

Garment sector may lose tempo, warns BGMEA

With the export of ready-made garments having failed to reach the target last year, manufacturers have cautioned that the burgeoning sector might lose the tempo unless the snags are removed with utmost urgency, reports UNB.

Garments, which has been keeping the country's export turnover healthy over the last couple of years when jute and other traditional foreign exchange earners periodically stumbled, fell short of the target by 22 per cent in the last fiscal year (1993-94).

Dejected over the adverse trend, the authorities have recently slashed the garment export target for the current fiscal year by 550 million US dollars.

Talking to UNB, Redwan Ahmed MP, President of Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), cited factors like erratic power supply, procedural tangles, harassment by customs, acute scarcity of cargo carriers which contributed to the setback.

We have long been cautioning the government of the

consequence of these chronic hurdles ... everything goes too slow here. Problems demand urgent corrections before time runs out," said Ahmed, flanked by other BGMEA office-bearers, at his office on Thursday.

BGMEA is now preparing to take these grievances to the Prime Minister soon.

Garments exporters particularly pointed out frequent loadshedding that they complained, has appeared as a matter of serious concern for the sector.

"Over the past three or four months, there has been three hours of loadshedding on an average, simply crippling productivity. We are failing to ship the consignments timely, and many of us have lost buyers for failing to keep schedule," said Redwan Ahmed, a ruling party member of parliament.

Exporters strongly resented procedural bottlenecks in releasing imported fabrics from the customs authorities which, they said, is another major cause of frequent default in shipment.

Complaining "oversuspicious" attitude of customs officials, Redwan Ahmed said

there had been frequent incidences of customs authorities holding back finished fabrics suspecting those as grey fabrics.

Fabrics are then sent for chemical tests, time goes in the meantime and, on many occasions, exporters lost buyers. We have discussed the problem with the customs authorities several times. Decisions were taken, but officials at the field level gave a thumbs down.

BGMEA demands that the

garments manufacturers be allowed to import grey fabrics to enable them to go by the changing fashions in the West.

Exporters also have serious complaints about scarcity of air cargo plane.

Some 1000-1200 metric

tons of export cargo usually await space in the airport daily whereas Biman does not at all have the capacity to airlift those.

The exporters also complained about inadequate equipment in the Chittagong port to handle container cargo that has been hampering the garments export. Loading and unloading sometimes take two weeks, they said.

RAJSHAHI, Sept 18: Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB) under its 'rural poormen cooperative project' has disbursed Tk 4.36 lakh as loan among 22,216 members of the project from February to August this year, reports BSS.

Some 1,615 men and

women cooperative societies have so far been formed under this project. A total of Taka one crore two lakh has also been deposited by the members as their own investments.

BRDB with the financial assistance of Asian Development Bank (ADB) introduced the project in March last year and this project will be continued up to December of 1997.

The main objective of this project is to accelerate the pace of socio-economic development of two lakh five thousand poormen by providing them proper training and loan benefit from the project.

So far a total of 23396

members have been provided

training in small business, paddy husking and poultry.

Some 82 thanas of 13 districts under Rajshahi and Khulna divisions have been brought under the project and Taka 148 crore has been allocated for implementing the project.

NEW DELHI, Sept 18: India stopped short of allowing a majority stake for foreign telecom companies in telephone services, four months after deciding to allow private phone networks in the country, reports AFP.

Communications Minister Sukhdev Singh said a maximum equity participation of 49 per cent would be allowed for foreign telecommunication companies launching joint ventures with Indian counterparts to set up phone exchanges.

He called it the "smoothest introduction of private telecoms" to have taken place anywhere in the world, explaining away the delay to his efforts to persuade workers' unions to accept competition.

The trade unions are now reconciled to the private sector's entry, he said in the news conference ahead of his planned departure on an investment-seeking mission to Japan.

Clinton urged to abandon Super 301 trade policy

Mahathir against rapid progress in APEC

JAKARTA, Sept 18: Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad on Saturday cautioned members of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum against rapid moves to institutionalise the organisation, reports Reuter.

Mahathir, accompanied by Foreign Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Defence Minister Najib Abdul Razak along with a group of businessmen, was in Indonesia ahead of the APEC summit meeting in November in Bogor, West Java.

There should not be too much rapid progress in APEC," he told a news conference at the end of a two-day visit.

It should not be a structural organisation in which members accept decisions made by APEC. It should be a forum where the concentration is to help the less developed nations.

Its members include the United States, Thailand, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Singapore, Canada, Indonesia, Brunei, Mexico, Malaysia, New Zealand, Australia, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, Papua New Guinea and China.

Clinton is due to become a full member in November.

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sions with President Suharto on Friday during his visit, also said the two countries would hold further talks on a long-running dispute over two small islands near Borneo.

Senior APEC officials ended a three-day meeting in the central Java town of Yogyakarta on Wednesday in a bullish mood, setting a business-like tone for the November summit.

Officials said they made substantive progress on all key issues and had formally welcomed a controversial report on the grouping's future that laid the field open for their leaders to cement its commitment to free trade.

APEC, formed in 1989, accounts for 40 per cent of world trade and 50 per cent of its output.

The long-overdue drug policy lifted compulsory licensing for all prescription drugs except for five set aside for manufacture by state firms.

We would not like APEC overshadowing ASEAN or being directed by the more powerful members," he added.

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