



Govt takes major steps to execute jute sector reform

The government has taken some key actions to implement the jute sector reform programme (JSRP) and for the release of the second tranche of World Bank's credit, senior officials of the Ministry of Jute told BSS yesterday.

They said all is set to transfer the Hafiz Textile Mills to the winning bidder, one of the major conditions of the World Bank for releasing the second installment of Taka 182 crore fund under the jute adjustment credit.

The other actions already taken by the government include disposal of assets of four

closed mills and liquidation of Bangladesh Jute Corporation assets.

The implementation of the JSRP faced a setback in 1996 as the World Bank stopped disbursement of the second tranche of fund under the Taka 910-crore jute sector adjustment credit (JSAC).

The bank asked the government to implement some of the components of the credit to get the second installment of credit and agreed to extend time for another one year from December 31, 1996.

According to the agreement,

the World Bank disbursed the first tranche of Taka 182 crore which was made effective from April 4, 1994.

The government launched its jute sector reform programme with the assistance of the World Bank under the JSAC with the twin objectives of bringing about discipline in the financial sector and creating a viable jute industry in the country.

Two major tasks of the JSRP programme were closure of nine jute mills and downsizing two mills for capacity reduction and privatisation of 19 public

jute mills for transfer of capacity to the private sector within the programme time.

According to the ministry officials, the performance of the private sector mills during JSAC period has been disappointing and frustrating.

In spite of receiving debt write-off and restructuring facility and 20 per cent loss financing support from the government for two years, the private sector could not utilise its existing installed capacity of 10000 looms not to speak of acquiring additional capacity from the shredded capacity of the public sector, they said.

India eases restriction on Pak tourists

NEW DELHI, Mar 20: India today eased travel restrictions on Pakistani nationals in a goodwill gesture ahead of landmark talks next week between the two south Asian rivals, reports AFP.

Foreign Minister Inder Kumar Gujral said New Delhi was easing travel restrictions on Pakistani tourists visiting India.

"In keeping with Indian policy to promote people-to-people relations, the government had decided to permit Pakistan tourists to visit Indian groups," Gujral announced in parliament.

"This is a major unilateral step in the right direction," Gujral said and also offered travel concessions to Pakistani businessmen visiting India.

"For the first time, Pakistani businessmen will be eligible to one-year multi-entry visa and, if travelling by air, they could exit and enter either through Bombay or New Delhi."

Gujral also offered concessions to Pakistani senior citizens, students and religious pilgrims ahead of the four days of talks which begin March 28.

The up-coming meeting is the first since January 1994 when official level contacts between India and Pakistan were suspended. The two countries have fought three wars since their independence in 1947.

No agenda has been set for the New Delhi meeting, but Is-

lamabad has said the talks cannot ignore the disputed territory of Kashmir which has caused two of the three wars between the two estranged Asian neighbours.

Novartis Group sales increase to \$25b

The Novartis Group released its first worldwide consolidated 1996 financial report at Basel, Switzerland on Wednesday, says a press release.

The report confirmed the new company's solid financial position by posting a sales increase to 25 billion US dollars in 1996, of which 19 billion US dollars were in life sciences — an upward climb of 6 per cent in local currencies.

With its headquarters at Basel, Switzerland, Novartis — the world's leading life sciences company was formed in December 1996 by the merger of Giba-Geigy and Sandoz, the world's two leading Swiss chemical companies.

Despite the rigours of the integration design and planning process in 1996, all the business sectors of Novartis — healthcare, agribusiness and nutrition participated in this sales growth. With worldwide industry ranking of no. 2, healthcare growth was of 7 per cent leading to sales over 11.09 billion dollars.

