

JICA to cooperate with BEPZA

Japan is ready to provide BEPZA with exports under a technical assistance programme for attracting more Japanese investment in the EPZs of Bangladesh, says a press release.

The offers was given by Representative of the Japan International Co-Operation Agency (JICA) Takashi Sakamoto during a meeting with Executive Chairman of the Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (BEPZA) Brig Gen (Retd) M Mofizur Rahman in the city on Sunday.

JICA also agreed to train BEPZA officials for active investment promotional campaign. Both BEPZA and JICA have agreed to exchange their regular publications and views for mutual understanding and co-operation.

The meeting was also attended by Member (Investment Promotion) of BEPZA Md Azmal Chowdhury.

DCCI, BEPZA to work closely to attract investment

Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (BEPZA) and the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) have agreed to jointly organise seminars on foreign investment in the EPZs of Bangladesh, says a press release.

The two sides reached an agreement to this effect at a recent meeting between President of DCCI Motiur Rahman and Executive Chairman of BEPZA Birg Gen (Retd) M Mofizur Rahman.

DCCI and BEPZA also agreed to work more closely to attract local investment in the EPZs.

During the meeting, the DCCI chief informed the BEPZA Chairman that a 15-member high powered Sri Lankan business delegation would come to Bangladesh on March 9 on a four-day visit.

The meeting was also attended by Member (Investment Promotion) of BEPZA Md Azmal Chowdhury.

New Chairman of Reckitt Benckiser (Bangladesh) Ltd



Colin Day, Executive Director and Chief Financial Officer of Reckitt Benckiser Plc, has been appointed Chairman of the Reckitt Benckiser (Bangladesh) Limited, says a press release.

Colin Day joined Reckitt Benckiser Plc in September 2000 from Aegis Group Plc where he was Group Finance Director.

Myanmar quashes rumours of bank note withdrawal

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's military junta Wednesday moved to quash rumours that it will introduce two high-denomination bank notes and withdraw all other currency in circulation.

"As we have already declared before, we have no intention of demonetizing the present currency in circulation and there will be no 5,000 kyat nor 10,000 kyat notes issued," said deputy chief of military intelligence Major General Kyaw Win.

Kyaw Win told reporters the rumours cropped up following the discovery and seizure of counterfeit 1,000 kyat notes in downtown Yangon recently.

But he said there was no indication of a well-planned campaign to flood the market with fake bank notes.

"These were isolated discoveries and we are just in the process of following the paper-trail," he said, adding no arrests have been made so far.

The military government dealt with similar rumours last November, when it denied widespread speculation it was poised to withdraw the 500- and 1,000-kyat notes from circulation.

PABX service thrives on BTTB phone dearth

MONJUR MAHMUD

As fixed telephones are not easy to subscribe, people are switching to PABX (Private Alternative Branch Exchange) phone service.

Many unemployed youths find it a good business taking the advantage of dearth of land-based phones of the state-run Bangladesh Telegraph & Telephone Board (BTTB), although the commercial use of PABX service is not legal.

Cellular phones provided by private operators also fail to serve the needs of the common people since these are costly.

According to sources, there are around two thousand PABX phone service providers (PPSP) in the city having more than two lakh clients.

After getting several phone lines from the BTTB, a service provider by using main equipment of PABX system sells 15 to 20 connections to the subscribers against one fixed phone line.

Although people have accepted the service, the government is yet to recognise the business. The service providers have formed an association styled Bangladesh PABX Telecom (Co)

Association (BPTA) to fight operational hassle, mainly from the BTTB staff.

"I have been in this trade for the last six years and I have invested Tk 10 lakh," said a leader of BPTA preferring not to be named. "I think we are not doing any harm to the government. Rather, we are paying 10 times more than what the government earns from the ordinary subscribers."

Those who need phone but cannot afford cellular phone are mainly the clients of the PABX service, he mentioned.

"I waited for two years for a phone from the state-run monopoly, but I did not get it. The BTTB officials demanded Tk 15,000 as bribe for the connection in addition to the government charges of Tk 18,400. So, I had opted for the PABX connection, though I know the service is not legal," said a subscriber at Mirpur in the city.

