

## Ceramicware manufacturers urge govt to check smuggling

UNB, Dhaka

The country's export earning from ceramicware may exceed Tk 500 crore annually within next five years if the sector gets proper assistance from the government, manufacturers said on Wednesday.

Ceramic manufacturers and exporters aired this hope in a meeting with the Home Minister, revenue officials and law enforcers, seeking steps to check smuggling of low quality foreign ceramic goods that flooded local market.

Bangladesh Ceramic Wares Manufacturers Association leaders told the meeting that export earning from the sector was Tk 103 crore in 2000-2001 fiscal. The earning could grow five times in next five years if necessary supports from the government were available, they said.

They expressed their worry at the smuggling of inferior quality ceramic goods from abroad, depriving the government of huge revenues and hampering local industry. They sought measures for protecting the booming ceramic industry and ensuring its smooth growth.

Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury, who chaired the meeting, gave some instant instructions to the officials concerned to take steps for protecting the growth of local ceramic industry.

National Board of Revenue Chairman Dr Shueb Ahmed, BDR Director General Major General Abu Ishaq Ibrahim, senior officials of Home Ministry, and customs intelligence attend the meeting.

## Japan industrial output down 0.3pc in Oct

AFP, Tokyo

Japan's industrial output in October fell 0.3 percent from the previous month, the trade ministry said in a preliminary report on Thursday.

The October figure followed a 2.9-percent drop in September, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry said.

The government forecast that November output would fall 1.0 percent from October but expected December output to rise 0.8 percent from November.

Industrial shipments slipped 0.4 percent in October after dropping 3.2 percent in September and inventories declined 1.1 percent after falling 1.3 percent, the ministry said.

## ROK industrial output falls by 1.3pc

AFP, Seoul

South Korea's industrial output fell 1.3 percent in October from a year earlier due to weakness in its textile, machinery, petrochemical and automobile sectors, officials said Thursday.

Fewer working days were a key factor behind the contraction, the National Statistical Office (NSO) said. In September, industrial output rose 5.1 percent year-on-year.

Industrial output in October, seasonally adjusted, fell 1.5 percent month-on-month.

"Despite negative growth in October, the pace of contraction has been easing in recent months," NSO director M.K. Kim said.

Many economists are still cautious about South Korea's economic recovery.

Daisin Economic Research Institute's analyst H.B. Kwon, however, said the output fall in October would not destroy hopes of a recovery, citing a faster inventory correction and solid consumption.

"Despite negative output numbers, the quality of the data is largely positive," he said.

The index of leading indicators rose to 136.8 in October from 136.2 in September.

Kwon said the index is pointing to an economic recovery in the second quarter of next year.

"Consumption and construction will remain engines for growth at least until the first half of next year," he said.

Meritz Securities economist Go You-Sun said output data was better than expected in October "when the numbers were supposed to be the worst."

"I think one big hurdle on the way to recovery was cleared."

She agreed the economy should start recovering in the second quarter of next year, adding the US-led war against terrorism appears no longer to be a major drag on recovery.

The government has raised its official target of next year's economic growth from below three percent to higher than four percent with rising consumer confidence expected to lead the recovery.

# Bangladesh has staggering trade deficit of \$1b with India: Khasru

UNB, Sangsad Bhaban

Bangladesh has a staggering trade deficit of more than one billion US dollar with India, Commerce Minister Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury informed parliament yesterday.

The country's export earning from India in fiscal 2000-2001 was only Tk 336.1 crore against import bill of Tk 6388.6 crore, he said replying to a question from Sarwar Jamal Nizam (BNP).

The Minister said a good number of items were imported from India against export of only a few Bangladeshi items.

The imported items are cotton, cotton fabrics and cloths, sulphur, stone, plaster materials, lime and cement, food grains, machinery, mineral fuel, crude oil and refined oil, bitumen, mineral wax, transport machinery and parts, iron and steel, bio-chemicals, electrical machinery and parts, knit fabrics, poultry and livestock feed, coffee and spices, rubber and rubber goods, aluminum and aluminum products.

Bangladesh exports to India include raw jute and jute goods, chemicals, frozen foods, leather, tea and battery.

Replying to another question from Prof Joyal Abedin (BNP), the

Commerce Minister said the country's total trade deficit, as recorded in last five years, stood at US\$12,807 million.

The five-year breakup of trade deficit: 1996-97 \$2,734 million, 1997-98 \$2,359 million, 1998-99 \$2,693 million, 1999-2000 \$2,063 million and 2000-2001 \$2,958 million.

Responding to another question from Alamgir Haidar Khan (BNP), Khasru also gave the breakup of Bangladesh's trade deficit with different countries.

