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The Daily Star BUSINESS

DHAKA, THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 2000

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RMG export to US may drop by 5-10 per cent

Market expansion by Caribbean countries

Star Business Report

The country's readymade garment (RMG) export to the US may reduce by 5-10 per cent due to market expansion by the Caribbean countries after they were allowed duty- and quota-free access under the USFTA Bill 2000, a seminar held in the city observed yesterday.

Under the USFTA 2000, most of the Sub-Saharan countries were given duty and quota-free access to the US market. At the same time the Caribbean countries would also enjoy the facility, provided they use US fabrics.

"Bangladeshi exporters will

need to reduce their production costs by 15 to 20 per cent to compete with the Caribbean countries to offset their tariff advantages. This is a difficult option since the domestic value addition in RMG is only 25 per cent," the keynote paper presented at the seminar on "USFTA 2000: Impact on Bangladesh's Apparel Trade with USA" said.

Held at a local hotel, Deputy Chief of Mission of the US Embassy Christopher Webster and Vice President of EPB Anwarul Kar Chowdhury also spoke at the seminar chaired by BGMEA leader M Abu Taher, President

of American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham) Forrest E Cookson presented the keynote paper.

Cookson said the Sub-Saharan countries still do not pose any threat to Bangladesh, but in future they could also become a major competitor. However, he said it would take a long time for these countries to develop their RMG industry.

Christopher Webster said Bangladesh should focus more on increasing its competitiveness rather than lobbying for similar duty-free access to face the USFTA challenges.

He also said the Caribbean

countries are also allowed to export quota-free apparels made with cut-fabrics from the US. In addition, Mexico has gained increased access to the US market during the last few years under the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) arrangement.

Cookson said that Bangladesh has to improve its port operation and customs, provide reliable power to industries, use modern management tools, invest in backward linkages and protect industries against dumping by China and India to survive in the competitive world.

Experts say 'no' to signing patent treaty without study

Experts at a roundtable on Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) yesterday observed that Bangladesh should not endorse the PCT of the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) without detailed study of its impact on pharmaceutical and other knowledge-based industries.

WIPOLIA, an industry body, hosted the roundtable at Hotel Purbani International here.

Professor A B M Farooque of the Pharmacy Department of Dhaka University, joint secretary of the Indian Ministry of Commerce and Industry A F Ahmad, Lecturer of the Law Department of Dhaka University Sheikh Hafizur Rahman, Dr Izaj Hossain of Chemical Engineering Department of BUET, Director of WIPO Wang Zhongfa, WIPO Executive Anil

Sinha, Dr A B M Abdullah of Bangladesh Jute Research Institute, controller of Patents and Designs A N M Abdullah, advocate Mohammad Mukit Khan and representative of Bangladesh Law Commission Mohammad Shawkat Ali Chowdhury, among others, participated in the roundtable moderated by Prof Dr Nurul Islam of the Institute of Appropriate Technology of BUET.

Professor A B M Farooque said Bangladesh should strengthen the national patent office but should not endorse PCT without detailed studies on its impact on the pharmaceutical sector.

"Our poor people would suffer if we take imprudent decision. The prices of essential drugs will go up and at this moment signing PCT is not that much important as Bangladeshi

innovators have so far applied for very few patents," he noted.

Indian official A F Ahmad said PCT has no bearing or substantive impact on the national patent laws in different countries. "In India, we have not seen the prices of drugs going up as predicted by experts," he added.

Sheikh Hafizur Rahman said Bangladesh should not endorse the PCT in a hurried way. The authorities should share opinions with different stakeholders of knowledge-based industries, he said.

Dr Izaj Hossain of BUET said as a developing country Bangladesh should not enter a treaty which might jeopardise its national interest.

WIPO's director Wang Zhongfa said without proper protection of international patent rights there would be no

transfer of technology.

"We are here not for pushing Bangladesh to sign the treaty but for promoting awareness about the PCT," the WIPO official said.

He said some people are very much worried about patents granted to the foreigners. But by granting more patents to foreigners you will be inviting more foreign investment.

The WIPO director observed that close-door policies will not assist proper growth of knowledge-based economy in the developing countries like Bangladesh.

Prof Dr Nurul Islam said the authorities should make arrangements for detailed study of PCT. But our patent office should take leadership to train professionals like journalists, attorneys and other stakeholders of the civil society

Hyundai Cement conducts workshop on concrete technology

Hyundai Cement, a group company of 'Holderbank' Switzerland, the world's largest cement producer, inaugurated the first in a series of professional workshops titled 'Workshop on Concrete Technology' at the BRAC Centre Inn on Tuesday, says a press release.