A client has to pay Tk 3,000 to get a connection of a PABX fixed phone and deposit Tk 2,000 as security to the service provider. After having connected, a client is able to make local, NWD and ISD calls and use fax or even get access to Internet.

With Tk 230 line rent per month, a client has to pay Tk 3 for a three-minute call. For every additional minute of talk-time, the subscriber has to pay Tk 0.50. There is no incoming charge for the first five minutes, but one has to pay Tk 0.50 per minute to continue talks.

On the other hand, a PPSP has to manage BTTB officials and even the linemen so that it can run business smoothly.

"We have to maintain a good relation with the BTTB officials and linemen so that they cannot disturb our service by disconnecting phone lines. We have already applied to the BTTB for legalisation of the business and are also pursuing the decision makers in this regard," the BPTA leader maintained.

When contacted, BTTB Chairman SATM Badrul Haque said he is aware of the commercial use of PABX service. In reply to a question, he said, "The BTTB is yet to get any proposal from the commercial PABX service providers to make their business legalised."



PHOTO: MCCI

David Preston, High Commissioner of Canada to Bangladesh, met Tapan Chowdhury, President of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Dhaka yesterday.

Dhaka Bank Board recommends cash dividend, bonus & rights shares

The Board of Directors of Dhaka Bank Limited has recommended of a 25 per cent cash dividend, one bonus share for every four shares for the year ended December 31, 2001 and one rights share at par for every two shares held by the shareholders, says a press release.

The decisions were made at a meeting of the board held in the city yesterday.

The shareholders whose names will appear in the register of members of the company on the day of closure of the register will be entitled to receive cash dividend, bonus share and rights share.

The annual general meeting of the members of the company will be held on May 22, 2002 at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel.

The register of members of the company shall remain closed from May 1 to 22.

The bank has earned a net profit of Tk 290.39 billion during the year 2001 as against Tk 173.18 million in the previous year, showing a growth of 68 per cent.

Asian tourism to gradually improve this year: Experts

AFP, Singapore

Representatives from Asia's multi-billion dollar travel and tourism industries said Wednesday they expected only a gradual recovery this year as lingering fears over terrorism and shrinking budgets due to the economic downturn persisted.

The need for Japanese tourists in particular to shed a fear of air travel was seen as key to the recovery, industry spokesmen told a news briefing here as part of a campaign to lure back travelers into the air.

"It's going to be a very, very gradual improvement," said Richard Stirland, director-general of the Association of Asia-Pacific Airlines, a grouping of 18 regional carriers which is spearheading a campaign to lure travellers back into the air.

"(The) major worry is really the long term impact on Japan and how quickly the trans-Pacific market is going to recover."

Business class and first class

GM allowed to ramp up investment in India

AFP, New Delhi

India's Commerce and Industry Minister Murali Manohar has cleared a proposal of US-based General Motors to invest six billion rupees (125 million dollars) in its Indian operations, a government statement said Wednesday.

General Motors' unit, in the western Indian state of Gujarat, has already launched the Opel Astra and Opel Corsa in the domestic market by sourcing technology from its German unit.

The statement said the company plans to use the money for manufacture and marketing of cars and commercial vehicles, apart from providing after sales support.

The industry minister also cleared 38 other foreign investment proposals for around 9.5 billion rupees in sectors such as banking, chemicals and engineering products.



PHOTO: STAR

Independent think-tank Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) Chairman Professor Rehman Sobhan (3rd from right) speaks at a dialogue on "Bangladesh Economy and the Forthcoming Development Forum 2002" yesterday in the city as Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman (2nd from left), Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury (2nd from right), Awami League leader Tofail Ahmed (right) and renowned lawyer Syed Ishtiaque Ahmed (left) look on.

US services sector soars to 15-month peak, job cuts fall

AFP, Washington

Activity in the US services sector soared to a 15-month record in February, a key barometer showed Tuesday, stoking optimism that the economy is emerging from recession.

The Institute for Supply Management (ISM)'s non-manufacturing index climbed to 58.7 points in February -- the highest level since November 2000 -- from 49.6 in January.