Country-wise breakup: India \$1,109 million, Japan \$256.23 million, China \$650.53 million, Singapore \$783.39 million, Thailand \$171.98 million, Indonesia \$184.54 million, Malaysia \$174.82 million, Australia \$185.38 million, South Korea \$367.29 million, Hong Kong \$379.61 million and Taiwan \$398.84 million.

The government is active in reducing the yawning trade deficit with different countries, the Commerce Minister said.

He added that the government is considering cash incentives to the garments and frozen food exporters and also trying to diversify the export products.



Photo shows officials of Standard Chartered Bank at the opening ceremony of an ATM at the bank's branch at Uttara in the city on Wednesday.

## StanChart opens ATM at Uttara branch

Standard Chartered opened an ATM at the Uttara branch of Standard Chartered Grindlays on Wednesday, says a press release.

The ATM was inaugurated by Chowdhury Maituri Rahman, a customer of the bank.

A host of customers and bank officials were also present on the occasion.

Standard Chartered Group, which comprises of Standard Chartered Bank and Standard Chartered Grindlays Bank in Bangladesh, has a network of 21 offices and 25 ATMs in Dhaka, Chittagong, Sylhet, Khulna, Bogra and Narayanganj.

## Alcatel foresees slight sales dip this year

AFP, Paris

French telecommunications equipment manufacturer Alcatel predicted Thursday that its sales this year would dip slightly from 2000 but expressed optimism about long-term prospects for the telecom sector.

"In the long term, telecommunications will probably be a persistent growth sector in the economy," Alcatel chairman Serge Tchuruk told a meeting of analysts here.

The global market would likely expand between 10 and 15 percent in the next few years, he added, without providing specific dates.

Alcatel sales in 2001 will be "inferior by only a few percent" compared with last year, when the company reported record revenues of 31.408 billion euros (27.9 billion dollars, 206 billion francs).

In the first nine months of 2001, Alcatel sales came to 18.587 billion euros, but the end of the year is traditionally a robust sales period.

Shares of Alcatel, which have been hit hard recently, bounced back in early trading Thursday on reports that the company planned to reduce its working capital by a greater than expected 1.5 billion euros next year, dealers said.

## Chinese leaders conclude 3-day key economic conference

AFP, Beijing

China's top leaders Thursday concluded three days of talks on how to manage the world's fastest growing major economy next year, state media said.

President Jiang Zemin delivered a speech at the meeting, outlining economic challenges in 2002 and tasks related to reform, development and stability, Xinhua news agency said without elaborating.

Other powerful politicians attending the meeting included Premier Zhu Rongji and Li Peng, the chairman of parliament, according to Xinhua.

The Central Economic Work Conference is an annual event taking place towards the end of the year, gathering key decision makers from the communist party and the government.

Observers believe key decisions are taken at the secretive conferences, such as the economic growth target for the following year.

This year's meeting is likely to be more important than usual, since it takes place while China is on the brink of entering the World Trade Organization and as its economy is under threat from slowing exports.

Government economists predict the economy will grow by 7.3 percent this year, down from eight percent growth last year.



Desmond Quiah, Country Manager, DHL Worldwide Express, and Faruque Hassan, Managing Director of Giant Distribution Ltd, recently sign an agreement which made Giant Group a partner in DHL's Import Express Sales Promotion campaign.

# Rana Talwar quits StanChart

AFP, Hong Kong

British-based Standard Chartered said Thursday chief executive Rana Talwar had resigned and his successor quickly denied speculation of a possible takeover of the emerging markets bank.

The new head, Mervyn Davies, who led Standard Chartered's Hong Kong operations, told a press conference here the bank intended to remain independent and there would be no change of strategy.

A London analyst with a major international brokerage, who declined to be named, said Talwar had been considered more open to the possibility of a takeover or merger than chairman Sir Patrick Gillam.

Davies declined to comment on whether there had been any disagreement between the former head and the bank's board of directors.

He also refused to make any other comment about Talwar's departure, except to say he resigned of his own accord.

Standard Chartered had no intention of merging with another

bank, the new chief executive told reporters.

"We are absolutely committed to remain independent," he said after being asked about speculation British banks Lloyds TSB and Barclays were possible suitors.

Davies said Standard Chartered's strength lay in Asia, Africa and the Middle East and that strategies would remain unchanged under his leadership.

The bank's business would continue to be based on consumer banking, mortgages and the credit card business.

One of his top priorities as the new head would be growing the bank's business in China.

While the bank would be interested in taking a majority stake in a Chinese bank, he said no talks were currently underway with any potential partners.

On Standard Chartered's proposed listing on the Stock Exchange of Hong Kong, Davies said the proposed listing would go ahead "as soon as possible" next year when market conditions allowed.



