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Tk 29cr SB loan for Netrakona farmers

NETRAKONA, Oct 27: Sonali Bank has begun disbursing Tk 29 crore credit to the flood-stricken farmers of greater Mymensingh district, reports APB.

The credit programme of the bank aims at helping the farmers to cultivate boro paddy, wheat, potatoes and other crops during the rabi season.

The bank has begun distribution of the credit through its branches among the farmers of Netrakona, Kishoreganj, Mymensingh, Jamalpur, Sherpur and Tangail districts.

Some Tk 4.32 crore credit will be disbursed among affected farmers in Netrakona district, Tk 4.31 crore in Kishoreganj, Tk 5.19 crore in Mymensingh, Tk 5.84 crore in Jamalpur, Tk 3.81 crore in Sherpur and Tk 5.38 crore in Tangail district.

Course on phone skills held

A day-long training course on Improving Telephone Skills to Meet International Standard was held at Dhaka Club recently, says a press release.

Organised by Rapport Bangladesh Limited, the course was conducted by an eminent trainer from India, Nina Kochar.

It was attended by 22 participants from Beximco Textiles Limited, Rahimafrooz (Bangladesh) Limited, Bashundhara Group of Companies, UCEP, International Office Equipment, UNOCL Bangladesh, WASA, BASIC Bank, IDLC and Faysal Islamic Bank of Bahrain, EC.

Alamgir for creating job opportunities for rural women

State Minister for Planning, Science and Technology Dr Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir yesterday said employment opportunities for the rural women should have to be created for alleviating poverty and the overall development of the womenfolk in the country, reports BSS.

"If you want to involve the rural women in the country's development activities you should have to bring some changes in society as well as mentality," he said while inaugurating a workshop on rural women employment organised by Women Affairs Directorate in CIRDAP auditorium in Dhaka.

Chaired by Nilfar Begum, Director General (DG) of Women Affairs Directorate, the inaugural function was also addressed, among other, by Secretary of the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs Prof Tahmina Hossain and Mohammad Anis Hasnain, Director, International Labour Organisation (ILO) Dhaka regional office. The minister said the overall development of the country would not be achieved without development of the rural women. "The development of the urban women cannot be an indicator of the overall development of the country's womenfolk," he said.

13,000 hectares of land to come under wheat cultivation in Kishoreganj

KISHOREGANJ, Oct 27: About 13,000 hectares will be brought under wheat cultivation in the 13 thanas of the district in the ensuing rabi season, says BSS.

According to the Agriculture Extension office, the thana-wise break-up of land is: 1732 hectares in Ho-saipur, 2851 hectares in Sadar thana, 2447 hectares in Pakundia, 1380 hectares in Katildi, 1450 hectares in Karimganj, 373 hectares in Tarail, 104 hectares in Itna, 82 hectares in Nikli, 139 hectares in Astagram, 1632 hectares in Bajitpur, 578 hectares in Kualiarchar, and 265 hectares in Bhairab.

The production target has been fixed at 29,093 tonnes, the source said.

Singapore, China set up direct Internet link

SINGAPORE, Oct 27: Singapore and China have established a direct Internet link to open the way for greater data exchange and encourage more business collaboration between the two countries, says AP.

The two megabytes per second link "will further enhance existing Internet data exchange, and encourage the sharing of Internet content, facilitate business and even research and development collaboration between the two countries," the Telecommunications Authority of Singapore said Monday.

Singapore Communications Minister Mah Bow Tan and Chinese Information Industry Minister Wu Jichuan will also sign a memorandum of understanding Wednesday in Beijing outlining areas of Internet co-operation, the statement added.

The agreement will map ways of developing, promoting and increasing Chinese-language content on the Internet, and boost electronic commerce between the two countries.

SEA meltdown pushes shrimp prices down
Exporters find it hard to sell 10,000 MT stock

By Govinda Shil

Bangladeshi shrimp exporters are left stranded with 10,000 tonnes of unsold frozen fish this year as major shrimp producers — Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia — have dumped their sea foods in the international market pushing prices substantially down.