Activity had seasawed for the past four months, surging in November and December before declining in January, said the ISM survey chief Ralph Kauffman.

"However, February's index is a large increase over the November-January range and may represent a breakout of the non-manufacturing economy into continued growth in the coming months," Kauffman said.

"Supporting that scenario is a

jump in the February new orders index into territory also not seen since November 2000 and a slower rate of decrease in the February backlog of orders index."

The non-manufacturing index of new orders rose to 57.3 in February from 49.4 in January and the non-manufacturing index of the backlog of orders rose to 47.5 from 45.5.

The 50-point mark is the theoretical dividing point between contraction and expansion in activity.

The expansion in services mirrored an ISM purchasing managers index of manufacturing activity, released Friday, which leapt 4.8 points to 54.7 points in the same month.

"Not only is the manufacturing sector coming back, but the non-manufacturing portion of the economy looks like it is already there," said Naroff Economic Advisors president Joel Naroff.

"The huge surge in the Institute for Supply Management's non-

manufacturing index is one more signal that the economy is on the mend," he added.

"Indeed, with orders surging and even inventories rising, we could be in the beginning of a major acceleration in growth."

Further bullish news was delivered by a survey showing the number of job cuts announced by US employers slid 40 per cent from the previous month to 128,115 in February.

It was the lowest level of planned job cuts since June 2001, said the survey by outplacement firm Challenger, Gray and Christmas, but remained 26 per cent above the February 2001 figure.

"Even though the February job cuts showed a significant decline there is no reason to think the job market is rebounding," the outplacement company's chief executive, John Challenger, said in a statement.



PHOTO: H&M

H&M, a Swedish garment buying house, runs a comprehensive sewing machine operator training programme in Bangladesh. The programme is intended to train ex-child labourers who previously lost job due to under age. H&M imparts four-month basic training and three-month practical training to them at garment factories, which supply products to H&M. Upon completion, the ex-child labourers are offered permanent jobs at the factories where they receive training. H&M on Saturday organised a ceremony in the city to award certificates to its suppliers as a symbol of gratitude for providing jobs to the trainees. Picture shows Karl Gunner Fagerlin, Purchasing Director of H&M, giving certificates to a garment factory owner. Ingrid Schullstrom, Manager of Environment of H&M, and Mats Samuelsson, Chief Representative of H&M in Bangladesh, are also seen.

France blocks EU compromise on opening up energy market

AFP, Paris

France blocked Tuesday a compromise proposal on opening up the European Union energy market to competition, French Economy and Finance Minister Laurent Fabius said.

Liberalizing the EU energy market is currently being debated in Brussels by economy and finance ministers from the 15-nation European Union.

Fabius, who did not attend the Brussels meeting Tuesday, replied "yes" when asked at a development forum here if France had in fact barred a compromise.

He said France's representative at the Brussels meeting, Jean-

Pierre Jouyet, would later make a statement on the French position.

A draft statement said the 15 member states had agreed on "timetabled physical interconnection objectives between member states' networks ... to mark a material advance towards the single energy market."

At midday, however, there was still no agreement on exactly how liberalized it would be -- open to both corporate and household use -- and the key word "corporate" remained in vexing brackets in the draft.

EU sources said all countries except France wanted to remove the word "corporate" in order to imply that the entire energy market -- domestic household use as well as

business -- should be opened to competition under a strict timetable.

An EU summit in Barcelona, Spain March 15 and 16, according to the draft, should "set an ambitious calendar... for (corporate) access to free supplier choice."

But a solid front among the economy and finance ministers was said to be paramount, because evidence of internal discord would be seen at the summit as weakness.

The confrontation comes just ahead of the first round of French presidential elections April 21, in which economic liberalization could prove to be an explosive electoral issue.



PHOTO: RUPALI BANK

Md. Yeasin Ali, Managing Director of Rupali Bank Limited, addresses a branch managers' conference of Rangpur zone of the bank as chief guest recently. Syed Afroz, DG M and Zonal Head of Rangpur Zone, and Solaiman Ali, AGM - Audit and Inspection Cell of the zone, are also seen in the picture.