The workshop was inaugurated by Ramit Budhrajia, CEO, Hyundai Cement, and conducted by foreign technical experts from other 'Holderbank' group companies in the region. It brought together technical staff and engineers from some of the largest domestic and multi-national construction companies, commercial builders and contractors in the country.

The workshops aim to orient and strengthen the technical knowledge of the participants in the areas of concrete basics and application, concrete and RMC (Ready Mix Concrete) mixing techniques and procedures, current and emerging concrete technologies, quality control processes, raw material compositions and testing both on the field and the lab and improving production and operational efficiency through innovative solutions.

The workshop concluded with a question and answer session and lively discussion of mechanics of cement and concrete manufacturing.

As one of the leading brand names in the industry, Hyundai Cement has initiated these seminars in an effort not only to provide value additions and technical support to its large domestic base of customers, and to strengthen its business partnerships with them, but also to aid them in serving their consumers better.

ADB-funded crop diversification project a boon for NW region

Some 160,000 farmers in northwest Bangladesh are expected to raise their income through a Crop Diversification Project for which the Asian Development Bank (ADB) Tuesday approved a loan of US \$46.3 million, reports UNB.

The project will help them cultivate higher-value cash crops such as fruits and vegetables to improve their income and nutrition.

"Most farmers in this area are rice growers. Some are beginning to grow tubers and hybrid maize and we want to show them how to cultivate different crops, including fruits, vegetables and spices, all of which have a greater value of production per unit area," says ADB economist Pratima Dyal.

The project will cover 16 districts in the northwest region and will support interested farmers with new technology, training and extension, credit, market and price information. Project support will also be provided for farmer mobilisation, improve market infrastructure, applied research and project management.

Oil prices steady

LONDON, Nov 22: Oil prices were little changed yesterday but cold weather in the United States and jitters about Iraqi supply underpinned the market, reports Reuters.

Forecasts that temperatures in the US northeast, the nation's biggest consuming area for winter heating fuel, would slide as much as 18 degrees Fahrenheit below normal mid-week triggered panic buying on Monday.



Ramit Budhrajia, CEO of Hyundai Cement, speaks at the 'workshop on concrete technology' at BRAC Centre Inn on Tuesday. - Unitrend photo

ADB backs pvt sector forum of S Asia growth initiative

MANILA, Nov 22: The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is sponsoring and participating in the first Private Sector Forum on South Asia Sub-regional Cooperation in Calcutta, India, from November 28-29, says a press statement.

The event will bring together public and private sector representatives as a step towards identifying an investment programme to develop what has been dubbed the South Asia Growth Quadrangle, consisting of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal. The event is being organised by the chambers of commerce from this sub-region.

ADB will be represented by a large delegation led by Programs West Director Yoshihiro Iwasaki. The sub-region has the greatest concentration of Asia's poor - but also great potential for rapid development. ADB believes a public sector-private sector partnership is the key to unlocking the sub-region's potential.

Broadly, an investment programme for the sub-region would include an economic corridor around the Bay of Bengal, linking ports from Chittagong to Dhaka, Mongla, Calcutta, and Haldia.

It would also include a transport grid of east-west railroads and highways linking the eastern Indian hill states with West Bengal through Bangladesh, as well as north-south transport corridors linking Nepal, Bhutan, and the hill states of eastern India to ports on the Bay of Bengal. This grid would be connected to the rest of India at Calcutta through India's top priority Golden Quadrilateral project of superhighways joining Delhi, Bombay, Chennai, and Calcutta. Similar grids could be developed for power, hydrocarbons, and telecommunications.

The Calcutta forum aims to begin translating these broad concepts into specific, bankable, investment projects. ADB will urge governments and private sector representatives to prepare a regional development master plan to identify specific projects in different sectors, and priorities them for financing.

The South Asia Growth Quadrangle is of special interest to ADB, which has made poverty reduction its overarching goal. It is estimated that over half of Asia's 900 million people subsisting below the poverty line live in the SAGQ countries. Nonetheless, ADB believes this challenge is an opportunity. The sub-region offers a huge force of hard working and disciplined workers at relatively low wages. Given the chance to be productively employed, with suitable investment to develop their skills, this work-force could be a major competitive advantage.



