

Businessmen, economists differ on move against brand counterfeiters

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

While businessmen urged the government to crack down on brand counterfeiters for preserving consumer rights some eminent economists suggested to go slow fearing the move could stifle growth of small enterprises in the country.

Termining counterfeiting a crime against humanity, businessmen urged the government to ensure brand protection and check counterfeiting to offset consumer cheating but Professor Muzaffer Ahmad of Dhaka University warned that stringent law for brand protection could diminish growth of small industries.

He was speaking at a seminar on brand protection and counterfeit products organised by Institute of Business Administration (IBA) of Dhaka University yesterday.

Professor Ahmad said the country is still not in a position to offer total protection to brand products and services as more than 60 per cent people of the country earn less than one US dollar a day who are unable to buy expensive brand products.

"Counterfeiting of brand items can not be encouraged," he said "but government should not be over strict to this informal sector which generates lot of employment and cater the low-income people."

Dr Syed Ferhat Anwar of IBA also spoke in favour of going slow against the brand coun-



PHOTO: STAR

Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury (2nd from right) and Dhaka University Vice Chancellor Anwarullah Chowdhury (2nd from left) are seen at a seminar on brand protection and counterfeit products at Dhaka University yesterday.

terfeiter to protect the small and medium enterprises of the country.

Speaking on the occasion, SJ Davies, Managing Director of Bata Shoe Company Ltd., said unscrupulous trader cash in on the hard-earned goodwill of big companies and deceive customers.

He said foreign investors would not want to stay in a country where their products and

services are imitated easily with little legal provisions. "The government must implement intellectual property right to acknowledge the contribution of the inventor and save the users from being cheated."

Presided over by Prof. Anwarullah Chowdhury, Vice Chancellor of Dhaka University, the seminar was attended by Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, Minister for

Commerce, Suhel Ahmed Chowdhury, Secretary for Commerce, Dr Anwar Hossain, Director of IBA, Aftab-ul-Islam, President of AmCham, Sarwar Ahmed, CEO of Syngenta and Dr Syed Ferhat Anwar of IBA.

Commerce Minister said the country needs an active consumer association like developing countries, which will champion the cause and, rights of consumers.

"We have to create mass awareness against counterfeiting and media can play an important role in the part," Khosru said.

Commerce Secretary Suhel Ahmad Choshdury said the country has to protect brand products and stop adulteration for its obligation to WTO.

"Bangladesh Standard and Testing Institute (BSTI) has to be empowered and be equipped with modern technology to detect spurious items," he said.

Prof Anwarullah Chowdhury said consumer protection act should be enacted and existing laws needs to be updated with severe clauses of punishment for the wrongdoers.

Barrister Tanjib-ul Alam presented a keynote on "brand protection and counterfeit products: the legal regime".

He suggested updating The Trade Mark Act, 1940, Patent and Design Act, 1911, and Copyrights Act, 2000, for checking counterfeiting.

Citibank unveils plans to expand business

Internet banking on the cards to encourage remittance

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Responding to the government's plans to encourage remittance through official channels, Citibank NA Bangladesh has initiated moves to help remit 100 million US dollars from Saudi Arabia to Bangladesh this year.

Nanoo G Pamnani, Citibank NA Area Chief for South Asia, disclosed this at a press conference in the city yesterday.

He said the bank plans to expand its activities in Bangladesh in response to the government's plans to increase remittance flow which was around 30 million US dollars last year.

Pamnani said Citibank would soon introduce Internet banking to encourage people to remit through official channel. "The Internet banking will facilitate both Citibank and other banks' clients to send their money to Bangladesh from anywhere in the world," he said.

Nanoo Pamnani also introduced a new logo of the bank terming it a symbol of "banking in the next century".

Speaking at the press conference, prior to departure from Bangladesh ending his two-day visit, Nanoo G Pamnani said Citibank believes Bangladesh has a bright future and that the bank will help in the development activities of the country by serving its clients and catalyzing direct foreign investment.

"We wish to take Citibank's brand to a higher point of visibility in the marketplace and definitely expand our activities. Citibank offers the widest range of products

for customers designed to maximise their convenience and services and we are evaluating how best to launch consumer banking in Bangladesh," he said.

