bangladesh's factories in global RMG market.

India and China enjoy relatively high labour productivity and apply more capital intensive modern technologies, the BB added.

The central bank said efficient port services are needed to help apparel factories reduce lead time to become competitive.

Both India and China have advantages in lead time as they get locally available raw materials like fabrics and RMG accessories, the

BB said.

The country's RMG products are highly concentrated on low value items such as boys/men's shirts, T-shirts, women's skirts and blouses.

"These items have relatively low rate of profit and face fierce competition from other countries' producers in the post-MFA world," the BB study added.

One of the important weaknesses in Bangladesh RMG sector is the relatively inadequate development of backward linkage industries, the central bank said.

There are insufficient numbers of establishments such as textiles

and accessories industries in the RMG sector and they can barely meet the local requirement.

The BB study also highlighted the abundant and cheap labour force and their skill as the strength of the country's RMG sector.

"Our labourers and managers have acquired skill. Therefore, the garment workers have already proved themselves as efficient in needwork," the study mentioned.

It said the knitwear products enjoy advantages over woven items as technology used in knitwear is relatively simple, inexpensive and highly flexible.



Prof Rehman Sobhan, chairman of Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), visits a stall at a two-day 'Development and ICT Fair' that began at Brac Centre Inn in Dhaka yesterday. Ananya Raihan, executive director of D.Net, a development research network and organiser of the show, among others, is seen.

Etihad Airways likely to launch flights to Dhaka

BDNEWS, Dhaka

Etihad Airways, the UAE's national flag carrier, is likely to launch flights to Dhaka later this year.

Habibullah Khan, director (flight safety) of the Civil Aviation Authority, told the news agency that the Etihad Airways had communicated with them, but the authorities are yet to give permission.

He, however, said the Civil Aviation authorities have decided in principle to give permission to the airline to operate in Dhaka.

Meanwhile, BDNEWS correspondent in Dubai reports that before starting its operation to Dhaka, the two-year-old airline will launch flights to the northern Pakistani cities of Lahore, Islamabad and Peshawar as well as Jeddah and Manila next month, a senior official said.

As part of its ambitious growth plan, it also plans to start flights to New York, Manchester, Jeddah and Jakarta before the end of this year.



Moazzem Hossain (C), editor of The Financial Express, speaks at a workshop on 'Bridging Corporate Sector & Media' organised by Management and Resources Development Initiative (MRDI) in Dhaka yesterday. Hasibur Rahman (L), MRDI executive director, and M Emamul Haque, head of Advocacy Unit of the World Food Programme, are also seen.

BRIDGING GAP WITH MEDIA

Corporate houses need strong PR wings

Workshop told

BDNEWS, Dhaka

As lack of access to information hampers proper news coverage, speakers at a workshop in Dhaka yesterday called for setting up of strong public relations wings in corporate houses.

They also said the companies should practise corporate social responsibility (CSR) for their sustainable development.

They were speaking at the workshop organised by Management and Resources Development Initiative (MRDI) with support from Manusher Jonno. Representatives from banks, insurance, telecommunication, real estate companies, chambers and print and electronic media took part in the workshop.

One-month newspaper content analysis, assessment of newspaper gatekeepers and corporate sector, and findings derived from three roundtables were presented in the workshop moderated by Moazzem Hossain, editor of The Financial

Express.

Dewan Sultan Ahmed, vice president of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), said governance in the state level is a pre-condition for ensuring governance in corporate houses.

Sadat Hossain Salim, managing director of Anwar Landmark Ltd, said media should also be governed by ethics and guidelines when it comes to publishing advertisements.

Farid Hossain, bureau chief of Associated Press (AP), said business reports lack depth and news value. He also said some advertisements, especially in electronic media, are destroying the country's social values.

Syed Yamin Bakht, general manager (information) of GrameenPhone Ltd, said local business news gets less coverage in media. He also said if the corporate PR wings influence news coverage, it is the failure on the part of the newspapers.

Lopa Rahman, senior research fellow of Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI), said CSR is not charity. Companies should continue with CSR activity, it is not one-off assistance, she added.

Nasir A. Chowdhury, managing director and CEO of Green Delta Insurance Ltd, said journalists need training for better corporate news coverage.

Mohd Sanullah, company secretary of Singer Bangladesh Ltd, said recently launched Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) guidelines will help companies ensure corporate governance.

Pranab Saha, chief reporter of the Prothom Alo, said company press releases should be more informative for better coverage.

Mustak Hossain, manager of corporate affairs of Ranks Telecom Ltd, said the corporate houses should undertake issue-based training for journalists in collaboration with journalists' forum and associations.

S'pore targets record 9.4m visitors in 2006

AFP, Singapore

Singapore has set a target of 9.4 million visitors and 12 billion Singapore dollars (7.4 billion US) in tourism receipts for 2006, officials said.

"We have done well in 2005 and we must keep up this momentum of good growth with the aim to do better," Singapore Tourism Board (STB) chief executive Lim Neo Chian said at an industry gathering late Thursday.