Ericsson organised a workshop on its mobile phones for the dealers and agents of GrameenPhone at a city hotel on November 18, says a press release. Hasan Mohammad Zahid, Deputy Manager, GrameenPhone (left), Engr Anwar Hossain, General Manager, Ericsson Consumer Products (middle), and Mehboob Chowdhury, Director-Sales and Marketing, GrameenPhone (right), were also present.

Meghna basins, one of the largest graineries of the world. With investments to improve agricultural productivity, and efficient water management, this grainery could feed the sub-regional work-force at reasonable prices. Other resources include the hydropower potential in Nepal and Bhutan, the coal resources of West Bengal and Bihar and the hydrocarbon reserves in Bangladesh, Assam and Tripura.

In addition, there are large non-energy mineral deposits, forest resources, livestock and marine resources and a network of ports in Chittagong, Mongla, Calcutta, and Haldia.

Large and coordinated investments across a wide front are needed to tap this potential. Private entrepreneurs will be the main instrument of transformation, especially in undertaking infrastructure projects. However, coordination is required among governments to create an enabling environment for the private sector, such as forging agreements to facilitate cross-border movements of goods and services. Moreover, many of the planned infrastructure projects are cross-border projects which require coordination across national boundaries. Governments will also need to take the lead in identifying, planning, and mobilising funds for such mega investment projects.

Earlier, Syscom held a Dell enterprise solutions workshop at BRAC Centre Inn.

The function was addressed, among others, by William Lim, Technical Marketing Manager of Dell Asia Pacific Customer Centre, Serena Foo, Senior Marketing Specialist, Catherine Lian, Senior Accounts Executive from Dell APCC, and Zia Mansur, Channel Representative, Intel Corp.

DHL calls for collaboration with customs authorities

HONG KONG, Nov 22: DHL Worldwide Express calls for collaboration with the customs authorities to expedite customs clearance and to facilitate trade in the region and beyond, says a press release.

At the Regional Contact Points Meeting of the World Customs Organisation (WCO) held in the Hong Kong earlier, DHL urged the air express industry to work closely with the customs authorities to streamline control and combat smuggling.

"Our business is built upon speed, our customers rightfully expect the latest possible pick-up cut-off times and the earliest possible deliveries. As the air express industry sets to skyrocket thanks to the renewed focus on just-in-time business practices and booming eCommerce, a close collaboration with the customs authorities to streamline the pipeline and at the same time suppress smuggling has become imperative," said Charles Longely, Chief Executive Officer for DHL Asia-Pacific/Middle East.

DHL has a long history of working hand in hand with customs authorities to expedite trade and combat smuggling. It was the first in the industry to establish EDI (electronic data interchange) linkage with customs authorities for fast and accurate clearance. It has recently pioneered an imaging system which is another industry first. Under the system, customs authorities are able to view digitised images of shipment documentation such as airway bills, proforma invoices and packing lists which are stored at DHL's computer system. The initiative dramatically speeds up clearance at destination gateways, well before the shipments physically leave the origin.

Dell to boost Business in Bangladesh

Dell, world's leading direct computer systems company, aims to boost its business in Bangladesh, a top official of the company said yesterday.

"We are focusing on Bangladesh's corporate bodies like banks, financial institutions and telecom-service providers to sell our whole range of products," Kelvin Lee, Director of Sales, Developing Markets Group, told reporters at a press conference held in the city yesterday.

A premier supplier of technology for Internet infrastructure, Dell is growing rapidly all over the world with a leading position in the Asia-Pacific region, he claimed.

"Strong sales to large corporate customers upped Dell's quarterly revenue by 39 per cent in the Asia-Pacific markets including Japan," Lee said.

The company's revenue for the last four quarters ending October 27, 2000 totalled US\$30 billion, he said.

Dell computer sales grew by about 300 per cent in Bangladesh in the last fiscal year, said Shahudul Haque, Managing Director of Syscom Information Systems Limited, the local authorised dealer of Dell.

He said Dell sold products worth US\$1.2 million in Bangladesh in 1998-1999, which was only US\$0.3 million in 1992.

