

BRDB launches
Tk 1.4 cr loan
disbursement
scheme in Kushtia

"Rural Poor Co-Operative Project" of Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB) has launched a programme to disburse Taka 1 crore four lakh as credit during the 1994-95 financial year for socio-economic development of assetless people in 12 thanas of greater Kushtia district, reports BSS.

An amount of Taka 76 lakh has already been disbursed during the last five months. This credit is being provided for the income generating activities like beef fattening, milch cow, pisciculture, poultry raising, vegetable cultivation, nursery and small trading. Repayment of credit by instalment has already been started, a press release of BRDB said here yesterday.

The project has already given skill development training to 8634 assetless people in different income generating activities. A plan has been taken to provide skill development training to one lakh 32 thousand assetless members during project period of the district.

The project started with aim to achieve the target of socio-economic development of one lakh 32 thousand assetless families of the district.

Biman's founding
anniversary
observed

The 23rd founding anniversary of Biman Bangladesh Airlines was observed yesterday, a Biman press release said, reports BSS.

Biman — the national flag carrier of Bangladesh — had begun its journey on January 4, 1972, soon after the independence of Bangladesh.

A millad mahfil was held in Biman Bhawan to mark the day. Special munajat was offered, seeking divine blessings for continued prosperity of the airline and the country. Similar programme has also been organised in all Biman offices and establishments under Biman network.

Biman wishes a very happy and prosperous 1995 to its valued customers, wellwishers and the countrymen.

New executives
of Peoples
Insurance

Al-Haj Md. Rahim Uddin Bhorasha and Nurul Islam Pathary have been elected chairman and vice-chairman respectively of the Board of Directors of the Peoples Insurance Company Limited at a meeting held on Thursday, says a press release.

Former member of parliament Rahim Uddin Bhorasha is the chairman of R.K and R.V. Group of Companies. He is a former president of Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Rangpur.

Unionism disrupting garments
sector, alleges BGMEA

By Asiuzzaman

Just after the child labour problem subsided, an acute workers' unionism has now gripped country's garments sector disrupting the production and exports, sources in the Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) said.

For the past several months, the workers in many of the factories have engaged themselves in forming unions instead of discharging their routine duties, one BGMEA source alleged.

Another source said a number of factories have already been shut because of the labour problems, and many others are facing closure owing to their disrupted business.

"Bad days are coming for country's garments sector unless the situation is not contained," one executive member of the BGMEA told The Daily Star on condition of anonymity.

As part of their continued agitation, garments workers last month held a closed-door meeting at the Engineers Institute to form a national workers union in the country to realise their demands.

He said that the problems centring round the child labour issue have almost been solved as the factories retrenched most of the child workers. According to a BGMEA decision, the factories are now free from child labour since October last year, he added.

Some 1,800 garments factories employ about 10 lakh workers. According to the BGMEA, the sector contributes 63 per cent of country's export amounting to over two billion US dollars.

A number of BGMEA executive committee members alleged that a non government organisation "Asian American Free Labour Institute (AAFLI)" has been instigating the factory workers to form the unions which cause disruptions in the factories.

All the sources requested anonymity as they are afraid of becoming targets of the AAFLI.

"If I am locked into a confrontation with the AAFLI, it sends letters to the buyers urging them not to do business with my company," one executive member of the BGMEA alleged.

AAFLI also takes the help of foreign media to tarnish the image of a particular company, he added.

He said being an US NGO, the buyers sometimes entertain the AAFLI allegations and take actions like cancelling orders.

Apparently annoyed with the AAFLI activities a section of garments owners reportedly attacked the AAFLI's Gulshan office in mid-November and damaged it.

The BGMEA executive named a number of companies which faced problems with the AAFLI and said Roushan Garments is the latest 'victim' of the NGO.

Another BGMEA executive committee member said the Roushan Garments retrenched some workers who were surplus because of dull business.

Some of the workers reportedly informed the matter to the AAFLI which took the issue seriously. The AAFLI country director sent letter to the Roushan factory directing the owner to reinstate the workers within 10 days.

