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Quality control a must to face post-MFA era: FM

Quality Fair 2006 kicks off

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Ensuring quality control at every level in production process is a must to survive in the tight and protective market following the expiry of the multi-fibre arrangement, said the minister for foreign affairs yesterday.

M. Morshed Khan said, "Unless adopting quality management system in producing any product, you will certainly be kicked out from the competitive global market."

He was addressing the inaugural ceremony of a three-day Quality Fair 2006 at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in Dhaka.

Bangladesh Association of QMS Professionals (BAQP) in association with Catalyst and Strategica Limited organised the fair. Dewan Sultan Ahmed, vice-president of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), MA Momen, president of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI), Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, Ahmed H Kabir, president of BAQP, and Rajib Parvez, chairman of Strategica Limited, also spoke at the inaugu-

ral function.

The fair aims to highlight the companies that have achieved management standards such as ISO 9000, ISO 14000 and HACCP certifications and the QMS consulting and certification houses that offer services for gaining such management standards.

A total of 25 companies, including Abul Khair Steel, BSB, Certification International, Daffodil PC, MSS, NHPC, ORI, PMTC, QIA, RDER, Shah Cement, StarShip, SEYLON, URS, USAID and other QMS certified organisations, are showcasing their products at 25 stalls at the fair.

Organisers said the prospective companies seeking certification will have the opportunity of exchanging views with the companies that have already achieved management standards.

Termining ISO certification a short-term accreditation for a company, the foreign minister said it can be achieved by maintaining different parameters. But it should not be used as a signboard, he added.

"If we want to survive in the world's competitive market, we have to do better than ISO parameter," he observed.

The minister also urged the stakeholders to take initiative for developing human resources.

He lamented that so many people in the industrial sector are not well aware of quality control.

"We have to create awareness about quality management. Today, awareness is the biggest challenging issue to control quality at every level of the society," he said.

The FBCCI vice-president said many international buyers now want ISO certified products. "So, as part of the country's export diversification, we have to move forward to international standard line," he added.

In the present global trade scenario, non-tariff barrier appears to be a major obstacle than the tariff barriers, he said. The DCCI president, adding "Keeping this in mind we have to be aware of quality management control to examine sanitary, phytosanitary measures in the production level".

Quality is a matter of courage, said Mahfuz Anam. "There is no other alternative to maintaining quality, as consumers are becoming more conscious about quality of products, he said.

Citing an example that through improving quality of their products

the Japanese have now grabbed the global market, he said the products made by them in the 60s had no quality, though those were on sale at the cheapest price at that time.

"Without quality, every other way to succeed in business is a short-cut way. So, everyone should look at the global market to find out the reasons why a company is respected while the other is denied," he said.

Quality is also integrated with a company management, he maintained, adding that compromise with quality may be a blunder for a company.

The BAQP president said the society is suffering at every level because of lack of quality control. So, quality management should be improved, he added.

During the fair, a number of seminars will also take place which aim to specifically highlight QMS and related issues. However, the name of any participant in any seminar is required to be registered through visiting www.baqp.org/qualityfair.

The Daily Star, Channel 1 and Wega Zone are the media partners of the fair. The fair will remain open from 11am to 8pm everyday.

BASIC Bank declares 24.07pc dividend

Bangladesh Small Industries and Commerce (BASIC) Bank Ltd has declared a 24.07 per cent dividend for the shareholders for the year 2005.

Of the dividend, 16.67 per cent is stock dividend and 7.40 per cent cash dividend.

The dividend was announced at the 17th annual general meeting (AGM) of the bank held in Dhaka on Sunday, says press release.

Secretary of Ministry of Industries and Chairman of the bank Md Nurul Amin presided over the AGM.

Beximco Synthetics okays 5pc cash, 10pc stock dividends

Beximco Synthetics Ltd has declared a five per cent cash dividend and 10 per cent stock dividend for its shareholders for the year 2005.

The dividends were okayed at the 15th annual general meeting (AGM) of the company held yesterday in Dhaka, says a press release.

Vice Chairman of the company Salman F Rahman presided over the AGM, which was also attended by directors Iqbal Ahmed, MA Qasem and AB Siddiqui Rahman.