Minister for Trade and Industry Lim Hng Kiang said the city-state surpassed its 2005 targets with a record 8.94 million visitors who generated 10.8 billion dollars in revenues.

The growth in arrivals in 2005 was attributed to major international events hosted in Singapore, like the 117th International Olympic Committee meeting and the growing popularity of budget carriers in the market.

The top sources of tourists were Indonesia, China, Australia, Japan, India and Malaysia.

"We will need to sustain our efforts in focusing on key target markets and building the Uniquely Singapore brand," said the STB's Lim.

He said that in order to achieve the 2006 targets, the STB will focus on working with local and international players to bring in and develop "world class products".

Chian cited the opening of nightspots Crazy Horse Paris, a French cabaret, and London's Ministry of Sound dance club in 2005.

India to announce airports sell-off 'in days': Report

AFP, London

India's government will "in a matter of days" award contracts to private companies to run and modernise the country's biggest two airports, Mumbai and Delhi, Finance Minister Palaniappan Chidambaram said in an interview with the Financial Times, the paper reported Friday.

Chidambaram and the deputy chairman of India's planning commission, Montek Singh Ahluwalia, said the decision was taken at a ministerial meeting three days ago, according to the FT which spoke to the men on the sidelines of

Large-scale ICT use to help eradicate poverty

Seminar told

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Presided over by economist Hossain Zillur Rahman, the seminar was also attended by Shaheen Anam, team leader of Manusher Jonno, an NGO.

Programme Director of D.Net Mahmud Hasan presented a keynote paper at the seminar.

Earlier in the morning, D.Net Chairman Taufic Ahmed Choudhury inaugurated a two-day 'Development and ICT Fair' at Brac Centre Inn as part of the company's anniversary function.

Taufic Ahmed said the D.Net's objective is to make the benefits of ICT available to the poorer section of the society.

At the fair, D.Net is showcasing its ICT-related activities in the areas of agriculture, health, education, disaster management, rural employment and non-agricultural initiative. The fair, which is open to public, will end at 5pm today.

Mahmud Hasan said the ICT revolution has added a new dimension to the economic growth theories, governance, human rights, poverty and other development issues.

He said the ICT has brought unprecedented opportunities for improving governance, economic growth and cutting poverty.

The Dubai-based airline already has representation in Germany with double daily flights to Munich and Frankfurt, and a daily service to Dusseldorf, says a press release.

Germany is one of the largest and most important markets of the carrier as the number of visitors from Germany to Dubai has been escalating rapidly, with recent figures showing that more than 236,000 Germans visited Dubai in 2004, up from 156,000 visitors in the previous year.

Emirates to start services in Hamburg

In advance of the launch of its services to the German city of Hamburg on March 1, Emirates recently introduced itself to the city with a series of media and travel trade briefings.

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Japan must open markets more for foreign firms: US

REUTERS, Davos, Switzerland

Japan needs more work on opening up its domestic markets for foreign firms, US Deputy Treasury Secretary Robert Kimmitt said on Saturday.

"A considerable progress has been made but there are still opportunities in front of us," he told a panel discussion at the World Economic Forum in Davos.

"Things are going better for companies already in Japan but I think we still need to work on creating opportunities for new companies to come into Japanese markets," he said.

"Particularly looking at postal savings we want to create a level of playing field for Japanese and foreigners looking to come into Japan and give equal opportunities."

After four years, Enron's Lay, Skilling to face jury

REUTERS, Houston

Four years after the dramatic demise of Enron Corp, former chiefs Ken Lay and Jeffrey Skilling will enter a federal courtroom in Houston on Monday to face charges linking them to one of the biggest business disasters in US history.

The case against Lay, 63, and Skilling, 52, hinges on whether the two executives, who once enthralled Wall Street by creating a company that became the nation's seventh largest, were aware of Enron's financial shell game that pumped up earnings while hiding billions of dollars in debt.

The Enron Task Force, a special unit created by the U.S. Department of Justice to investigate wrongdoing at the Houston-based company, will parade several former Enron executives who have struck plea agreements in front of jurors to try to tie Lay and Skilling to criminal acts of fraud and conspiracy.

The government's case got a boost last month when Enron's former chief accountant, Richard Causey, who was due to go on trial with Lay and Skilling, struck a deal that will send him to prison for seven years and likely put him in the witness stand.

"I think the only (thing the defense) has to stand on is that Skilling and Lay had no knowledge of this, and that may have been easier before Causey's deal," said Henry Pontell, criminology professor at the University of California-Irvine and co-author of the white collar crime book "Profit Without Honor."



Shahriar Kamal, deputy managing director of Concord Group, and Mehboob Chowdhury (2-L), chief commercial officer of mobile phone operator Banglalink, shake hands after signing an agreement on Thursday. Under the deal, Concord Amusement World-Foy's Lake, Chittagong will arrange promotional programmes for Banglalink subscribers and the cellphone operator will also hold cultural events at the amusement park.

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