



MD of Holcim (Bangladesh) made EC member

Paul H. Hungenbobl, Managing Director of Holcim (Bangladesh) Ltd, has been promoted to join the Executive Committee (EC) of Holcim, says a recent Holcim global press release.

This change has come as the latest reinforcement in this leading cement group's management structure while ex-CEO of Holcim Thomas Schmidheiny, takes over as the company's Chairman and Markus Akermann as the new CEO.

Prior to his appointment of EXCO Member, Paul Hungenbobl, was working as Area Manager for Asia Pacific region besides being MD of Holcim (Bangladesh) Ltd.

He has a degree in engineering from the Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich and an economics degree from the University of St. Gallen. He joined the Holcim Group in 1980 and was a project manager at what is now Holcim Group Support.

The Board of Directors promoted him as area manager in the Asia Pacific Group region in 1994.

With his appointment as one of six members of EXCO, Paul Hungenbobl is the first-ever Managing Director of any transnational cement company from Bangladesh. The new management structure reflects and supports the Holcim Group's strategic priorities and commitment to sustainable growth.

Since the mid-1990s, Holcim Ltd has experienced dynamic growth highlighted by a 70 per cent increase in revenue and increased market penetration, significantly in Asia and Latin America.

Nitol, Chinese co sign MOUs to set up three industries

Nitol Group and Jiangsu Jinlong Automobile Sales and Service Co Ltd of China have signed three Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs) for setting up of three industries, says a press release.

The industries to be set up are export-oriented plastic industry CNG Bus plant in Bangladesh and CNG System for distribution and marketing of CNG in automobile of Bangladesh.

Abdul Matlub Ahmad, Chairman of Nitol Group and Dong Bao Yu, Chairman of the Board Jiangsu Jinlong Automobile Sales & Service Co. Ltd. of China, signed the deals on behalf of their respective sides.

The five-member Chinese delegation visited Bangladesh at the Invitation of Nitol and the MOU's were signed at the conclusion of its four-day visit.

During its stay in Bangladesh, the delegation held discussions with relevant ministries and concerned officials.

Moody's to maintain negative outlook for India

AFP, Bombay

Moody's Investors Service said Tuesday it would maintain the existing stable and negative outlooks for India's foreign currency and domestic debt respectively.

"We do not indicate that there would be any review of the country's ratings," Moody's president and chief executive officer John Rutherford said.

India's sovereign rating outlook was expected to be reviewed given the current volatile regional concerns with its neighbour Pakistan and the rising fiscal deficit in the current year to March 31.

"We have maintained the outlooks as we believe that India's economic growth is better than some of the European and other economies. Also with an expected growth in the US economy later in the current year, the Indian economy will also benefit," Rutherford said.

Moves on for Ctg Chamber polls CCCI takes step to obtain court permission for holding AGM

NURUL ALAM, Chittagong

After a long four-year break, the Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) may get its leaders elected if the chamber obtains permission from court to go to polls.

Highly placed commerce ministry sources said a move is on to bring about a leadership change in the Chittagong Chamber, the main trade body of the port city.

"Measures would be taken to infuse dynamism in the leadership of Chittagong Chamber in a bid to render better and proper service to the business community in Chittagong" the commerce ministry source said.

He said a high-level committee comprising elite and prominent personalities of the port city would be formed soon to hold the Chamber's election as well as to ensure a dynamic leadership.

Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, a former president of the Chamber, also desires to ensure a dynamic leadership in the trade body to boost trade and investments here, the source said.

However, the source ruled out any possibility of appointing an administrator at CCCI to help conduct its election though a rumour was rife over the last few weeks.

The CCCI election could not be held in 1998 and 1999 as there was a court embargo against it following a case filed by some 'aggrieved' persons.

Later, as they withdrew the case, the court ordered holding of CCCI election and gave the responsibility to the Directorate of Trade Organisations (DTO) to conduct the polls.

But the chamber politics took a different turn, when the CCCI Board of Directors removed elected president Kamal Uddin Ahmed in early 2000 after the expiry of his tenure and made senior vice president Saifuzzaman Chowdhury Javed the interim president of CCCI.

Later former CCCI president Kamal Uddin Ahmed alleged that Javed, a son of Bangladesh Awami League leader Akhtaruzzamn Chowdhury Babu, had forcibly become the chamber president. In the wake of such allegations, Javed gave up the post of CCCI president and Farid Ahmed Chowdhury was made president of the chamber.

During the drama over selection of interim president of the Chamber, the commerce ministry appointed an administrator of the Chamber, which was challenged in the court and the High Court declared his appointment void.

Meanwhile, the CCCI took step to obtain court permission for holding its AGM.