An iftar party was hosted for journalists by mobile phone company GrameenPhone at a city restaurant yesterday

# Poor countries to gain from WTO, says Moore

REUTERS, Geneva

World Trade Organisation chief Mike Moore said Wednesday a WTO campaign for freer global commerce would benefit poor countries, dismissing the protests of anti-globalisation activists.

In a speech in Hong Kong, Moore said poor countries would gain if the new round of trade liberalisation negotiations agreed by ministers of the 142-member WTO in Doha, Qatar on November 14 ended with cuts in tariffs on industrial goods.

Anti-globalisation activists have accused richer countries of using the WTO for their benefit at the expense of developing states.

Moore, a former New Zealand prime minister, said suggestions that the interests of poorer WTO members were trampled under foot in Doha amounted to "a truly spectacular misreading of what happened there."

"For some of these critics, there is no conceivable text or process that would not be represented as a conspiracy against developing countries and the poor," the WTO director-general told the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council, according to a text issued by his office in Geneva.

The common theme running through the Doha conference was the "fuller integration of developing countries into the trading system," he said.

Moore said "provision is made in almost every area... to help developing countries participate in and profit from the work" of the trade liberalisation negotiations, due to start from next January.

The "Doha Round" talks are set to be wrapped up within three years.

If the round succeeded in cutting most existing barriers to trade, "it would be like adding two more Chinas to the world economy," Moore said.

"Three quarters of all the benefits from cutting industrial tariffs would go to developing countries," he said.

"There is enough in the Doha package for everyone. Trade is not the only development factor, but it is an important motor for growth. Other issues such as good governance, debt relief, technology and investment matter."

At the insistence of developing countries, which make up nearly three quarters of the WTO's membership, the questions of debt and technology transfer and their link to trade had been included in the agenda, Moore said.

## Vietnam to step up WTO entry talks

AFP, Hanoi

Communist Vietnam prepared to launch intensive talks on World Trade Organization (WTO) membership Thursday, buoyed by the final ratification of an historic trade deal with the US.

WTO director general Mike Moore was due to arrive here around 7:00 pm (1200 GMT) for evening talks with Trade Minister Vu Khoan, ahead of meetings with Prime Minister Phan Van Khai, Foreign Minister Nguyen Dy Nien and Finance Minister Nguyen Sinh Hung on Friday.

"It's not a coincidence that Mr. Moore is visiting Vietnam at this time," Khoan told reporters.

"It's a very important visit. We expect to get a breakthrough."

Khoan said Vietnam's four rounds of talks with the WTO so far had been limited to questions of transparency.

"Now, we're going to begin a new round of talks on the core issues of Vietnam's admission to the WTO," he said.

Vietnam has so far declined to give a target date for its admission to the world trading club.

But the communist authorities have come under mounting pressure to press ahead before the WTO gets bogged down in talks on the new world trade round launched in the Gulf state of Qatar earlier this month.

Vietnam should aim to follow its communist neighbour China into the WTO within two to four years, European Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy said earlier this year.

## GMG Holidays introduces Hajj packages

GMG Holidays, a subsidiary of AMG Airlines, has introduced 4 attractive packages for Hajj for the year 2002, says a press release.

Named as "Barkat", "Rahmat", "Shukrana" and "Nazrana", the packages offer a perfect blend of ultimate peace, privacy and comfort at an economical price.

The 4 packages vary from 15 Days/14 Nights to 35 Days/34 Nights.

The 14 options of these 4 packages are specifically designed to cater to all individual needs and preferences.

## India to invite bids for state-run telecom giant by end of Dec

AFP, New Delhi

Indian privatisation minister Arun Shourie Wednesday said suitors for state-run telecoms giant VSNL and petroleum products marketing firm IBP would likely be asked to put in their bids by the end of December.

"I expect that the financial bids will be called towards the last week of December," Shourie told reporters at the end of a cabinet meeting.

Shourie said government officials were working on a plan to distribute VSNL's cash reserves worth 40 billion rupees (848 million dollars) through a special dividend to shareholders before its privatisation.

The government, which holds 52.97 percent of the New York Stock Exchange-listed VSNL, plans to reduce its holding to 26 percent by selling a 25 percent stake along with management control to a strategic partner and another 1.97 percent to VSNL's employees.

The government, which holds 57 percent stake in IBP, plans to sell a controlling 33.58 percent to a strategic partner.

## Mexico offers to host next WTO confce

AFP, Geneva

Mexico has offered to host the next World Trade Organisation conference of commerce ministers, which is due to be held in 2003, a WTO spokesman said Wednesday.

The offer, sent to WTO director general Mike Moore, makes Mexico the first country to officially ask for the high-profile forum since a new trade round was agreed two weeks ago in a meeting in Qatar.

China and South Africa, however, have expressed interest in an unofficial level.

WTO conferences, like those of the World Bank or the World Economic Forum, have been dogged in the past three years by massive anti-globalisation protests, some of them violent.