Coming AGMs					
Company	Book Closure	AGM/EGM	Date	Venue & Time	Dividend Proposed
National Tube	01/03/97-25/03/97	AGM	25/03/97	Factory Premises 11 am	18.25
Eastern Cables	01/03/97-29/03/97	AGM	—	—	18.5
BD Luggage (Pub)	18/03/97-24/03/97	Half yearly interest	—	—	18
City Vegetable	20/03/97-28/03/97	AGM	—	—	3R:1 (Pre: Tk 50)
Bengal Scent	15/03/97-28/03/97	AGM	28/03/97	Hotel Sonargang, —	18.5
Altaf Automobiles	22/03/97-25/03/97	AGM	—	—	2R:1 (Pre: Tk 150)
Bananco (Pub)	25/03/97-16/04/97	AGM	—	—	—
Usmania Glass	02/03/97-21/03/97	AGM	21/03/97	Regi. Office 10:30 AM	25
Savar Refractor	20/03/97-21/03/97	AGM	27/03/97	Hotel Sonargang 11:30 AM	—
Singer BD	27/03/97-16/04/97	AGM	16/04/97	Hotel Sonargang	75 18.2
Palma Oil	23/03/97-29/03/97	AGM	29/03/97	—	15
Jute Spinners	24/03/97-30/03/97	AGM	30/03/97	Head Office, House No. 98, Road 9A (New) Dharmadip 12 Noon	20
Wata Chemical	01/04/97-08/04/97	AGM	08/04/97	Jalagangra Hall, Hotel Pathan 4 PM	25
Pharmaco Int.	17/03/97-30/03/97	AGM	30/03/97	60, Northfield C/A, BOC Auditorium 10 AM	—
BTC	18/04/97-18/04/97	AGM	—	—	30
Amer Galva	20/03/97-27/03/97	AGM	27/03/97	Party Center Dharmadip	—
ULC	02/04/97-20/04/97	AGM	29/04/97	Hotel Sonargang, 3 pm	22
IDLC	05/04/97-13/04/97	AGM	13/04/97	Hotel Sonargang, 10 am	35 18.1
IDLC	—	EGM	Do	—	—
Reckitt & Colman	19/04/97-08/05/97	AGM	08/05/97	—	35

PEREGINE BANGLADESH INDEX

Thursday's market comment

The PBI fell 0.17 per cent for the seventh consecutive day to close at 604.36. Market sentiment was negative as 18 issues declined over 11 gainers one issue remained unchanged. Meghna Cement topped the plus column as it appreciated 9.15 per cent on retail demand followed by Bata Shoe which gained 7.7 per cent on institutional (ICB) demand. Eastern Housing, Monno Ceramic and BOC were amongst the notable winners as they appreciated 7.2 pc, 6.8 pc and 6.7 pc respectively. Bangladesh Lamps and Reckitt & Colman led the losers as they dropped 9.9 pc and 9 pc respectively on thin volume. Beximco Limited and Olympic Industries also suffered as they lost 8.3 pc and 7.4 pc on moderate volume. Beximco Textile was not traded.

Exchange Rates

The following are the Janata Bank's dealing rates (BD Tk for one unit of Foreign Currency) to public as on 20/03/97.

Selling Currency	Buying		T.T. Clean	O.D. Sight Export Bills	O.D. Transfer
	T.T. O.D.	B.C.			
US Dollar	43.3620	43.4150	43.0700	42.9036	42.7912
GB Pound	69.5955	69.6755	68.5760	68.2949	68.1158
D. Mark	25.8422	25.8719	25.4060	25.3019	25.2356
F. Franc	7.6593	7.6681	7.5332	7.5023	7.4826
JP Yen	0.3570	0.3574	0.3487	0.3473	0.3463
C. Dollar	31.6367	31.6730	31.1998	30.9823	30.9011
S. Franc	30.1418	30.1764	29.6301	29.5087	29.4313

Janata Bank's selling and buying rates in cash currency for public:

	US DLR	GBP	S. RYIAL	UAE DH	KU DINAR
SELLING	43.4500	68.3455	11.8000	11.7500	142.5000
BUYING	42.9500	66.3455	11.4500	11.2500	137.0000

New govt gives top priority to economy

Liberal policies to continue in Nepal

KATHMANDU, Mar 20: Nepalese Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand has declared the economy his government's top priority, one day after winning a parliamentary vote of confidence, a newspaper said today, reports AFP.