When asked, Senior Vice-President of CCCI S M Nurul Huq said the Chamber would announce the procedures for holding the AGM and election after getting court permission.

CCCI President Farid Ahmed Chowdhury also sent a representative to the commerce minister in this regard, he said.

Lack of good governance hits Japan-aided projects

UNB, Dhaka

Lack of good governance, procedural delays, and unnecessary interference create hurdles in implementing Japanese-aided projects in Bangladesh, a project brief says.

"Lack of governance of GOB is the root of difficulties on Monday," noted the brief, presented to journalists here at a briefing on Japan's development activities in Bangladesh.

It identified delay of procedures, unnecessary interference at every stage, delay in procurement and construction works, poor operation and maintenance and failure in realisation of expected project effect-all stemming from poor governance-hinder project implementation.

Japan will expand its technical assistance in human resources, institution and policy areas with a view to improving governance and ensuring the sustained realisation of the project effect, chief representative of JBIC Yasunori Onishi said at the press briefing at Japan embassy on Monday.

Marking 30th anniversary of diplomatic relationship with Bangladesh, Japanese economic diplomats elaborately talked about Japan's cooperation for development in Bangladesh, status of Japanese-aided projects and future outlook of Japan's assistance.

Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) has so far signed 68 loan agreements amounting to US\$ 5 billion with Bangladesh. Bangladesh stands 10th among the 100 loan-recipient countries and shares 2.8 per cent of JBIC global loan commitments.

Japan gives less priority to loans and focuses more on grants and technical assistance as it classifies Bangladesh as Least Less Developing Countries (LLDCs), said Toru Maeda, Charge d' Affaires of the Embassy of Japan in Dhaka.

"More grants and more technical assistance are better for Bangladesh than loans, because you need to pay back the loans with interest," said Toru, who heads economic cooperation section of the embassy.

Of the total JBIC loans agreed upon so far, commodity credits

account for 48 per cent, manufacturing (including fertiliser factories) 17 per cent, power and gas 15 per cent and transportation 12 per cent.

JBIC, the lending arm of Japanese overseas development assistance (ODA), was established in October 1999 following merger of Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund (OECF) and Export-Import Bank of Japan.

Jamuna, Paksey and Rupsha bridges, Chittagong airport, power plants, rural electrification, telecommunications, fertiliser, rural credits and rural infrastructure development are among the areas of JBIC projects.

Basic infrastructure development, and rural and agriculture development are the two priority areas of JBIC operations in Bangladesh to help reduce poverty with due consideration to debt-repayment capacity of Bangladesh, JBIC officials said.

Maeda said Japan provides ODA in four categories grants, technical assistance, loan and assistance through multilateral institutions like World Bank and Asian Development Bank.

WEAB team calls on commerce minister

A delegation of Women Entrepreneurs Association of Bangladesh (WEAB) called on Commerce Minister Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury yesterday, says a press release

During the meeting the entrepreneurs pointed out their different problems in the country and the minister assured them of all kinds of co-operation. The minister assured them of separate portfolio in the nationalised commercial banks, MGF scheme on exportable items and inclusion of women entrepreneurs in the different trade body and meeting.

Led by WEAB President Nasrin Awal Mintu, the delegation included Laila Kabir, Sajeda Minhaj Mukul, Fouzia Amin Nina, Naz Farhana Ahmed, Nazma Huda, Rina Karim, Shamsunnaher Chowdhury, Veena Ahmed, Emi Islam, Mahmuda Rahman, Rafia Khan Ruma, Dewan Rajia Sultana, Viquarunnesa, Advocate Nasima Akhter and Rina Rahman.

The WEAB presented a crest to the minister.

US firm awards 'Factory of Year' crest to Onus Apparels

Oxford Industries Incorporate, a leading US garment buyer, has selected Onus Apparels Ltd. a Bangladeshi garment manufacturer, as the best factory for the year 2001, says a press release.

Technical Manager of the US company Danny Holmes handed over the 'Factory of the Year' crest to Managing Director of Onus Apparels Shafui Islam Mohiuddin at a function held at a local hotel on Monday.

BGMEA President Kutubuddin Ahmed, First Vice-President Ershad Ullah and Second Vice-President Kazi Moniruzzaman, among others, were present on the occasion.

Oxford Industries, which imports readymade garments from 21 countries, buys over \$50 million worth of garments, from Bangladesh a year, the release added.

Kleenheat dealer confce held

Kleenheat gas arranged a dealer conference and training programme at its LPG import and bottling facility at Mongla recently, says a press release.

The session was presided over by Klaus Gohra, Country Manager-Bangladesh.

The conference was followed by a guided tour of the facility and lunch.

The aims at providing best services to the company's customers.

