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IFAD takes up poultry project in Netrakona

NETRAKONA, Dec 26: International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD) has taken up a poultry project in the district in an attempt to make the unemployed youths self-reliant, reports UNB.

Under the project, 14 duck farms have been set up in Sadar thana, nine in Atpara and 11 in Barhatta thanas of the district.

Owners of the farms, who were once unemployed, now earn Tk 8,000 to Tk 15,000 per month by selling eggs.

Abdul Halim, owner of a farm at Bichipara village in Sadar, said he set up his farm in 1998 with financial help from IFAD and now fetches up Tk 9,000 per month.

JOBS workshop on Bank SME client training held in Cox's Bazar

A three-day training workshop on "Bank SME Clients Training in Strengthening Business and Marketing Development" was held at the Fisheries Research Institute premises in Cox's Bazar on December 8.

It was organised and sponsored by the USAID funded JOBS Programme in collaboration with Micro Enterprise Development Unit (MEDU), Agrani Bank says a press release.

Conducted by the Centre for Human Excellence (CENCE), the training programme was attended by 20 participants — 2 being existing clients of Agrani Bank and 18 potential clients — from the Cox's Bazar area who are involved in different micro small business ventures.

Agrani Bank AGM Md Muzaffar Hussain who is also in charge of the MEDU project, graced the closing and certificate awarding ceremony as the chief guest and distributed certificates among the participants.

Aniruddha Hom Roy, Senior Manager, Loans Facilitation Unit of JOBS/USAID, spoke on the occasion as special guest. The closing ceremony was chaired by Md Ruhul Amin, SPO and Manager, Agrani Bank Cox's Bazar Branch.

On the closing day, Cox's Bazar chapter of the CEFCE Entrepreneurs Association (CEA) organised an innovative event titled "JOBS Trainees' Mini Trade Fair '99" in which the participants were given an opportunity to put up stalls and sell their products.

A similar workshop with 20 participants was also organised and sponsored by JOBS/USAID for the existing and prospective clients of the Saidpur Branch of the Agrani Bank. The workshop was held from December 1 to 3. On the closing day, Branch Manager Shahidul Islam distributed certificates among the participants.

Japan to inject public money into credit unions

TOKYO, Dec 26: The Japanese government is to inject taxpayer's money into credit unions and associations to help the weakest institutions in the country's financial system, a report said today, reports AFP.

The coalition government led by the Liberal Democratic Party aims to revise laws and use money from a pool of funds created last year for financial system stabilisation, Nihon Keizai Shimbun business daily reported.

The government will infuse funds into credit unions and credit associations by allowing them to issue preferred subscription certificates and buying the securities through the deposit safety net, the Deposit Insurance Corp. it said.

The credit unions and associations, regional financial cooperatives dealing with residents and small firms, are currently not allowed to receive funds from nonmembers.

By revising related laws, the government will allow individual unions and associations to issue the subscription certificates.

Myanmar adds 5 categories to import/export commodities

YANGON, Dec 26: Myanmar has added five categories to the list of banned import commodities through normal border trade, bringing the total number of such categories to 15, according to an order issued recently by the Ministry of Commerce, says Xinhua.

The previous 10 such categories of banned import commodities include gourmet powder, beverage, canned meat and fruits, instant noodle, fresh fruits, cigarettes, wine and beer.

The newly-added five categories are chewing gum, cake, wafers, biscuits, chocolate and different kinds of plastic-made daily necessities.

Meanwhile, the ministry added only two categories to the list of banned export commodities through normal border and marine trade.

SEC calls on DSE to grant ample power to its CEO

By M Shamsur Rahman

The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) has asked the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) to give "adequate authoritative power" to its chief executive officer (CEO).

It has also asked both the DSE and the Chittagong Stock Exchange (CSE) to reduce the sizes of their policy-making bodies.

The capital market watchdog recently took up these measures to boost surveillance of the bourses.

SEC officials say that the CEO of DSE has not yet been given full authority to run the operations of the exchange.

"Recently, the DSE passed over its surveillance job to a committee consisting of three non-member councillors who are to report to the Council,"

one SEC official said. "This means a total conflict of interest as the surveillance body is there to identify any wrong-doings by the brokers or the councillors, and if they are to report to the Council we cannot expect fair decision, he explained.

"This also contradicts the procedural manual for surveillance sent to DSE and CSE in July 1999 wherein it was categorically mentioned that the supervision and investigation activities should be conducted by the officials of the bourses who would be directly accountable to the CEO," the official said.