The pro-royalist premier, who heads a tripartite coalition government, Wednesday won a vote of confidence he tabled at the 205-member House of Representatives.

Chand won 113 votes while the main opposition Nepali Congress (NC) got only 85, officials said. Nepal's constitution says a government must get at least 103 votes in such a vote to remain in power.

"The government has accorded top priority to strengthening the national economy by

rectifying all the lapses which have occurred in the country's fiscal and monetary sectors," The Rising Nepal newspaper quoted him as saying.

"We will continue the liberal economic policies upheld by previous governments and provide maximum incentives to the private sectors," he said, according to the state-run English language daily.

Chand said Nepal's development depended on "the unilateral efforts of the government," adding that non-government sectors would also need to be mobilised to gear up development activities.

"The government will strive to make Nepalese products more competitive in the international market to strengthen the national economy," he said.

AB Bank managers' confce held

The managers' conference '97 of Arab Bangladesh Bank Ltd. was held at a local hotel yesterday which was inaugurated by M Morshed Khan, Chairman of the bank, says a press release.

While pointing out the different aspects of the bank, Khan urged the managers for adjusting with the changing economic scenario resulting from massive free market-oriented economy presently pursued globally.



The AB Bank managers' conference-1997 held yesterday at a local hotel was attended, among others, by M Morshed Khan, Chairman, Ramzul Seraj, Vice Chairman, A Rahim Chowdhury, Managing Director, and M A Awal, Deputy Managing Director of the bank.

Wonder plant food promises smiles to farmers

By Shehab Ahmed

Beniali, Jessore: Mohammad Korbanullah, beaming with his treasure of giant potatoes and pumpkins, never had a big smile in his 32 years of life ever since his parents migrated from Noakhali in search of a job in this corner of Bangladesh.

A part time cattle trader, landless Korban, with two daughters and a patch of some-ones land, dotted with his thatched hut and tiny kitchen garden, never had more than a hand-to-mouth existence.

But a bad deal with traders specialising in cross-country ferrying of beef cattle left Korbanullah wondering about his future.