Regarding the bank's performance in Bangladesh, the Citibank South Asia Area Chief said he is pleased with the progress of business and expects more growth in coming years.

Explaining Citibank's expansion strategy in Bangladesh, Sanjay Nayar, Managing Director & Head Global Corporate & Investment Banking, Citibank India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal, said the bank will do everything to make its strategy successful.

Outlining the current operations, David Rees, Chief Executive Officer of Citibank N.A. Bangladesh, said Citibank had resorted to wholesale banking services to various banking and non-banking financial institutions, government undertakings as well as national and international corporate houses. The bank has extended support to infrastructure project finance, he added.

Earlier in the press conference, Nanoo Pamnani handed over a cheque on behalf of Citibank NA to Friendship Hospital, which is also known as the Floating Hospital of Bangladesh.

Referring to the cheque presentation, he said, "Social responsibility is a very important feature of Citibank's global culture particularly in developing countries. By doing this we help the underprivileged".

The press conference was also addressed by by Mamun Rashid, Chief Operating Officer of Citibank N.A. Bangladesh, Madhulika Gupta, Vice President & Director Corporate Affairs, Citibank-India, was also present at the briefing.

Exim Bank recommends 40pc dividend

Exim Bank has recommended a 40 per cent dividend to its shareholders, says a press release.

The dividend recommendation, subject to the approval of the central bank, came at the 21st meeting of the Board of Directors of the bank held Tuesday with Md Nazrul Islam Mazumder, Chairman of the Bank, in the chair.

The bank mobilised a total deposit of Tk 726.37 crore as on 31.12.2001 against Tk 393.45 crore in the preceding year, the meeting was told.

The total loans and advances of the bank stood at Tk 513.34 crore against Tk 217.05 crore during the preceding year.

Fantasy Kingdom, STS sign deal

Amusement park Fantasy Kingdom of Concord Entertainment Company Ltd and Scholastica Transport Services Pvt Ltd (STS) signed an agreement on Tuesday, says a press release.

Under the deal, STS will be the official bus service provider of Fantasy Kingdom.

S M Kamaluddin, Chairman of Concord Group, and Yasmeen Murshed, Chairperson of Scholastica Transport Services, signed on behalf of the two companies.

Fantasy Kingdom will be the largest theme park in this part of Asia with hair-raising rides and amazing landscape.

Kodak KB-10 camera launched in Bangladesh

Kodak KB-10 camera has been launched in Bangladesh.

The launching ceremony was held at a city hotel yesterday, says a press release.

Kodak personnel and Kodak Express lab and studio owners were present on the occasion.

On the launching of the camera in Bangladesh, Richard Fleming, Business Manager of Southwest Asia, Consumer Imaging, Kodak, said "...The KB-10 is a major step forward in Kodak's aim to bring the joy of photography to everyday life."

The KB-10 gives superior quality pictures at the touch of a button, turning even the amateur into a pro photographer. The size and shape of the camera provides a firm grip while shooting pictures, making them sharper and clearer.

The largest selling camera in the world, the KB-10 is among Eastman Kodak's latest range of user-friendly economy cameras. It's conveniently priced at Tk 995/-, and comes with one Kodak Max film, a battery, a carry pouch and is backed by one year warranty. The product range includes cameras, films, processing products and services.

3-day MIDAS fair begins

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A three-day trade fair organised by Micro Industries Development Assistance and Services (MIDAS) began in the city yesterday.

Rokia A Rahman, former advisor to the caretaker government and a member of the MIDAS Board of Directors, inaugurated the fair. Abdul Karim, Managing Director of MIDAS Financing Limited (MFL), other MIDAS officials and women entrepreneurs were present at the inauguration ceremony.

A large number of micro and small enterprises owned by women entrepreneurs are taking part in the fair titled 'MIDAS Trade Fair-2002'.

They are showcasing a wide variety of traditional and non-

traditional items including readymade fashion wears and handloom products in about 45 stalls. The fair is being held in MIDAS office premises at house number 5, road number 16 (Old 27), Dhanmondi.