He also said that such important functions of the day-to-day administrative jobs should be performed by the adminis-

tration staff, as is practiced globally, to conform to the conditionalities of the US\$ 80 million second loan tranche from the Asian Development Bank's (ADB).

The CSE has confirmed that its surveillance department is comprised of the administration officials who reports to the CEO, the official also said that.

In a meeting with the two exchanges last week, the SEC chairman said that the CEO should also be a member of the governing body of the exchanges without voting right and that at least fifty per cent of the members of such governing bodies should be nominated by Commission with a view to ensuring adequate representation from both the issuers and investors.

"But the persons from different ministries cannot be considered as representatives of the issuers or investors in the governing body of the exchange," the SEC chairman was quoted to have told the meeting.

The chairman also said that the present size of the governing body of both the bourses were too big, which could be reduced to reasonable ones.

The meeting also recommended that both the exchanges should jointly review present indices and come up with a uniform criteria for index calculation so as to reflect a realistic picture of their trading activities.

It also recommended that a separate board should be introduced by February 1, 2000, to identify AGM defaulters.

PDB readies Y2K contingency plan to ensure smooth supply

The Power Development Board (PDB) has finalised its contingency plans to face the millennium bug to continue uninterrupted power supply at the dawn of year 2000, reports UNB.

But it all depends on smooth supply to gas as three-fourths of the country's power generation is based on natural gas. The good news, however, is that the authorities concerned confirmed unhindered gas supply.

"Both sides (power and gas authorities) did utmost to make their systems and computer chiefs Y2K-compliant. They also have contingency plans. Power supply will not be affected by the computer bug," hoped national Y2K coordinator Dr Abdus Sobhan.

PDB's Y2K consultant Shaiful Islam also voiced similar optimism saying they have taken all preparations and have been assured of uninterrupted gas supply at the dawn of the new millennium.

However, confusion still prevails over the 420 megawatt Raosan power station as it was taken over by the PDB engineers along with army troops on December 22 from the Chinese experts.

Some systems and chips of the station couldn't be confirmed as Y2K-compliant due to non-cooperation by the Chinese engineers. Plants at Ghorasal and Ashuganj are compliant, the Y2K Centre officials said.

Official sources at the PDB said a high-level meeting yesterday reviewed the overall preparations and finalised the contingency plans. Its members and all senior officials were present in the meeting.

"The preparations will be like during wartime. It will be like an emergency for the PDB personnel," an official said after review of the preparations and finalisation of the contingency plans.

According to him, all the stations and sub-stations have been asked to be prepared along with everything — from candle and hurricane to food, stand-by generators to bandage and emergency medicines.

All officials will remain present at their respective work stations from 2 pm on December 31 to 2 pm January 2 to

face any situation. Every station and sub-stations will have a control room.

There will be three control rooms in Dhaka — one for the overall monitoring and two others for generation and transmission. PDB members will look after the control rooms with physical presence for 48 hours.

The PDB also checked power line carrier (PLC) for emergency communications in case of failure of the BTTC cables. Radio communications system has been tested while enough vehicles have been procured to cover in case of emergency.

Extra preparations have also been taken for Karaphuli hydro-power project and small diesel plants, which usually remain idle at night in this low-demand season, to gear up instantly, if necessary.

PDB officials said it would run its monitoring and recording systems mainly manually, as those are not compliant. A retrospective date of 1972 will be used where computer use is a must.

But they are highly confident that the millennium glitch will not affect the power sector as rollover tests at the three computerized stations at Ghorasal, Ashuganj and Raosan, which generate 2,094 megawatt, three-fourths of total generation, gave OK report.

Online shopping to flourish in China

BEIJING, Dec 26: As more consumers in China began to surf on the Internet, on-line shopping is expected to flourish, with several computer companies already reporting growing profits, reports Xinhua.

Zhang Chengguo, an economist with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, predicted that an increasing number of Chinese customers will go on-line during this holiday season, although electronic-commerce is not fully developed in the country.

An e-commerce operator, 8848.net, which opened an on-line supermarket in May this year, has scored surprising sales, growth, according to a report by China Daily Business Weekly today.

The company's revenues grew from the first month's 500,000 yuan (about 60,200 US dollars) to 3.8 million yuan in September said.

However, China's on-line shopping is still hindered by several factors. Internet applications, to most Chinese surfers, are still limited to news and E-mail.

The e-commerce market is still immature because the country lacks a complete credit system and effective express network.