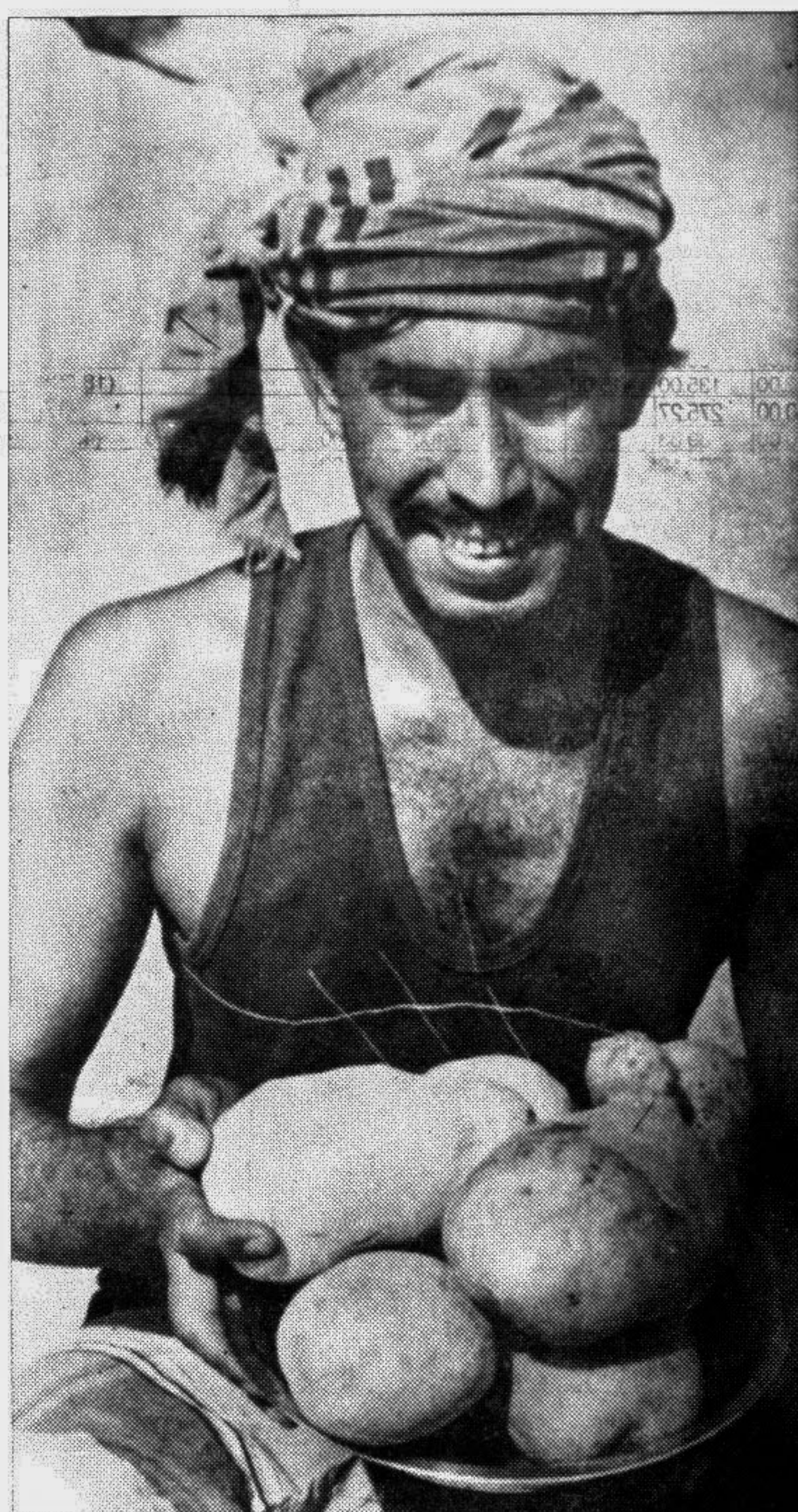
It was a stroke of luck and coincidence that changed the course of his career. While idling his time at the agri-input dealer Abdul Halim's shop at Beniali bazar Korbanullah came across the idea of using a fungicide and plant food, marketed by Novartis, the multinational giant, formed after merger of two Swiss companies Ciba Geigy and Sandoz, which holds 40 per cent of Bangladesh market share of pesticide, insecticide and plant foods.

"Mamu", (maternal uncle) as they call the dealer, also came in search of his fortune from Korban's native village. At the beginning of the potato season he suggested Korbanullah to try his luck with potato, topping it with pumpkins and onions, using Wokozin, a seed-weed based plant food or hormone.

The result was a wonder for Korbanullah who harvested potato yielding 140 maunds per Bigha which is 40 maunds higher than the normal average.

The wonder plant food is yet to receive registration as it is undergoing field trial for usage in crops other than cotton for which it has already got registration.

As part of the Novartis internal field trial at selected patches of land through its dealer network, the Wokozin and Setoff, another fungicide that keep rice and other crop fields free of weeds are being tested.



A farmer showing his giant potatoes treated with Wokozin plant food. —Star photo

Korbanullah planted Vanilla variety of potato in one and half-a-bigha plot he had leased from a farmer.

"I have got 40 maunds more than last year's yield," he said. He invested 12,500 taka and sold taka 21,000 worth of potato when they were one and half-a-month old in December-January, weighing between 300 to 600 grams. A couple of them later turned out to be 800 grams. He expects another taka 14,000 from 20 bags of potatoes which he has deposited at a local cold storage.

Now he is waiting to harvest 'elephants', as he proudly calls his huge pumpkins, which topped his potato field, spilling over to the rest of his leased plot, covered with onions.

Korbanullah planted pumpkins 20 days after potato and another 20 days later onion. The Wokozin fed pumpkins will churn out taka 5,000 for him. He had to bear an extra Tk 250 for the seeds and pesticides.