Detailed presentations on how to improve customer service were held at the conference, while the training session covered safety processes, LP Gas technical information, documentation for smooth operations.

Kleenheat Gas, Australia's largest and most experienced LP Gas concern has been operating in Bangladesh for the last six months. Its presence in the country is a result of a joint venture between Wesfarmers Ltd of Australia, Elpiji Group of Malaysia and Palmal Group of Bangladesh.

With its vast experience, expertise and technological know-how, only Kleenheat Gas is equipped to ensure the highest level of customer satisfaction.



PHOTO: WEAB

A delegation of Women Entrepreneurs Association of Bangladesh (WEAB) led by its president Nasrin Awal Mintu presents a crest to Commerce Minister Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury at a meeting with him in the city yesterday.

Jamilur Reza Chy calls for updating govt web portals

Obsolete information earn bad name for the country

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Former caretaker government advisor Professor Jamilur Reza Chowdhury yesterday said only ten per cent of the ministries have so called web sites and those with obsolete information, giving negative impression of the country.

Speaking at the inauguration of a training course on web site designing organised by the Dhaka Reporters Unity, Chowdhury, who was also the Chairman of the National Committee on Information Technology, said only few government ministries have web sites and these are not being updated.

Citing examples of Nepal and Bhutan, Professor Chowdhury said although they started computerising government offices later, their web

sites are much better than that of Bangladesh ministries. "Computerisation of the public sector should take place at much faster pace."

Pointing to some incidents of intrusion at some official sites and changing the addresses of a political party web site, Chowdhury attributed the problem to the absence of domain registration of the country.

He called for initiating steps to have a proper domain name.

Identifying paucity of telephone lines as the main barrier to making Internet access easy in the country, Professor Chowdhury suggested use of cable, wireless technology as a way out of the situation.

Ninety per cent of the fiber optic capacity of Bangladesh Railway still remains unused which can be

opened up for data communication, he said adding that cyber café can be set up throughout the country for which nothing is required excepting terminal equipment.

Opening up the telecom sector should be another top priority of the government, he said. It may reduce income from the Bangladesh Telephone and Telegraph Board (BTB) in the short run but would help generate value added tax (VAT) in other forms.

He said the task force headed by himself has already handed over its recommendations one-and-a-half-year ago to the government but very few of those have so far been implemented.

DRU President Shajahan Sardar and General Secretary Motahar Hossain Masum also spoke on the occasion.

Tata, IOC win bidding for major Indian state firms

AFP, New Delhi

India said Tuesday the Tata Group had won bidding for a stake in telecom giant VSNL and state-run IOC would buy a slice of fuel retailer IBP Ltd. -- in a major boost to the country's privatisation programme.

Disinvestment Minister Arun Shourie told reporters Tata had won the 25-per cent stake in Videsh Sanchar Nigam Ltd (VSNL) -- India's sole international long-distance telecoms operator -- with a bid of 14.4 billion rupees (306 million dollars).

Indian Oil Corp's (IOC) winning bid for a 33.6-per cent stake of IBP, which runs a chain of gas stations around India, was 11.5 billion rupees.

The stake sales in the two profitable state-run firms were seen as crucial to revitalising India's privatisation programme, which has consistently failed to meet its annual targets, as well as reducing the fiscal deficit.

However, the fact the bidding for IBP was won by another state-run firm is sure to fuel persistent allegations the government is fudging the privatisation process by simply switching shareholdings between state companies.

Other bidders for the IBP stake included India's largest private sector company Reliance, as well as Royal Dutch/Shell Group and Kuwait Petroleum Corp.

Shourie also announced stakes in two large state-owned refiners, Hindustan Petroleum Corp. Ltd. and Bharat Petroleum Corp. Ltd., would be put on the block in three months time.

However, he stressed state firms such as IOC would not be allowed to bid "so that competition is created within the private sector also."

"IOC entered into this round of bidding because it needed access to retail outlets. By acquiring a stake in IBP they have gained access overnight to 1,500 petroleum retail outlets. We had to allow IOC to prepare for growing competition," said Shourie.

"But in the next round of bidding for oil companies HPCL and BPCL, IOC will be kept out so that private competition can come up also. Without competition the consumer will never stand to gain. We recognise this."

IOC's 11.5 billion-rupee bid doubled the second highest bid of 5.95 billion rupees made by the Royal Dutch/Shell Group oil conglomerate.

IBP shares rose 18 per cent to close at 859.70 rupees in trading on the Bombay stock exchange, while VSNL shares rose 0.4 rupees to 168.25 rupees.

The government sold its VSNL shares to the Tata group at 202 rupees per share.