An employee of Japan's toy giant Takara, Terumi Endo, holds a banana-shaped telephone handset, "Sonna Banana", which connects to cellular phones and home telephones as an extra handset, in Tokyo on Sunday. Takara will put it on the domestic market next month with a price of 1,680 yen (\$16.00). —AFP photo

Y2K glitch scare Central bank advises banks to take precaution

Bangladesh Bank yesterday advised the banking sector to take precautionary measures in all bank branches through this sector in Bangladesh was free from Y2K problem, reports BSS.

In an official release, the central bank advised all bank branches to keep in writing the balances of all accounts at the end of last working day of the year as a precautionary measure against any Y2K problem.

This is a routine practice in a bank branch without computer, the release said.

Those branches which are

using computers for maintaining accounts should take a hard copy of the balance of each account as a part of their year-end closing tasks, it added.

The Bangladesh Bank also advised each bank branches to send in writing the year-end statement of accounts of each account-holder as an existing banking practice.

The Bank requested each account holder to collect the statement of their accounts from the respective bank branches.

China industrial sector maintains steady growth

BEIJING, Dec 26: China's industrial sector maintained a steady growth in the first 10 months of this year, according to figures released by the National Bureau of Statistics, reports Xinhua.

The added value of industry from January to October increased by 9.1 per cent on an annual basis to reach 1.626 trillion yuan (about 196 billion US dollars).

The added value of light industry during the period stood at 693.1 billion yuan, up 8.5 per cent year-on-year, and that of heavy industry at 932.7 billion yuan up 9.5 per cent.

Statistics showed added value of 930.6 billion yuan from the state-owned and state holding enterprises.

In the meantime, collectively-owned enterprises, a component of the public assets, reported added value of 277.6 billion yuan.

The added value of enterprises with overseas investment and investment from Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan regions amounted to 334.1 billion yuan.

The statistics covered all enterprises in the state and non-state sectors with the annual product sales revenue at and above five million yuan.

Steel output on upswing

Another report says: The first 10 months of this year witnessed a steady growth of China's steel production with the output growing a year-on-year 7.8 per cent to reach 101.47 million tons, according to the National Bureau of Statistics.

The output of steel products between January and October hit 97.74 million tons, surging 14.2 per cent on an annual basis, the bureau said.

LGED projects progressing well in Bandarban

BANDARBAN, Dec 26: Works on a number of roads under two major infrastructure development projects in the district are progressing fairly well, reports UNB.

The roads are Lama-Shualok, Ali Kadam-Kalarzhiri, Ali Kadam-Thanchhi-Balpara, Kalaghat-Paikhanghri-Tarachha, Lama-Noapara, Balaghat-Bagharama and Balaghat-Thoangapara.

Construction of the Lama-Shualok road began in 1997-98 fiscal, involving Tk 34 crore, officials said.

Construction of a 180-metre bridge over the Matamuhuri River under the Lama-Shualok project, costing Tk 1.64 crore, is also going on in full swing.

Another report from Chhapinawabganj adds: Local Government and Engineering Dept (LGED) is implementing 35 schemes in the district, spending Tk 11.63 crore.

Keisen Varsity team visits Bantai Industries

A team of twelve students of Keisen University of Tokyo headed by Prof Masaaki Ohashi visited Bantai Industries Pvt Ltd., says a press release.

Bantai is a 100 per cent export-oriented labour intensive cap manufacturing factory located in Dhaka. It runs health, family planning, education, day-care centre, fair price shop and other welfare programmes for its 450 women workers and their children.

The Japanese students appreciated the welfare programmes and exchanged information and ideas about the problems and prospects of poor working girls of the same age in Bangladesh.

Every year, two such students' teams from Keisen University visit Bangladesh and Bantai Industries Pvt Ltd as part of their study of developing countries.

India to raise import duty on sugar, edible oil

NEW DELHI, Dec 26: India plans to raise import duty on sugar and edible oils to restrict a flood of imports, a senior government official said yesterday, reports Reuters.

"The decision to raise import duties on sugar and edible oils has been in principle approved," the official, who asked not to be identified, told Reuters.

"A final decision and the announcement will be coming from the Finance Ministry."

Import duty on sugar would be increased to at least 40 per cent from the current 27.5 per

cent, the official said. India's sugar industry, hit by a low import duty, hit by 50 per cent.

Low global prices and repeated demands from the industry have led the government to raise import duty on sugar at least three times in the past two years. The trade says that has not stopped imports.

Officials say India began the 1999/2000 season with sugar stocks of 6.7 million tonnes, of which two million tonnes were imported.

