

## WTO AID FOR TRADE PACKAGES

# Govt to form nat'l body to devise strategy

JASIM UDDIN KHAN

The government has decided in principle to form a national committee on 'Aid for Trade' to reap maximum benefits from the WTO's aid for trade packages following Doha Development Round deadlock.

The government will also seek written opinions from all stakeholders especially from chambers and trade bodies on the issue.

The decision was taken yesterday at a meeting on 'WTO Doha Development Round' with Commerce Minister Hafizuddin Ahmad in the chair.

The committee after receiving the opinions from businesspeople and trade experts will formulate a strategy to utilise the trade pack-

ages offered by the developed countries.

Japan has already offered US\$ 10 billion under aid for trade packages for the least developed countries (LDCs) and some developing nations.

Other developed countries also offered increased trade-related technical assistance to help LDCs prepare for closer integration in the multilateral trading system and build physical infrastructure to produce goods and export under WTO.

"Bangladesh will get priority in receiving aid among the LDCs as the country's infrastructure needs a huge development," Nasir Uddin Ahmed, director general of WTO Cell at the commerce ministry, said after the meeting.

He said, "Our ports should be developed. Capacity building of customs and trade officials is also required," he added.

"Suggestions were made in the meeting to form a national committee so that the aid for trade could be used for the interest of the country," Debapriya Bhattacharya, executive director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said.

"We don't think the suspension of the Doha Development Round will affect Bangladesh much as most of our trade benefits come from bilateral deals," he added.

Meanwhile, the commerce minister said Bangladesh's selection as the co-ordinator of the LDCs in the WTO will bring more opportunities for the country in the future

global trade negotiations.

The meeting also decided to submit the recommendations placed by experts on draft modalities on non-agricultural market access (NAMA) soon.

Feroz Ahmed, commerce secretary, Farooq Sobhan, former foreign secretary and president of Bangladesh Enterprise Institute, Mir Nasir Hossain, president of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), and Mir Shahabuddin Mohammad, vice chairman of Export Promotion Bureau, were also present at the meeting.

## Prime Bank arranges Tk 23cr loan for Virgo Pharma

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Prime Bank Ltd has arranged a Tk 23 crore 'syndicated hire purchase shirtakul melk' (syndicated loan) for Virgo Pharmaceuticals Limited (VPL).

An agreement to this effect was signed yesterday by VPL Managing Director (MD) Shafayetul Islam, Prime Bank MD M Shahjahan Bhuiyan, Export Import Bank of Bangladesh Additional MD Kazi Mashur Rahman and Shahjalal Islami Bank Limited Deputy MD Jillur Rahman.

Prime Bank is the lead arranger of the first-ever syndication deal under Islamic Shariah in Bangladesh.

PBL Chairman Imam Anwar Hossain, Chairperson of VPL Syeda Mahbuba Akhter, Chairman of VPL Advisory Committee Professor AK Azad Chowdhury, Khatib of Baitul Mokarram Mosque Maulana Obaidul Haque and Secretary General of Bangladesh Association of Pharmaceutical Industries Nazmul Hassan were also present at the signing ceremony.

Speaking at the function, Imam Anwar Hossain said the syndicated loan will surely help VPL to launch new project in producing tablets, capsules, liquids, semi-liquids like syrup, suspension, emulsion, ointment and cream, saving huge foreign currency from the national exchequer which would have spent for import of these medicines from abroad.

Shahjahan Bhuiyan said the financial support, though a little amount, may create intention amongst many other institutions to enter into syndication lead following Islamic Shariah, which will directly encourage the businesses to take up big projects.

## SME fair from Sept 11

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

In a bid to encourage small and medium enterprises (SMEs), country's apex trade body is going to organise a weeklong SME fair in Dhaka from September 11.

"We want to display developments of our local SME products as the sector has a great potential," FBCCI President Mir Nasir Hossain told a press conference yesterday, announcing the fair schedule.

The Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) chief said although the local entrepreneurs have the ability to produce international standard products, they fail to introduce their products at national and international levels due to lack of campaign.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia is scheduled to inaugurate the fair, while Leader of the Opposition in Parliament and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina is expected to attend the closing ceremony.

Local products including textile, frozen foods, leather and leather goods, plastic products, surgical equipment, medical machinery,

sanitary products, real estate related products, agro-based ones, bicycle, ceramic and melamine products, pharmaceuticals, software, cosmetics, furniture, electrical and electronic goods and jewellery will be displayed in the fair at 111 stalls and 9 pavilions, according to the organisers.

Mir Nasir said the SME sector contributes 90 percent to the total export earnings. It has also 25 percent contribution to the country's GDP (gross domestic product).

"But unfortunately, continuous power shortage, lack of funding, high interest rate, unavailability of raw materials hinders growth of the sector," he added.

He also identified reluctance of the private banks to disburse loans to SME sector as the major barrier to flourishing the sector.

The FBCCI will organise four seminars as the sidelines of the fair on SME development. Some interactive meetings between SME entrepreneurs and buyers will also be held during the fair.

## Chinese GWM brand vehicle launched

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Le Meng Motors, the sole distributor of Chinese GWM brand vehicles in Bangladesh, has started marketing of the cars in local market for the first time.

Great Wall Motor Company Ltd, which is the largest private sector automobile manufacturer in China with an annual capacity of three lakh units, manufactures Great Wall Motors (GWM) brand passenger vehicles.

Commerce and Water Resources Minister Hafizuddin Ahmad inaugurated the marketing of the vehicles at a function in Dhaka on Wednesday.

Zhu Jinfu, company commercial counselor of Chinese embassy in Dhaka, Khairul Anam, chairman of Le Meng Motors, Tofail Ahmed, managing director, among others, were present at the inauguration.

Initially, the company will import four types of automobiles -- Sing RUV, Sailor pickup, GWM superior pickup and SUV Limousine of Hover CUV model.

The 2200 cc SUV Limousine will cost Tk 18 lakh and it travels nine kilometers on one litre fuel, officials said.

"We have set up a service centre and will provide free services for the buyers until the vehicles run 20,000 kilometres," said Tofail Ahmed adding that the company eyes to sell 1,000 units in the next one year.

## Oil prices rise

AFP, Singapore.

Oil prices were higher in Asian trade Thursday on concerns an approaching storm and a decline in US crude reserves.

At 11:25 am (0325 GMT), New York's main contract, light sweet crude for delivery in September, was up eight cents to 75.89 US dollars a barrel from its US close of 75.81 dollars Wednesday.

Brent North Sea crude for September delivery was up seven cents at 76.96 dollars.

## Thai auto exports jump

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's auto exports for the first-half year jumped 38 percent year-on-year to a record high of 263,587 units on the back of robust global demand for light pick-up trucks, an industry group said Thursday.

Thailand, Southeast Asia's top auto industry, is set to overtake the United States as the world's top maker of one-tonne pick-up trucks this year thanks to strong global demand.



PHOTO: STAR

M Shahjahan Bhuiyan, managing director of Prime Bank Ltd, and Shafayetul Islam, managing director of Virgo Pharmaceuticals Ltd, shake hands after signing a syndicated loan agreement yesterday in Dhaka.