BenQ-Siemens mobile handsets launched

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Siemens Bangladesh Ltd on Sunday unveiled its new consumer brand BenQ-Siemens mobile handsets in the local market.

Forged from a dynamic and complementary partnership between the former Siemens handset business and the Asian consumer electronics group BenQ, the new company will focus on expanding its product portfolio in the 3G arena by using the multimedia strengths of BenQ.

At the launching ceremony in Dhaka, Rudolf P Klink, managing director and CEO of Siemens Bangladesh Ltd, said, "Mobile phone business has always been critical for us and we have focused on this business with sincerity and passion."

Adrian Chang, president of Asia Pacific of BenQ Corporation, said, "We have now successfully united the two companies at an operation level and today marks the start of the next phase in our development to engage the Bangladesh consumers with the spirit and energy of our combined BenQ-Siemens brand."

Aminur Rashid, director, Industry and Consumer Products Division of Siemens Bangladesh, said, "We are a strong brand in the mobile phone industry in Bangladesh having a market share of 20 per cent."



Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan visits a stall after inaugurating a three-day 'Quality Fair 2006' at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in Dhaka yesterday.

Give private sector chances to ensure good governance

Seminar urges govt

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Speakers at a seminar yesterday urged the government to offer opportunities to private sector so that it can play a role in establishing good governance.

They also said good governance especially in key areas such as law and order, banking and finance, legal affairs, and infrastructure is the overriding necessity.

They were speaking at the seminar titled 'Policy Reforms in Government to Business Relations - Looking Ahead' organised by the US Embassy in Dhaka and co-hosted by the American Chamber of Commerce in Bangladesh (AmCham). AmCham President Andrew Fawthrop conducted the seminar.

Speaking at the seminar, Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed, managing director of PKSF (Palli Karma Sahayak Foundation), said the corporate governance should also be improved at levels. "The private sector should also be given the opportunity," he added.

The former Bangladesh Bank governor also said development in infrastructure is needed to increase foreign investment.

Emphasising continuation of reform policies, Saber Hossain Chowdhury, political secretary to Awami League president, said changes in government do not mean changes in reform policies. "The opposition has a role to play in this context," he said.

Former commerce minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury

said investment in different areas such as infrastructure and telecoms will help the NBR collect more revenue.

Presenting the keynote paper, National Board of Revenue (NBR) Chairman Khairuzzaman Chowdhury said if the reform processes are effectively implemented, Bangladesh's tax administration would reach high standard.

He, however, said allegations are there that pervasive corruption and administrative bottlenecks are still acting as a major impediment to growth in investment and business.

Professor Masuda Rashid Chowdhury, vice-president of Saarc SME Forum, also spoke at the seminar.



Officials show off newly launched BenQ-Siemens brand mobile handsets at a function in Dhaka on Sunday.

Nokia values Bangladesh as emerging market

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh is one of Nokia's most important emerging markets, said a high official of the mobile phone giant at a press briefing at a hotel in Dhaka yesterday.

Senior Vice President for the Asia-Pacific Networks of Nokia Rajeev Suri said, "We recognise the great importance of the fast growing Bangladesh market. We will be developing a strong Nokia presence to serve the market in the best possible way."

He also said his company is working with Warid Telecoms and GrameenPhone to strengthen Nokia's footprint and visibility in this country, establishing an office in Dhaka and dedicating personnel in place to serve their potential customers here.

Nokia plans to hire more people and is confident of expanding along with their customers and market, he added.

"We are making good progress and gaining momentum in establishing relationship with the Bangladesh government and the operators here," Suri said.

As one of the leading end-to-end mobility suppliers of mobile terminals, Nokia intends to make mobile communications affordable and accessible to the Bangladeshi people, the press meet was told.

According to the Nokia, the number of mobile subscribers will reach at least 3 billion globally in 2008 from 2 billion in September 2005, of which around 80 per cent will come from new growth markets. Asia-Pacific region and China will account for 50 per cent of the world-be subscribers.

"We are well positioned to capitalise on this growth with our localisation strategy and commitment to bringing resources, people and products to where they best serve customers," Suri said further.