Onions cost him taka 2500 in investments. After one irrigation the onions looked sick. Then 'Mamu' advised him to use Wokozin on the onions. They appeared healthy and promising to garner him 50 maunds, bringing him taka 5000 next month.

The farm hand who faced a bleak future looks forward with smile to cultivate jute, then grams, followed by potato. But he showed aversion to planting rice because last season he received a bruise investing taka 2000 but failed to recoup the investment.

The Novartis dealer said he picked up Korbanullah as a test case for experimenting with Wokozin because the young farmhand was industrious and ready to try his luck with the wonder plant food.

Novartis officials hope that the new plant nutrient would bring smiles to many more Korbanullahs in the future when it gets registration from the authorities after successful field trials by government farm experts in different unknown locations. It is likely to be cheap, they said.

Lack of professional expertise, logistics hampering BOI activities

By Rafiq Hasan

The activities of Board of Investment (BOI), the premier government organisation for encouraging investment in the country, are yet to be accelerated due to lack of trained manpower, professional expertise, and proper logistics.

Sources said though the board was formed about eight years back for giving impetus to local investment and attracting foreign capital, the country's yet to receive any substantial amount of investment.

In a recent report, the World Bank also expressed dissatisfaction over the performances of the board.

Frequent changes at upper level of BOI have hampered its work. The executive chairman of the board could continue his tenure for more than one year. At least 12 persons were appointed executive chairmen in the last eight years. They were: A K M Mossarraf Hossain, Lutfulahil Mazid, Habibur Rahman, Mahmudul Huq, Shah Mohammad Farid, A S M Akram, Golam Mostafa, Mir Mostafizur Rahman, Dr Syed Yusuf Farooq, Mokammel Huq and Tawfiq Elahi Chowdhury.

The current chairman is Anisul Huq Chowdhury.

According to sources, BOI has become a much coveted place for civil service cadres for spending their transitional period while their services are under transfer from one ministry to another. A number of officers from cadre service were sent to the board on deputation during their OSD period.

After having training abroad, they are deputed to BOI but they leave the board after getting promotion in another ministry, sources alleged.

There are a number of instances that officers having foreign tour and training on investment promotion from the board join the Ministry of Commerce, Establishment, ERD and even Ministry of Disaster Management.

"If this be the order what is the use of giving training to an officer during one's tenure at the board?" sources asked. Whenever an offer of foreign tour of training comes to the board a serious tussle ensues between the cadre service officers and permanent staff of BOI. As the bureaucrats always

dominate the hierarchy of the organisation the cadre service officers often get the opportunity of getting foreign tour though they do not stay at the board for more than a year, sources noted.

Due to these anomalies and lack of new recruitment of fresh manpower, professionalism did not develop at this highly promotional organisation leaving its major activities confined to just giving official approval for setting up of industries.

Despite the board is headed by a full-fledged secretary. He lacks executive power regarding administrative and financial matters.

As the board is directly under the Prime Minister's office, it has to depend on them for any financial and administrative decision which takes much time.

With more than 300 employees including 50 officers, the activities of the board are very slow and it has generally failed to give proper backing to the entrepreneurs, alleged a leading industrialist of the country. He said it takes several weeks to forward a letter from

the board recommending telephone, gas and water supply connections to the industrial units.

On the other hand the officers of the board said they have to work with limited logistic support. Fax, e-mail and internet services are absent from the board.

BOI executive chairman Anisul Huq Chowdhury, however, refuted allegations of slow pace of its activities and low inflow of foreign investment in the country.

He said foreign investors had been showing much interest to invest in our infrastructure and a number of MOUs were signed in this regard recently in power, gas and energy sectors.

Regarding scanty logistic support at BOI, the executive chairman said some measures have been taken to strengthen the activities of the board in addition to 4 computer sets which have been bought recently another 4 sets would be purchased shortly, he added.

He admitted that there might be some minor differences between officers of BOI and those coming from cadre service but that is usual and unavoidable.