International prices of shrimps have fallen by about 40 per cent as a result of dumping by the South East Asian countries, who together supply 75 per cent of sea food to the global market, according to Bangladesh Frozen Foods Exporters Association (BFFEA) sources.

Price of the commonly-consumed shrimp has fallen to US\$ 4.25 from its previous price of \$6 per pound.

According to sources, these major producers could sell their shrimps at such cheap rates because of their massive currency devaluation.

"But we cannot cut back on our prices to such an extent," says Golam Mostafa, president of BFFEA. "If we do to compete with them, we will incur heavy losses."

According to him, dumping by these countries will make

Bangladesh incur a loss of Tk 60 crore this year.

Shrimp prices rose as high as US\$ 8.25 per pound in June, but began to fall as these Asian countries tried to weather unpredictable economic turmoil by allowing massive currency devaluation.

BFFEA for solution at today's Export Council meet

The BFFEA will place a five-point recommendation before the Export Council meet today with a view to overcoming the crisis the shrimp exporters are facing due to slump in international prices.

According to the recommendations, the exporters who spent about Tk 545 crore in total to standardise their plants in line with the EU health regulations early this year want interest waiver on bank loans till December this year.

They want a three-year moratorium on their outstanding loans and also seek conversion of accumulated interests

into interest-free block accounts for the same period. The banks could readjust their advances at the rate of one per cent of each export receipt.

The association also suggested the government introduce a 1 per cent cash incentive on shrimp exports for the current fiscal. It also demanded 40 per cent of their loan limits as fresh loans for running the plants damaged seriously due to the price fall.

The Association also called for interest waiver on Tk 40 lakh loan the government provided to each of 40 plants early this year for their renovation.

mas festival.

This is probably the first time that an export sector of Bangladesh has been hit by the East Asian meltdown.

"We have fallen victims of the Asian economic meltdown," Mostafa said, adding that there was hardly any chance to sell the frozen fish leftovers as time to catch up with Christmas bonanza is over.

Exporters said that they would have to ship the stock by October 31 to avert major capital losses. "Shrimp is a perishable item and we are now trying to minimise our losses by cutting back on prices as much as possible. This will force us to swallow further losses, but it is still better than total loss," said Ferdous Alam, chairman of Lockpur Fish, a major seafood trader. Lockpur, which has an annual turnover of Tk 250 crore, is left with an unsold stock worth Tk 40 crore.

Many of the 50 fish processing plant owners are now mad-rushing to Dhaka to consult their association for working a way out. The association and its members are going through extensive brain-storming for a solution to the crisis that the sector is faced with.

CDS set-up to cost \$10m, says expert

Star Business Report

The proposed Central Depository System (CDS) for a transparent capital market operation is expected to cost around US \$ 10 million to set-up and run in the initial years of operation.

"The first year's cost for such a company would be about Tk 125 million which would rise to Tk 250 million in 2007," according to Keith Williams, a CDS expert working for Hong Kong based foreign expert, International Securities Consultant (ISC).

The expert was making a presentation on CDS at a local hotel yesterday.

Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) Chairman MA Syed also talking at the presentation on Bangladesh Central Depository to find potential sponsors who will set up and run the CDS said it would be formed in line with the one in Hong Kong.

He also stressed the need for a central depository for swift and efficient settlement of stock transactions.

"The fruit of automation could not be reaped without a CDS," Syed said.

"After long years of wait the bourses are now automated. It's a great achievement. Now we need a CDS for building public confidence and bringing more transparency in transactions," Syed said.

After the 1996 share market scam a general loss of confidence by the investors is now

observed in the market and CDS is seen by many as a key to bring back the shied investors.

International Securities Consultant (ISC) made a study on CDS. The ISC drafted a law based on the study and sent it to the ministry for vetting which was later approved by the cabinet and is likely to be placed in the next parliament session.

The CDS will be a private company owned by banks, financial institutions, merchant banks and the two bourses.

Every transaction would be settled through the CDS and transfers would be made by book entry system.

The CDS will pave the way for scrippless trading by eliminating existence of paper scrips.

BR earnings up 22 pc

The Bangladesh Railway has earned over Tk 73.18 crore in the first quarter of the current fiscal which is 22 per cent higher than the earnings of the corresponding period last year, reports APB.