MIDAS is engaged in the promotion and development of the micro and small enterprises in the country. MIDAS services include financial assistance, entrepreneurship development, training, feasibility study, market research and information dissemination.

MIDAS, which lays special emphasis on women entrepreneurship development, has disbursed more than Tk 700 million as loans among more than 2000 small and micro enterprises of which women run more than 500.

MIDAS has set up four sales centres, known as Midas Mini Mart, at Dhanmondi, Uttara, Gulshan and Bally Road to provide marketing support to the women entrepreneurs. These outlets are owned and managed by groups of women entrepreneurs with technical assistance from MIDAS.

The MFL, a non-bank financial institution licensed, has been looking after the enterprise-financing role of MIDAS since October 1999. It has also implemented the Women Entrepreneurship Development (WED) programme of MIDAS.

The MFL also provides lease-financing assistance to small and medium enterprises for acquisition of capital machinery, equipment and vehicle on short-term basis.

CDBL makes presentation for CSE members

Central Depository Bangladesh Ltd (CDBL) and its system provider CMC Ltd presented a demonstration on business rules specification to the Chittagong Stock Exchange (CSE) members in Chittagong on Wednesday, says a press release.

CDBL and CMC also elaborately described of the benefits of the CDS system to the CSE members.

Central depository will eliminate paper-based share certificates, routing out the fake shares. It is expected that the CDBL will begin operation by November this year.

Bank assoc discusses important issues

Bangladesh Association of Banks (BAB) on Tuesday had a threadbare discussion on the restriction debaring government organisations from keeping more than 15 per cent of their funds in private commercial banks and total ban on keeping such funds in the banks which are in operation for less than five years, says a press release.

The meeting with BAB Chairman Kazi Akramuddin Ahmed in the chair also discussed issues such as problem of recovery of loans, deduction of income-tax against provision and calculation of capital adequacy.

Yusuf Abdullah Harun, President of the FBCCI, was present at the meeting as chief guest.

The meeting was also attended by chairmen, directors and managing directors of many private commercial banks.



PHOTO: STAR

Rokia A Rahman, former advisor to the caretaker government and a member of the MIDAS Board of Directors, inaugurates the three-day 'MIDAS Trade Fair-2002' in the city yesterday.

Government initiates move to make insurance sector vibrant

BSS, Dhaka

The government has taken a number of steps to ensure smooth expansion and healthy competition in the insurance industry.

The steps include reforming outdated laws, stopping commission for general insurance business, cancellation of licences for doing unhealthy and unethical business, developing skilled manpower and ceasing insurance business on credits, commerce ministry officials told BSS Tuesday.

The commerce ministry has already formed a four-member committee headed by the Chief Controller of Insurance for recasting the existing insurance laws making those capable of meeting the challenge of time.

"The Insurance Act 1938, Insurance Rule 1958 and Insurance Corporations Act 1973 that govern the operation of insurance companies were framed long ago and have become outdated and out of context with the present requirements," a commerce ministry official said.

The laws would be changed immediately after receiving neces-

sary recommendations from the committee, which have been asked to submit its report within a very short period, he said.

The government in last December has also formed the long awaited Insurance Advisory Board under the chairmanship of the Commerce Minister Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury to support the insurance industry. The board will meet soon to review the existing problems of the sector and give suggestions to overcome the problems, sources said.

Responding positively to the demands of the private insurers, the government on last December has stopped payment of commission to make competition for procurement of business in the market.

In a move to check unethical and unhealthy business in the sector, the government has decided to cancel licences of those insurers who would violate the existing insurance laws and stop insurance business on credits.

Strong measures have also been taken against the malpractice of some unscrupulous persons who issue insurance policy without

receiving necessary premium violating the insurance rules.

"It keeps huge amount of premium outstanding every year, which remains unrealised resulting in loss of premium to insurance companies and taxes to the government," an insurance expert said.

Tough actions would be taken against the overseas investors who violate the provisions of the law of the land by placing their insurance with foreign insurers that deprived the local insurers of huge premium and the government of foreign exchange earnings, commerce ministry officials said.