Tk 127cr WFP assistance for rural dev in '97

WFP support to the Rural Development activities in 1997 has begun with new orientation on more sustainable alleviation of poverty for the rural poor, according to WFP press release.

In 1997 WFP assistance including bilateral support from EU, Australia, Canada and France amounts to 170,000 tons of commodities at a cost of Taka 127 crore.

The emphasis in this phase of the project is to allocate about 80 per cent of resources to the area with relatively high poverty and increase resources for programmes, supporting women.

During 1997, the programme is expected to generate employment for some half a million people including 150,000 women.

103,000 tons of wheat at a cost of some Taka 90 crore have been allocated for the water sector. This is expected to employ 200,000 people and benefit directly/indirectly some 8 million people by rehabilitating 219 flood control embankments, drainages and irrigation schemes for the prevention of flooding along the banks of major rivers.

Some 275 Potable water tanks will also be constructed thus improving drinking water facilities in the coastal areas, where arsenic problem has been more acute.

23,800 tons of wheat at a cost of Taka 17 crore have been allocated for the improvement and construction of over 790 km of Growth Centre Connecting Roads. An additional funding of Taka 7 crore is also provided to help construct more than 200 bridges and culverts on these roads. This is going to facilitate greater access to the economic growth of the rural areas.

The support to the Forestry Sector has been increased with the allocation of 31,000 tons of wheat at a cost of Taka 23 crore.

A total of over 700 schemes are planned for implementation in 1997 with participation of 70 NGOs.



A S F Rahman, Chairman of Beximco Group, seen addressing a seminar on 'projective weaving machine' organised jointly by Sulzer Ruti, Switzerland and its Bangladesh representative Nascom (Pvt) Ltd. at Sonargaon Hotel in the city on Sunday.

SIA to fly to Jeddah

SIA will introduce Jeddah to its route network from August, says a press release.

The city in Saudi Arabia will be served by three non-stop flights a week using the Airbus 340 aircraft.

Jeddah, located on the Red Sea coast, is a bustling cosmopolitan city. It is also one of the gateways to the holy sites of Islam.

From this month, Silkair is operating twice-weekly direct services with Fokker 70 aircraft to Davao in the Philippines.

Bismillah Airlines to operate on int'l routes

The Bismillah Airlines Ltd., a joint venture with Kazakhstan, has got the licence to operate on international routes from the Civil Aviation Authority as the first venture in Bangladesh in private sector.

This airlines will carry mainly agricultural products, industrial products, readymade garments, medicines and essential products of our country. The commercial operation of the company will start by March 1997, says a press release.

Tk 40 lakh British grant for 6 NGOs

British Acting High Commissioner Miriam McIntosh yesterday presented cheques amounting to Taka 39.97 lakh to six Bangladeshi NGOs for six new projects, reports UNB.

The recipient organisations are Nari Unnayan Shakti (NUS), Sheba Artha Samajik Unnayan Sangstha (SASUS), Aid-Comilla, Integrated Social Development (ISD), Chetona Dak and Noakhali Rural Development Society (NRDS), said a British High Commission press release.

Singer's Comilla showroom-cum sales centre relocated

Singer has relocated its previous showroom-cum-sales centre from Raigonj bazar to its own building "Singer Saurav" at Mogultuli in Comilla, says a press release.

The newly built showroom was formally inaugurated by K M Nurul Huda, Deputy Commissioner of Comilla recently, Mahubul Jamil, Chairman and Managing Director of Singer Bangladesh Limited presided over the ceremony.

"Singer Saurav" in Rangpur is another mentionable venture of Singer Bangladesh Management, which is now under construction. This relocation of Singer's showroom in its own premise will enable customers to shop Singer products in a more convenient and soothing environment, truly matching the quality of the products.

The members of the Management Committee, Senior Executives of Marketing and Marketing Services Department were present on the occasion.



K M Nurul Huda, Deputy Commissioner of Comilla, opened the new showroom-cum-sales centre of Singer Bangladesh Ltd at Mogultuli in Comilla recently. Mahubul Jamil, Chairman and Managing Director of the company, is also seen in the picture.