The figure is about Tk 13.16 crore more than Tk 60.02 crore the BR earned in the same period of the last fiscal year.

Of the amount, the Railway East Zone has earned over Tk 28.71 crore by carrying 7.61 lakh more passengers.

About Tk 28.25 crore came from carrying goods and over Tk five crore from parcel, said a press release yesterday.

Debt recovery problem S'pore banks won't issue credit cards to expatriates

SINGAPORE, Oct 27: Local banks in Singapore have mostly stopped issuing credit cards to expatriates, citing difficulties in recovering unpaid debts after they leave, a newspaper reported Monday, reports AP.

Two of Singapore's four largest local banks now reject all applications by foreigners outright, said the Straits Times, while the other two demand credit histories and local guarantors before issuing cards to many expatriates.

These banks fear unpaid credit card bills will aggravate mounting bad corporate debt from the regional economic crisis, a banker told the newspaper.

They also lack the international network to pursue foreigners who leave without settling their personal debts.

About 450,000 foreigners — mostly laborers and maids, but also well-heeled professional — work and live among Singapore's 3.1 million permanent population. But high salaries don't seem to preclude irresponsible use of credit cards.

One banker told the newspaper that a high-ranking foreign executive at a bank in Singapore left the country with 30,000 Singapore dollars (\$18,400) in unpaid debt.

Expatriates now rely on foreign institutions operating in Singapore — including Citibank, Standard Chartered bank and American Express — for their credit card needs, the report said.

Viqarunnisa wins Cherry Blossom quiz competition

Star Business Report
Viqarunnisa Noon School has won the second Cherry Blossom national quiz competition.

The two-day competition held at the British Council Auditorium ended yesterday, says a press release.

The runner-up in the competition is Scholastica School.

Fifteen teams comprising schools from all over the country participated in the competition organised by Reckitt and Colman.

The competition was jointly inaugurated by Geeteara Safiya Choudhury, Chairperson and Managing Director of Adcomm Limited, and Nurul Amin Sheikh, Brand Manager of Reckitt and Colman.

Rahbar A Anwar, Marketing Manager, RCBL who spoke on the occasion also distributed prizes among the winners.



Minister for Labour and Employment MA Mannan inaugurates a workshop on labour management cooperation organised by Bangladesh Employers' Association (BEA) under joint activities of BEA/ILO yesterday. Rokia A Rahman, President, ASM Quasem, Vice-President, CK Hyder, Secretary-General of BEA and Helle L Scholer from ILO, Dhaka, are also seen. — BEA photo

Seminar emphasises integrated efforts
'Country has potentials to emerge as major ceramic exporter'

Bangladesh has the potentials to become one of the major ceramic exporting countries, provided integrated institutional and individual efforts are taken to rejuvenate this emerging sector, speakers at a seminar said here yesterday, reports BSS.

They said despite a vast potential market the country's ceramic industries, excepting a few, are still far from the international standard in producing quality goods. For this, they suggested adoption of sophisticated techniques like quality control, timely shipment, excellent design and attractive packaging.

"Availability of the main basic ingredients for ceramic products like moist clay and cheap labour force and the added competitive advantages of Bangladesh over other countries, they told a day-long seminar on "design and packaging of ceramic goods for Japanese market."

Jointly organised by Japan External Trade Organisation (Jetro) and Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) the seminar was held at EPB here.

EPB Vice Chairman Anwarul Bar Chowdhury attended the inaugural function as the chief guest while Jetro representative in Bangladesh Yichi Bamba, EPB Director A K K Nazmul Alam and Japanese expert Akira Nishimura spoke on

the occasion.

Akira Nishimura, who is also Managing Director of Japan Pottery Manufacturers Federation conducted the day-long seminar, attended by about 20 persons representing six leading ceramic industries, EPB, Bangladesh Institute of Ceramic Industries and Science Laboratory.

Anwarul Bar Chowdhury said Japan, the biggest donor for Bangladesh can be the latter's one of the largest importers by raising the quality of our products through transferring technology as well as knowledge to our entrepreneurs.