"In such a scenario, we do not find any justification in

continuing with sugar imports with a low import duty," Shivajirao G. Patil, president of the National Federation of Cooperative Sugar Factories Ltd, told its annual meeting.

Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution Minister Shanta Kumar told the meeting the government was thinking of ways to promote sugar exports to clear stocks.

The government would soon decide whether to reform the sugar industry which is one of the few industries still under state control.

Can Asia pull off another miracle in 21st century?

SINGAPORE, Dec 26: "The next century will be the Asian century" — that proud boast by Asian leaders is no longer heard, but analysts say steady reform and restructuring following a financial crisis could well lay the ground for another, more sustainable regional economic miracle, reports AFP.

"The question of an Asian century, to a certain extent, rests on the Asian governments themselves and the key issue is: how far are they willing to go in embracing financial reforms?" said Bill Belcher, head of Asian economics and fixed income research at Merrill Lynch.

The financial crisis which erupted in mid-1997 slammed the brakes on Asia's explosive economic growth the laid bare deficiencies in the region's key financial systems.

Belcher said financial reforms were crucial for Asia to ward off increasing competition in the new millennium and, more importantly, to raise rates of return for investors.

Citing an example, he said investments by Malaysia, Thailand and South Korea in the last decade made up about 40 per cent of their gross domestic products (GDP) but average annual return was only seven to eight per cent.

Chile and Taiwan however made similar returns by investing only 20 per cent of their GDP.

"So it is not difficult to argue that there is a misallocation of resources in much of Asia due largely to a flawed financial sector," Belcher said.

He said the region should not merely give lip service to re-

forms in its effort to woo back investors who bailed out of the region following the financial crisis which erupted in mid-1997.

"The proof is in the pudding and they have to do some proving," he said.

Reputed US professor Paul Krugman, a strong critic of Asia's growth strategy before the financial crisis struck, said the export-driven region could regain its lost lustre in the new millennium.

"It is a story that is starting to look as if it has a happy ending," he said in a lecture in Bangkok last week, even while noting that much of the region was handicapped by banks burdened with huge bad loans.

Krugman warned in the mid-1990s that Asia's breakneck

growth rates were unsustainable — and in fact were partly illusory — because they derived in large measure from unproductive investment of money borrowed from abroad.

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor now thinks a repeat of the Asian financial crisis is unlikely.

But Stratfor, an influential US-based private intelligence gathering company, said Asia would go through a painful phase following the crisis.

Except for a few countries, with relatively healthy banking systems, Asia would not recover this decade, it said in a 2000-2010 global forecast released on December 20.

Stratfor said Asia's economic problems could not be solved without a "wrenching

remake" of its financial system and that most countries in the region, including Japan and China, lacked the will and political capacity to carry this out.

It predicted that Asian economies would remain in a "long term stagnation mode" with "intermittent upturns" mistaken for recovery from the financial crisis.

"The most important issue in the region would be the political consequences of this economic deterioration," Stratfor warned.

But Bhanu Baweja, an economist at financial markets research firm IDEAglobal.com, said the financial crisis was a "short term" problem which could not alter the view on Asian dominance in the 21st century.

"In the big scheme of things, I don't think the Asian crisis, which is going to fade in importance in a few years — is going to alter what Asia is capable of achieving in the next 100 years.

"In terms of return on capital, Asian will be much higher than anywhere else in the world. If I were to buy a stock for the next 100 years, for example, it would be an Asian stock," he said.

Baweja said Asia's growth would be driven by its manpower.

"Manpower, Asia's bane now will be a boom tomorrow.

"Already Asia's economies are powering themselves as knowledge societies and in a matter of time the region will be rich in intellectual property," he said.

Anisuzzaman made chairman of BTTLMEA

Lt Col M Anisuzzaman (Retd) has been unanimously elected Chairman of Bangladesh Terry Towel and Linen Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BTTLMEA) for the year 2000-2001.

The election was held in the city on Saturday with Riaz-ur-Rahman, Chairman of the Election Board, conducting it, says a press release.

J A Ansari and A K M Veilayt Hussain were elected vice-chairmen.

The association elected an 11-member Executive Committee for a two-year term on December 2.

M A Qudus, Member, Election Board, and the outgoing Chairman Md Shaful Islam were also present.



Photograph shows a stall at a mini market organised by the participants of the JOBS-sponsored training programme on 'Bank SME Client Training in Strengthening Business and Marketing Development' held in Cox's Bazar recently. — JOBS photo