"Note that I will not send letter to your buyers or take any other action for 10 days from the date of this letter," an AAFLI letter signed by its country director and sent to the Roushan garments in early November, said.

The letter also mentioned "consistent with the AAFLI mission, I must now do everything legally possible to show the workers that Roushan (factory) is not above the law."

Roushan Garments sources said the NGO later sent letters to all its buyers one of which cancelled orders following a press report in the UK.

The factory has sent a legal

notice to the AAFLI claiming compensation of Taka five crore for damaging its reputation and business.

Roushan Garments claimed that the factory is free from child labours and it gradually developed a good reputation to its buyers in the European market.

When contacted AAFLI executive Anisuddin Khan told The Daily Star that "the garments owners are misunderstanding us." AAFLI is helping the workers to form a national union in line with Bangladesh law in which BGMEA has its consent.

"But most of the factories are misunderstanding that we are helping the workers to form union in every factory," Anisuddin, ranked three in the AAFLI, told this correspondent.

The mission of the AAFLI, he said, is to help "free and democratic development of trade union." Earlier, his organisation had worked with the tea gardens, railway and T&T workers to develop their skill for unionism, he added.

"Now our main thrust is the garments sector where 85 per cent workers are women," the AAFLI spokesman said, adding "workers are given lectures about their rights."

He admitted that AAFLI had problems with three to four factories but declined to elaborate saying "We referred the cases to the labour directorate or to the chief inspector of factories for necessary actions."

Regarding the Roushan Garment incident, Anisuddin admitted that it was wrong for AAFLI's part to write such letter directing the factory to rehire the workers within 10 days.

"We can not dictate but we can request," he said, adding "the terminated workers complained to AAFLI that they were sacked as because they came to AAFLI office and attended classes."

He declined to elaborate citing the matter as "sub ju-

dice" as Roushan Garments issued a legal notice to his organisation.

Anisuddin claimed that his organisation has a good rapport with the BGMEA and they are going to sign an agreement to resolve the child labour issue.

He said according to the AAFLI statistics, there are still 25,000 child labourers in Bangladesh garment factories who would be regularised in their jobs providing two-hour schooling every day.

The AAFLI executive said schooling system is the second provision in the controversial Harkin Bill.

Redwan Ahmed, President of the BGMEA told The Daily Star that he received a number of complaints against AAFLI.

"I am monitoring the situation and I am preparing myself to take necessary actions," he said over telephone.

Redwan said he had already referred the matter to the government authorities concerned which is the right organ to check the matter.

He said an NGO should not have any right to supervise or dictate how a factory would be run.

The BGMEA president said the country's existing laws permit the workers to form union, and the factory owners always abide by those laws.

He said he had several rounds of talks with the AAFLI country director regarding the child labour issue. "We have agreed that we should settle all the issues amicably," he added.

Talking to The Daily Star, another BGMEA members said that the AAFLI has no operation in India. In Indonesia it created some problems.

A garment worker who attended classes in the AAFLI office said, "They told us that our pays and salaries would be regularised if we come to attend the classes here."

"They teach us that if a worker is thrown out, we all should abstain from work and come out of the factory," the worker added.



Executives of Square Toiletries-Ltd at the annual sales conference at a local hotel yesterday. — Star photo

Tehran for closer trade
ties among Asian states

CALCUTTA, Jan 4: Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati urged Asian countries today to forge closer trade ties in a bid to become an "important centre of global power," reports AFP.

Velayati, who is attending the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) centenary celebrations in this eastern port city, said economic cooperation could also be extended to the new Central Asian nations.

There had already been "major efforts" by Iran, India, Turkey and China to strengthen ties with the former Soviet republics, he said, adding multilateral trade could be further boosted in the region to "revive old ties."

Velayati listed light and heavy industries, petrochemicals and textiles as the sectors in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan that offered huge potential for cooperation.

"Asia has such a rich culture and (is) endowed with important resources such as oil and

gas," he told some 1,500 delegates from 43 countries attending the three-day CII meeting, India's largest-ever business conference.

"Iran can serve as a bridge between Central Asia, the Middle East and international waters... it is the most suitable location for exports and imports for Central Asia," he added.