Apart from the two state owned insurance companies, a total of 59 private insurance companies and a foreign one have so far been doing business in the country as the government gave permission to operate private insurance companies in 1984.

The government has given top priority to the insurance sector as revenue earnings from the sector increased significantly in the first six months of the current financial year.

According to official statistics, Tk 154.7 crore has been earned during

July to December 2001 while the amount was Tk 159.3 crore in the previous financial year. Besides, the government has also earned a total of Tk 62.88 crore as taxes and VAT from the private insurance companies in the last financial year (2000-2001) while Tk 61.64 crore in the previous year.

In recent years, private insurance business have increased significantly as in 2000-2001 fiscal, premium earnings have reached to Tk 682.33 crore for general insurance and Tk 426.39 crore for life insurance while the amount was only Taka 99.05 crore for general insurance and Tk 39.21 crore for life insurance business in the previous year.

As part of human resources development in the sector, the government is also considering to give a permanent shape of the Bangladesh Insurance Academy, which was established in 1973, through an act of the parliament for advancement of insurance education and training.

"The office of the Chief Controller of Insurance will be well equipped with necessary manpower and materials," said the commerce ministry official.



PHOTO: STAR

Sanjay Nayar, Managing Director & Head Global Corporate & Investment Banking, Citibank India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal, hands over a cheque to a representative of Friendship Floating Hospital at a city hotel yesterday. Nanoo G Pamnani, Citibank NA Area Chief for South Asia, David E. Rees, Chief Executive Officer of Citibank NA Bangladesh, and Mamun Rashid, Chief Operating Officer of Citibank NA Bangladesh, are also seen in the picture.

Lanka forms panel to battle energy crisis

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka is to short-circuit bureaucratic procedures in a desperate bid to buy electricity from private firms and overcome a major energy shortage, officials said Thursday.

Water levels at the island's hydro-power generating reservoirs are running dangerously low -- at 20 per cent of capacity -- due to a prolonged drought.

The present water is sufficient to generate energy for about 30 days by continuing to work thermal generators, officials said.

Sri Lanka is largely dependent on hydro-electricity with 65 per cent of the installed generating capacity coming from hydro stations while the balance comes from a combination of gas and diesel oil-fired generators.

Officials said Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe had ordered the formation of a high-powered panel to manage the energy sector for three years without bureaucratic red tape in order to overcome the crisis.

"The committee will be empow-

ered to bring power generation into operation without delay," an official said adding new laws will be introduced to give sweeping powers to the panel.

He said the panel will be asked to ensure there will be no power cuts after the middle of this year.

Sri Lanka's state-run electricity distributing monopoly is currently enforcing daily two-and-a-half hour power cuts.

Power and Energy Minister Karu Jayasuriya said the government had contracted to buy 110 mega watts of power from the private sector which would be connected to the national grid in less than three weeks.

"We have been able to manage the crisis so far and we should be able to get the shortfall we need from electricity generators which are already with private industrialists," Jayasuriya said.

The government has begun paying a subsidy to industries using their own generators instead of drawing electricity from the national grid which faces a shortfall of 200 mega watts.

Gulf Oil to set up plant to produce finished petroleum products

The Gulf Oil Bangladesh will set up a plant in the country to produce finished petroleum products and market them in the local market, says a press release.

This was stated at a workshop organised by the company at a city community centre on Tuesday.

The Managing Director of the company, Monirul Islam, presided over the workshop.

The General Secretary of the Bhairab-Kishoregonj Bus Minibus Owners Association, Alamgir Kabir, was present as chief guest on the occasion.

Speaking on the occasion, the managing director said the Gulf Oil Bangladesh, marketer of the globally renowned Gulf lubricant in the country, is working with a plan to set up a plant to purify crude petroleum products.

He said the petroleum market in the country is expanding rapidly with every passing day. And a greater participation of the private sector in this field is very important to keep pace with the growth, he added.



PHOTO: GULF OIL

Monirul Islam, Managing Director of Gulf Oil Bangladesh Ltd, presides over a workshop on the company's lubricant in the city on Tuesday.