When asked about measures to reduce the total cost of ownership of mobile usage, the Nokia Networks official said, "Co-operation is needed between the private sector, governments and regulators to bridge the digital divide and Nokia is committed to doing its part to spread the benefits of mobility."

A number of senior officials were also present at the press conference.

BGMEA opens eye unit

UNB, Dhaka

An eye unit has been set up at the BGMEA Health Centre at Malibagh in Dhaka to offer eye treatment to garment workers free of cost.

President of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) Tipu Munshi formally inaugurated the unit yesterday.

The BGMEA Health Centre was established in 1994.

BGMEA vice president Shahidul Haque Sikder and centre Chairman Masud Kader Mona were, among others, present in the opening ceremony.

Japan, Brunei begin FTA talks

AFP, Tokyo

Japan and Brunei launched Monday their first round of talks toward signing a bilateral free trade agreement as Tokyo seeks more such pacts in Asia.

Japan is Brunei's biggest export destination, shipping some 200 billion yen (1.7 billion dollars) in 2004, mainly oil and natural gas, while Japan exported machinery and other goods worth 12 billion yen to Brunei.

"The meeting began today and will last for five days," said a foreign ministry official.

The two nations agreed in May to kick off the talks during a meeting held on the sidelines of the Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) in Qatar.

Japan has been increasingly pursuing free trade pacts to secure access to raw materials and markets for its exports.

Its first, with Singapore, took effect in late 2002 and Japan has since agreed deals with Malaysia, Mexico, the Philippines and Thailand.

It is in ongoing negotiations with South Korea, Indonesia and with the 10-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) as a whole.

INDIA'S DECISION NOT TO EXPORT SUGAR, PULSES Hafiz sees no adverse impact on Bangladesh

UNB, Dhaka

Commerce Minister Hafiz Uddin Ahmed has said India's decision not to export wheat, sugar and pulses will not make any adverse impact on Bangladesh market.

India might have taken the decision on certain domestic compulsions, he said while talking to reporters at his office yesterday.

The minister said India is not a major destination of wheat, sugar and pulses for Bangladesh. "Bangladesh import sugar from Brazil and Thailand, pulses from Myanmar, Australia, Canada and Turkey while wheat from Australia, Canada and USA," he said.

As per the statistics of the commerce ministry, in the first nine months of the current fiscal year (2005-06) Bangladesh imported 451,024 metric tons of sugar -- 303,596 MT from Brazil and only 53,400 MT from India.

In the same period, Bangladesh imported 1,315,081 metric tons of wheat from various countries, including 223,000 MT from Australia and only 35,000 MT from India.

Bangladesh imported a total of 291,163 metric tons of pulses during the period. Of this, 135,000 MT from Canada, 105,463 MT from Australia and 29,200 MT from India.

Although there was no negative

impact on Bangladesh market following the recent Indian decision, the commerce minister said the government is deeply observing the matter.

He said to make the market stable, the government has already taken some measures like importing 160,000 metric tons of sugar and 3,000 metric tons of pulses through the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB). Tender has already been floated in this connection, he said.

The commerce minister said his ministry will take necessary steps to ensure the availability of essentials during the holy month of Ramadan at comparatively low prices.

South Asia can reduce poverty by two-thirds in a decade: World Bank

UNB, Dhaka

South Asian countries like Bangladesh will be able to reduce poverty by two-thirds in less than 10 years riding on recent strong economic growth, says a World Bank report.

But Bangladesh will have to double its growth rate to achieve the target as the report titled "Economic Growth in South Asia" estimated that the South Asian countries could see single-digit poverty rates in a decade if economic growth accelerates to 10 per cent a year until 2015.

"Bangladesh may find frozen foods, pharmaceuticals and ceramics as areas of growth," according to the WB report released yesterday.

To tap the growth target, the report pointed out, Bangladesh needs to become more competitive by upgrading ports, roads, power supply and transport logistics.

The report said Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan have all grown at over 5 per cent a year on average during the last five years. Growth in both Pakistan and India topped 8 per cent last year. Forecasts put South Asian economies on a steady path of expansion this year.