Velayati also called upon New Delhi to expand bilateral trade between India and Iran.

An Indo-Iranian gas pipeline project and joint ventures in several sectors such as fertilisers and railways could serve as a model in the region, the Iranian leader said.

Velayati, heading a high-powered delegation to the eighth meeting of the Indo-Iranian Joint Commission, has signed several agreements in New Delhi after his arrival in India on Monday.

He is among several key speakers at the CII meeting.

Square Toiletries
holds annual
sales confce

By Staff Correspondent
Square Toiletries Ltd., a subsidiary of Square Pharmaceuticals Ltd., held its annual sales conference at a local hotel yesterday.

The conference was presided over by Director of Square Toiletries, Anjan Chowdhury, and chief speaker was Executive Director, Dr Ali Reza Kadriabakh.

Square Toiletries became an independent company in June 1994, and from January 15, 1995 will occupy new factory premises of its own.

The conference was attended by regional sales representatives of the company, and reviewed national sales performances for 1994, evaluated sales achievement, targets and growth of the company, with a view to creating new sales policies for '95.

Sales growth for the company for '94 was 23.63 per cent in toiletries and 4.29 per cent for health products. A new product — lip-gel was introduced into the market in 1994, and demand was greater than production capacity for the product. A cooperation agreement was signed with the German company Wella.

At the end of the day-long programme an award giving ceremony was held while it was rounded off with a cultural programme.

Sudan opens
first stock
exchange

KHARTOUM, Jan 4: Sudan, in an attempt to knock its troubled economy back into shape, has marked the new year by opening a stock exchange and printing its own banknotes, reports Reuter.

Trading on the country's first stock exchange began on Monday and officials hope the exchange will eventually attract badly-needed local and foreign investment.

Asian stock markets close lower

HONG KONG Jan 4: Asian stock markets closed mostly lower Wednesday, with share prices slipping in Tokyo in a quiet half day session, reports AP.

The 225-issue Nikkei Stock Average lost 39.02 points, or 0.20 per cent, closing the year's first trading day at 19,684.04.

The average had lost 29.92 points, or 0.15 per cent, on Friday ending 1994 trading at 19,723.06. The market was closed from December 31 to January 3, and opened only for a half day Wednesday before returning to normal Thursday.

Most investors remained on the sidelines in the absence of market-moving news, brokers said. They said it was difficult to predict the future course of the market until next week, when the trading gets into full swing.

The Tokyo Stock Price Index of all issues listed on the first session was down 5.69 points, or 0.36 per cent, to 1,553.40. On Friday, it had climbed 4.75 points, or 0.31 per cent, to 1,559.09.

Meanwhile, the US dollar climbed further against the yen after opening 1995, trading at the highest level since August.

Wednesday's opening level of 100.88 yen was the dollar's highest against the yen since its August 11 opening of 101.35 yen. By late afternoon, it was at 101.16 yen, up 1.33 yen from its level late Friday. Last year, the currency started at 112.78 yen and reached the year's lowest close of 96.40 yen on November 2.

In Hong Kong, share prices staged a mild recovery as fund managers and speculators began buying back shares dumped in nervous selling in the previous session.

The key Hang Seng Index of blue chips rose 42.87 points, or 0.5 per cent, to 7,887.01 following Tuesday's 346.90 point drop.

The index was slightly higher most of the day, slipped in a spate of late afternoon selling, and then rebounded.

But the buyback was not wholehearted and most investors held back, waiting for some sense of direction, one broker said.

The market remain closed for the holidays in Taiwan.

Elsewhere in Asia:
WELLINGTON: New Zealand share prices fell moderately in quiet trading. The NZSE-40 capital index fin-

ished its first session of the new year down 8.14 points at 1,906.11.

MANILA: Share prices fell in light trading on a dearth of market moving developments. The Philippines unlisted composite index of 43 selected issues tumbled 33.31 points to 2,771.97, erasing the 19.47 point gain in the past two sessions.

SYDNEY: Australian share prices fell, with brokers citing a sell off in local bonds and concerns about the country's widening current account deficit. The All Ordinaries index lost 18.7 points to 1,886.2.