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Office of the Executive Engineer (RHD) Ferry Division, Barisal (RHD), Tender Notice

- Tender Notice No : 25 of RHD Ferry Division, Barisal/2000-2001.
- Name of work : As described below.
- Eligibility of contractor : "A to E" General category contractor of RHD as per financial capacity and territorial jurisdiction.
- Availability of tender schedule : 1. Executive Engineer, RHD Mechl. Ferry Division, Barisal/Khulna.
2. Executive Engineer (RHD), Road Division, Patuakhali.
3. Sub-Divisional Engineer, RHD, Mechl. Ferry Sub-Division, Barisal (only office hours. No tender will be sold on the date of receiving tender schedule).
- Tender receiving officer : 1. Superintendent Engineer, RHD, Mechl. Ferry Circle, Khulna.
2. Executive Engineer, RHD, Mechl. Ferry Division, Barisal/Khulna.
- Last date of selling tender documents : 28.11.2000/14.08.1407 (only office hours).
- Last date of receiving tender in sealed cover : 29.11.2000/15.08.1407 at 12 noon.
- Last date of opening tender in sealed cover : 29.11.2000/15.08.1407 at 12-30 PM.
- Date & time of opening tender : 03.12.2000/19.08.1407 at 1 PM.
- Date & time of lottery (if applicable) : 07.12.2000/23.08.1407 at 1 PM.

ASEAN leaders meet today to discuss currency, trade plans

SINGAPORE, Nov 22: Striving for greater regional cohesion, Asian leaders hope to take further steps this week along a twin track of free trade and financial cooperation to buttress their economies against a slowdown in global growth, says Reuters.

The task facing the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) at a three-day summit starting on Thursday is daunting.

Bereft of strong leadership and with many of its members mired in political trouble at home, the body looks to many analysts an unlikely candidate to forge a new Asian regionalism.

"Right now, they're in a phase of stagnation, especially because of the changes in Indonesia and the Philippines," said Julius Caesar Parrenas, a senior adviser to the Taiwan Institute of Economic Research.

But Parrenas cited ASEAN's ambitious plan for a regional currency safety net, also involving China, Japan and South Korea, as an example of what can be achieved even in tough times.

Which is driving this process forward - the fact that China is very much in need of investing and that Japan is trying again to build its relationship with the rest of the region and trying to play a more active role.

"All of these factors are pushing countries to move forward in the area of cooperation," Parrenas told Reuters.

Leaders of ASEAN+3 - China, Japan and Korea join the summit on Friday - are expected to take their currency plan a step further by endorsing a blueprint for a web of bilateral swap agreements among their central banks.

"Once that is decided, it will be relatively easy to conclude the bilateral swaps," a senior Japanese government official said.

The idea is to make foreign-exchange reserves available at short notice to a member of the group whose currency comes under sudden speculative attack, as happened to the Thai baht in 1997.

The baht's forced devaluation had a domino effect across Asia, plunging most of the region into deep recession.

With the US economy slow-

ing and most Asian bourses down sharply this year, the storm clouds seem to be gathering again across Asia. But economists say things are much different now.

Asian countries are enjoying plump current account surpluses and so do not need to rely as much on volatile capital inflows. They have rebuilt their foreign exchange reserves and growth, while slowing, is not about to grind to a halt, economists say.

"Uncertainties may persist for a while... but that does not mean that Asia is spiralling into crisis," Rebecca Patterson, an analyst with JP Morgan in Singapore, said in a note to clients.

Still, the swap lines, agreed in May at a ministerial meeting in the northern Thai resort of Chiang Mai, will provide useful insurance by giving central banks more firepower.

Trade tensions

One of the two documents due to be signed at the informal summit will grant Malaysia more time to comply with ASEAN's tariff-cutting plan in the auto sector so it can nurture its national car maker, Proton.



Shahudul Haque, Managing Director of Syscom Information Systems Limited, the local authorised dealer of Dell, addresses a press conference on the occasion of the first Dell Enterprise solutions workshop at a city hotel yesterday. Picture also shows (from left) Kelvin Lee, Director of Sales Developing Markets Group, William Lim, Technical Marketing Manager, and Zia Mansur, Channel Representative, Intel Corp. - Syscom photo.

Group No	Name of work	Estimated cost	Earnest money
1.	Supplying of spare parts for 110 HQP Daf engine Model-D.T. 615 under Ferry Sub-Division, Barisal during the year 2000-2001.	Tk. 5,00,000/-	Tk. 10,000/-
2.	Repair with painting of utility type-2 (Imp) Ferry No. 21/96 of Lebukhali Ferry Ghat under Ferry Sub-Division, Barisal during the year 2000-2001.	Tk. 4,92,027/-	Tk. 9,841/-

DFP-27633-14/11 G-2050

Executive Engineer (RHD)
(Mechl) Ferry Division, Barisal.