The recent Bangladesh Country Assistance Strategy (CAS)

focuses on improving the business climate as a key pillar, particularly improving governance and efficiency in infrastructure, reducing trade restrictions and providing access to land and labour markets.

The report said economic growth has already contributed to an impressive reduction in poverty in the last decade with poverty falling by 9 per cent in Bangladesh while 10 and 11 per cent respectively in India and Nepal.

"For Bangladesh, in addition to reducing poverty, there have been significant strides in meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)," it noted.

For example, the report added, gross primary enrollment has increased from 72 per cent in 1980 to 98 per cent in 2001 and Bangladesh has already attained the MDG of eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary enrollment.

The report further cites country-specific challenges that policymakers in Bangladesh need to strengthen governance to accelerate growth.

It stressed the need for embracing policies to increase investment and productivity, and improve the quality of labour, while addressing pervasive income inequalities and poor service delivery.

"South Asia's decade-long economic expansion has raised the possibility that the subcontinent could eliminate poverty in our lifetime," said Shantayanan Devarajan, co-author of the report and World Bank Chief Economist for the South Asia region.

"But to materialise this dream, South Asians must create the conditions and incentives necessary to sustain and accelerate growth that benefits all. The economic well-being of several hundred millions of people depends on it," he added.

The report observed that much remains to be done to achieve accelerated growth rates that increase economic prosperity across the board. Firstly, economic growth in the past decade has resulted in growing income inequality, which might act as a constraint to higher growth in the future.

Secondly, while conflict, corruption and high fiscal deficits may not have constrained growth in the past, their persistence may become binding in the future. "Faster growth must also be more equitably shared," the report said.

Also key to reaching higher growth will be addressing rural and urban infrastructure deficits, it said, adding that around US\$25 billion is needed annually for new infrastructure in the region.

Regional cellphone summit opens targeting market expansion

UNB, Dhaka

A fast-buck growth of mobile telecommunications in Bangladesh raises the number of subscribers to at least 12 million by the yearend, which indicates a large business market of 300 million dollars for the telecoms companies.

Chairman of Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (BTRC) Muhammad Omar Farooq yesterday announced the growth figure of mobile phones in Bangladesh as a regional mobile summit targeting market expansion opened here.

Informa Telecoms and Media, a Singapore-based multinational in the information-technology sector, has organised the two-day 3rd South Asia Mobiles Summit 2006 at Sheraton Hotel.

In 2001 in Bangladesh, the growth rate of mobile phone subscribers was only 662 million and land telephone was .56 million, while in December 2005, the figures stood at 9.269 million and less than 1 million respectively, Farooq said while inaugurating the mobile meet.

"We are an important country in Asia-Pacific, especially in South Asian region, in terms of telecommunications... The figures show the dynamism of mobile telecommunications growth in Bangladesh," he said.

He said that around 30 million GSM handsets are annually sold across the Asia-Pacific region, and by the end of this year, one million of it would be sold in Bangladesh.

"The market indicates a large business of 300 million dollars in Bangladesh just from the sale of GSM handsets. And it needs no mention that the market of mobile telecommunications system also has a great potential here," Farooq said.

Although the tele-density in Bangladesh is only 9 percent now, the access to telecommunication is almost 100 percent, the BTRC chairman told the function, adding that Bangladesh is already gripped by telephony.

He said they could persuade the finance ministry not to add any new tax to mobile connection and GSM handsets. This year's budget proposed to reduce the tax on mobile-phone connection and GSM handsets from Tk 800 to Tk 500 and Tk 300 to Tk 200 respectively.

Chairman of South Asia GSM Operators Forum Mehboob

Chowdhury said South Asia is one of the fastest-growing markets in GSM sector, among which Bangladesh has the potential of more than 15-million subscriber growth this year.

"To achieve the 15-million target, we need some support from government such as reducing tax rates, promoting the sector and encouraging foreign investment in this industry," said Mehboob, also chief commercial officer (CCO) of Banlalink and chair of the programme.

He said the mobile-telecom companies' common agenda is developing the growth of telecommunications in the country so that the benefit of communications can be made available to the people.

The objectives of the two-day summit are to explore market-growth outlook in South Asia and the successful strategies that have spurred growth in the market thus far.

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