Chowdhury said Japan will help arrange a single country fair in Tokyo in March next to promote our products to the Japanese people. This is a miracle opportunity for us to display our goods there, he said, adding through diversifying our products suiting to the taste of the Japanese people we can easily penetrate into their market where the quality and not the price is considered the most.

Bangladesh, according to official statistics, earned over Taka 49.25 crore during the last fiscal (1997-98) by exporting ceramic goods to about 30 European countries and the United States of America. At present six ceramic industries are ex-

porting their products abroad.

Yuichi Bamba said Jetro has taken a long-term programme for the development of this sector since Bangladesh's ceramic products have a bright prospect for the Japanese market.

He hoped that the participants would get complete idea about the Japanese market from the deliberations of this seminar.

Bamba assured that his organisation which runs under the Japanese Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) would continue its endeavours for the development of various sectors in Bangladesh, especially garments and ceramics to increase exports from Bangladesh to Japan.

The ceramic industry of this part of the world is as old as its history. The relics of Mohangants in Bogra, Moynamoti in Comilla, Paharpur in Naogaon and all other historical places reveal the background of Bangladesh's skill in ceramic works in ancient time.

The expert, organisers said, during his month-long tour to different industries of the country, will suggest ways how to raise the quality of products to have desired results.

Nishimura, in the meantime, also visited show rooms of some big ceramic industries in and around the capital Dhaka.

BIMB financial engineering workshop ends

A 3-day workshop on financial engineering ended at the Bangladesh Institute of Bank Management (BIMB) yesterday.

The objective of the workshop was to develop skills about the application of various tools and techniques of financial engineering in risk management.

The workshop also dealt with the prospects of applicability of financial engineering methods in Bangladesh, says a press release.

The concluding session was chaired by Dr Muinul Islam, Director General of BIMB.

The deliberations of the workshop also followed by a panel discussion where Ms Shirin Sheikh Mainuddin, Consultant, Bank of Boston, USA, Noor E-Alam Chowdhury of Standard Chartered Bank, Dr Sujit Saha and Dr Toufic A Chowdhury of BIMB were present as panelists.

The workshop was marked by distribution of certificates among the participants.

FBCCI chief in Mumbai to attend Asia-Pacific Chamber meet

President of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), Abdul Awal Mintoo, left Dhaka for Mumbai yesterday to attend the 17th Conference of the Asia-Pacific Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The conference was scheduled to begin at the Indian city yesterday, reports UNB.

He was accompanied by Safiullah Chowdhury, member, General Body of the SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI), said a press release.

The two-day conference will focus on the "Theme of restoring Asian dynamism in the global context". Trade and tourism, industrial cooperation, identifying business opportunities and role of regional cooperation will also be discussed in the conference.

During his stay, the FBCCI President is expected to call on the SCCI President Kenti Kumar R Podar.

Earlier a four-member European Union Parliamentary delegation led by Anita Jean Pollack called on Mintoo at his residence.

During the meeting they discussed matters of mutual interests and other issues.



Prize winners of Second Cherry Blossom National School Quiz Competition-1998 are seen with the organisers. — Adcomm photo

\$ 3b foreign investment hinges on problems

Problems in getting land and service facilities for a project, bureaucratic bottlenecks and port hazards have stalled progress of the proposed foreign investment of nearly three billion dollars during the last two fiscal years, reports UNB.

A recent survey of the Board of Investment (BOI) says some 158 foreign projects, involving about 1.54 billion US dollars, have either gone into production during the period or are in different stages of implementation.