SEOUL: Share prices closed mixed amid renewed concern about tightened liquidity. The Korea Composite Stock Price Index fell 16.56 points, closing at 997.01, below the psycho-

logical barrier of 1,000 points.

SINGAPORE: Share prices fell as the new year provided little inspiration to a sluggish market. The 30 share Straits Times Industrial Index dropped 2.11 points to 2,244.14.

KUALA LUMPUR: Share prices continued their losing streak in a market dominated by sellers. The KLSE Composite Index, biased toward large capital companies, shed 11.89 points to 957.81.

BANGKOK: Share prices rose slightly in thin trading as most foreign investors were absent for the New Year's holidays. The Stock Exchange of Thailand index climbed 6.58 points to 1,360.63.

JAKARTA: The stock exchange's Composite Index gained 2,104 points, closing at 474.485.

Notice of RHD Inviting Tender (2nd Call)

1. Tender Notice No	15/KRD of 1994-95.
2. Name of work	Launching Bolt connected portable steel bridge (Chinese) on RCC abutments at 47th KM on Chaysuti and 52nd KM Kalikaprashad bridge site of Kishoreganj-Kattadi-Bhairab Bazar Road under Kishoreganj Road Division during 1994-95. Ch. to 266-CA.
3. Estimated cost	Tk 6,66,931/-
4. Earnest money	Tk 13,339/-
5. Time allowed	30 (Thirty) days.
6. Eligibility of contractor	"A" to "C" class contractor of special category of RHD "D" special category of Mymensingh Road Circle, Mymensingh (Tender received in 1st call will be treated as valid).
7. Name of offices of availability of tender documents	All Executive Engineer, RHD, under Mymensingh Road Circle, Mymensingh/Executive Engineer, RHD, Narayanganj Road Division (Katchpur), Narayanganj/Planning & Design Division, Dhaka Zone, Dhaka/Planning Division (Roads and Bridges), Dhaka/all Sub-Divisions under this Division.
8. Name of officer to receive tender bids	Superintending Engineer, RHD, Mymensingh Road Circle, Mymensingh/Dhaka Road Circle, Dhaka/Monitoring and Evaluation Circle, Dhaka/Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation Circle, Dhaka Zone, Dhaka/Executive Engineer, RHD, Mymensingh/Tangail/Jamalpur/Natrakona Road Division and by the undersigned.
9. Last date of receipt of tender	Up to 12.30 PM on 11-1-95.
10. Date & time of opening of tender	At 12.45 PM on 11-1-95.
11. Last date of selling of tender documents	Up to 5.00 PM (during office hours) on 10-01-95.
12. Date & time of lottery	Lottery will be held on 18-1-95 at 11.00 AM in the office of the undersigned.

US dollar rises
against major
Euro units

LONDON, Jan 4: The US dollar rose against almost all other currencies in early European trading Wednesday, reports AP.

In Tokyo, where markets opened for a half-day trading for the first time since Friday, the dollar rose to its highest level against the yen since August. The dollar closed at 101.16 yen, up 1.33 yen from Friday.

In London, the dollar was quoted at 101.18 yen.

Other dollar rates compared with late Tuesday: — 1,559.8 German marks, up from 1,553.2; — 1,316.0 Swiss francs, up from 1,311.5; — 5,376.3 French francs, up from 5,359.0; — 1,748.2 Dutch guilders, up from 1,742.1; — 1,827.00 Italian lire, down from 1,710.50; — 1,405.1 Canadian dollars, up from 1,403.8.

AFP from New York says: the dollar climbed against other major currencies in quiet trading on Tuesday, the first trading session of 1995 after the long new year's weekend.

At around 9:45 am (1445 GMT), the dollar traded at 1,549.5 German marks against 1,545.95 on Friday and at 100.35 yen against 99.80 yen.

The greenback was also higher against other European currencies, trading at 5,365.2 French francs against 5,339.5 from Friday, at 1,315.2 Swiss francs against 1,308.5 and at 0.6406 pounds, sterling against 0.6382.