"The government has also taken measures to take out surplus, yet very valuable land worth 7.78 billion rupees from VSNL," said Shourie.

He announced the government had recently privatised seven companies through strategic sales and 12 hotels belonging to the Indian Tourism Department Corporation.

The Cabinet Committee on Disinvestment approved Tuesday the privatisation of the Qutab Hotel and Lodhi Hotel in New Delhi and the Laxmi Vilas Palace Hotel in Udaipur.

Shourie said Lodhi Hotel located on prime real estate sold well above its 400 million-rupee reserve price.

It was snapped up by Singapore-based holiday resort chain Siverlinks for 762.2 million rupees in hotly-contested bidding.

The Centaur Hotel in Bombay's plush Juhu beach was bought by the Radisson luxury hotel chain for 830 million rupees.

Philippines, Australia to remove trade barriers for agro-products

AFP, Manila

Canberra and Manila have set high-level talks in April to look at widening market access for their agricultural products in each other's markets.

Australian Agriculture Minister Warren Truss ended a visit to Manila on Tuesday after meeting with senior Filipino officials including Agriculture Secretary Leonardo Montemayor and Trade Secretary Manuel Roxas.

Truss told a news conference that Filipino officials sought market access for bananas, pineapples, and mangoes. Canberra bans all mango imports from the Philippines except those produced in the central island of Guimaras.

Australia imported Philippines mangoes until 1998, when it out-

lawed a chemical treatment by Philippines growers.

For his part, Truss said he raised Australia's desire to export temperate fruits and vegetables.

He also sought a lifting of the Philippines' ban on meat and bone meal imports and expressed concern over "difficulties regarding the microbiological testing of raw meat."

Manila set the restrictions on imports of meat and meat products following the most recent madcow and foot and mouth disease scares.

The two sides decided to set up a high-level bilateral consultative group on agricultural trade issues, with the first meeting set for early April, the Australian embassy here said.

Australia's trade with the Philippines totaled about two billion Australian dollars (1.02 billion US) in

calendar 2000 with Canberra enjoying a surplus of about a billion dollars. Most Australian exports to the Philippines are agricultural products.

Truss said Canberra has asked Manila to provide a list of pests and diseases that affect the tropical fruits it wanted to export.

"We have indicated some time ago the objective of addressing these issues by the middle of this year. That is still our hope."

He added: "We maintain a thorough quarantine policy because we are relatively free from many of the world's pests and diseases, and we must preserve this enviable disease status."

Technical Manager of US firm Oxford Industries Incorporate Danny Holmes hands over the 'Factory of the Year' crest to Managing Director of Onus Apparels Ltd Shafui Islam Mohiuddin at a ceremony held at a city hotel on Monday.

PHOTO: BGMEA

US Senate panel plans to subpoena ex-Enron chief

Kenneth Lay quits Board of Directors

AFP, Washington

A Senate panel announced plans Monday to subpoena former chairman Kenneth Lay to force him to testify on the collapse of the scandal-tainted energy giant as lawmakers warned that the affair had created a "crisis of confidence" in corporate America.

Concern about corporate accounting practices in the wake of the Enron scandal sent stocks tumbling on Wall Street Monday, with the Dow Jones industrials down 221.58 points (2.24 per cent) to 9,685.68 and the Nasdaq off 56.62 points (2.96 per cent) to 1,854.62 at the closing bell.

Late Monday, Lay announced his resignation from Enron's board of directors nearly two weeks after he stood down as chairman and CEO.

"I want to see Enron survive and

successfully emerge from reorganization. Due to the multiple inquiries and investigations, some of which are focused on me personally, I believe that my involvement has become a distraction to achieving this goal," Lay said in a statement.

Senate Commerce committee chairman Senator Ernest Hollings said Monday that the committee "really had no choice but to issue a subpoena to require his attendance" after Lay's lawyer announced the former Enron boss would not make his scheduled appearance Monday before the Senate panel.

"Tomorrow I'm calling a meeting of the full committee to get authority to issue a subpoena for his appearance on ... (February) 12th," Hollings said.

Representative Richard Baker, chairman of the House Financial Services Subcommittee on Capital

Markets, warned that Enron's failure "has created a crisis of confidence" in corporate America.

Even if subpoenaed, Lay may invoke a constitutional right to refuse to incriminate himself.

His refusal to testify is further inflaming passions in Congress where many lawmakers have already been seeing red over Enron's financial dealings and its treatment of its employees.

Lay's attorney said the former executive would not appear because of "inflammatory statements" made by lawmakers that showed "the tenor of the hearing will be prosecutorial."

Meanwhile Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) Chairman Harvey Pitt said Monday the collapse of Enron highlights a need to review and possibly toughen corporate disclosure requirements.