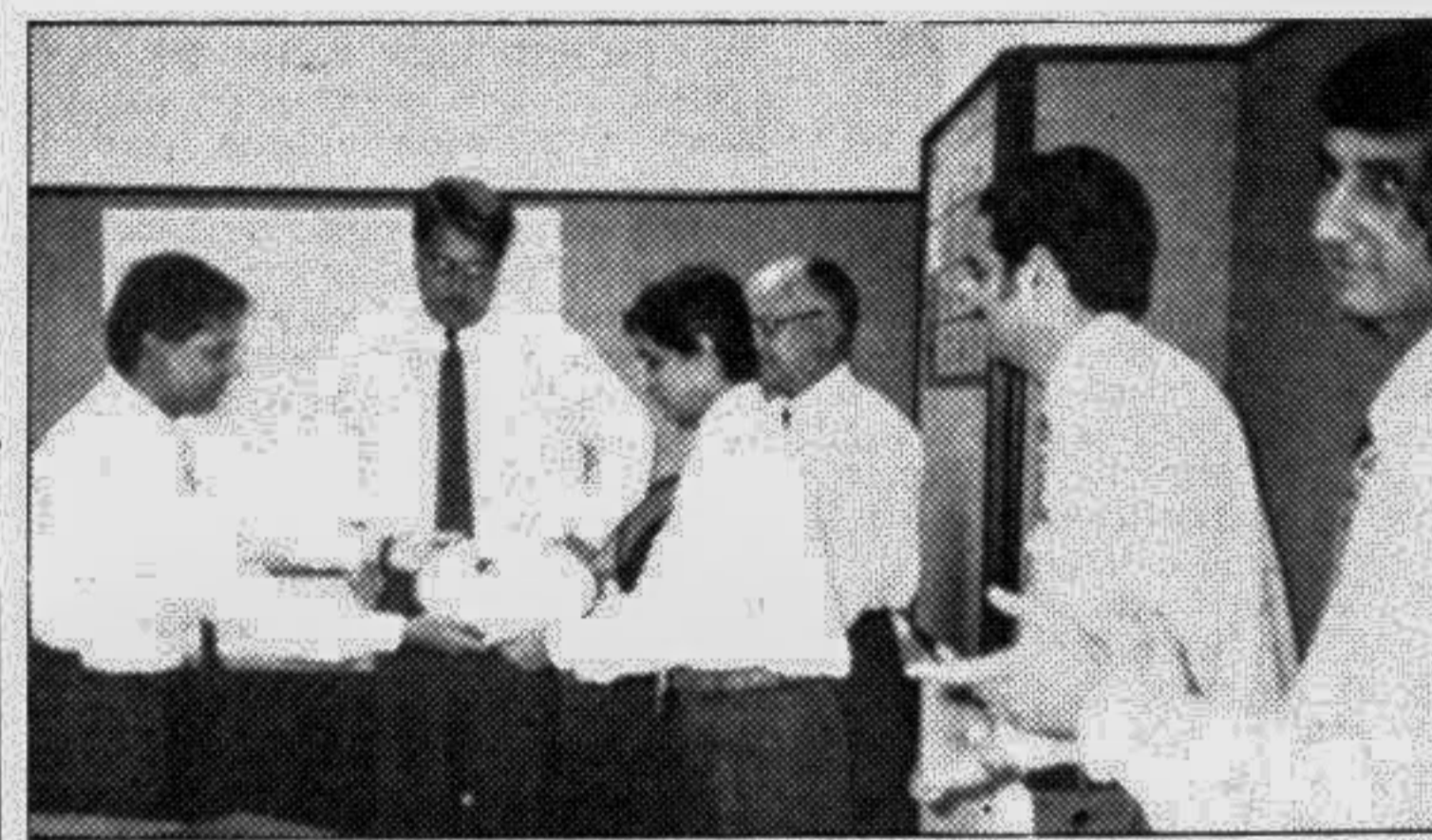
However, foreign direct investment during the two-year

period (July 1996-June 1998) totalled two billion and 72 million dollars. This included some projects in export processing zones (EPZs) and two major carried-over projects of BOI.

The BOI survey mentioned that 120 foreign projects involving an amount of 2.9 billion dollars have not yet made any physical progress.

In the two years, the BOI registered a total 278 foreign projects worth 4.4 billion dollars.

BOI officials said the rate of project registration is encouraging even after the recent flood.



Suraju Dutta, GSP Manager, Indian Subcontinent (FedEx) in Mumbai, recently presents a crest of recognition to ASM Azad Khan, Director (Finance) of Banex, license of FedEx, as an honor for its extraordinary service performance during Bangladesh's recent devastating flood.

Workshop on effective business communication concludes

Star Business Report
A four-day training workshop on effective business communication organised by Business Advisory Services Centre (BASC), Dhaka concluded recently, says a press release.

The workshop topics covered importance, classification, cost, benefits, process and challenging issues of communication, its principles, qualities and the technique of effective reporting.

The workshop held at the BASC Training Hall dwelt on the elements through practical exercises and participatory interactions.

The closing ceremony was presided over by Muhammad Ali, Executive Director of BASC.

Geeteara Safiya Choudhury, Chairman and Managing Director of Adcomm and Member, BASC Board of Directors, attended the function as chief guest and distributed certificates among the participants.

Nineteen mid-level Managers from Concern Bangladesh, Beximco Textile, Pride Textile, Singer Bangladesh Limited and Micro Electronics Limited participated in the workshop.

Russian parliament unlikely to pass crash budget

MOSCOW, Oct 27: Russia's parliament is unlikely to approve the government's crash budget designed to help the country limp through to the end of the year, a top state Duma official said today, reports AFP.

Alexander Zhukov, chair of the Duma's budget committee, said it would be difficult to get the fourth quarter budget through the house, which has a track record of scuppering the government's spending.

With next December's elections looming it will be very difficult for the Duma to pass such a tough and even cruel budget," Zhukov told a press conference. "everything depends on how successful the work of the government with the Duma is."

Indian industry welcomes new govt steps to boost growth

BOMBAY, Oct 27: Indian industry on Monday welcomed a host of new government measures to boost growth, but warned that swift implementation would be crucial to their success, as share prices staged a strong rally, says AFP.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and Finance Minister Yeshwant Sinha unveiled the steps at the weekend, allowing companies to buy back shares, opening up insurance to foreign investors, cutting red-tape and boosting public spending in infrastructure.

Vajpayee also announced plans to build a seven-billion-dollar trans-national highway. "These announcements are welcome," said venture capitalist Pradip Shah.

"It is good the finance minister has recognised bureaucratic hurdles as one of the obstacles to growth. The government is addressing one more serious concern of domestic and foreign investors," he said.

Shah said the announcements as proof of the government's willingness to open up to foreign investors, despite reservations within the ruling Hindu nationalist coalition.

At the same time he dismissed the highway project as a pipe dream.

"That item destroys the credibility of the other parts of the plan. Where does the government have resources for the highway plan?" he scoffed.

Shah also warned that allowing companies to buy back

shares would not boost the economy unless it was accompanied by a surge in demand.

Rajkumar Pitamber, Director at the industrial group Mahindra and Mahindra, described the new measures as "positive," but said business would want to see them implemented before passing final judgement.

"The fact that Vajpayee took the lead in making the statements shows the government is finally serious about reviving the economy," Pitamber said.

"Probably they feel they can now carry their party with them, but I would be very pleasantly surprised if they can carry along their coalition partners."

The stock markets greeted the packages with moderate enthusiasm, with the 30-share index on the Bombay Stock Exchange gaining nearly four per cent.

The 30-share Bombay Stock Exchange sensitive index was up 105.25 points, or 3.77 per cent, to 2,889.71 points at close of trade.

"The sentiment is positive, but the market is very cautious as prices are likely to peak out soon," said broker Gaurav Sanghvi.

Pitamber stressed that a positive stock market reaction did not mean a leap in business confidence.

"They are two different things, business confidence will rise only if the government is seen implementing its an-

nouncements," Pitamber said.

"It will be good if he can implement even two or three out of the whole list. One key issue would be opening up the insurance sector."

The Indian economy grew 5.0 per cent in the year to March 1998, down from 7.5 per cent the previous year.

Prime Minister Vajpayee has insisted that India can achieve six per cent growth this year, but some independent think tanks have forecast that the rate could slip below five per cent.

The Indian economy has been hit by a slowdown since October 1996, about the time when political instability pulled down the leftist government of the day.

"Business confidence" will rise only gradually, irrespective of what the government announces," said analyst Devesh Kumar, at foreign brokerage ABN Amro Equities.

"People will wait for implementation, before actual investments begin, but it is good that on some issues Vajpayee has set time frames. This means the government is serious about speeding the reforms."

"The market will react positively in the short term, but any long term upside will depend on actual implementation," he said.