

BSRS earns Tk 10.81cr profit

Bangladesh Shilpa Rin Sangstha (BSRS) has earned a profit of Tk 10.81 crore before tax during the fiscal year 2000-2001 which is 62 per cent higher than that of the previous year, says a press release.

Out of the profit, Tk 87.50 lakh will be paid to the government as dividend.

The above information was disclosed while approving the audited accounts of BSRS for the fiscal year 2000-2001 at a meeting of the Board of Directors of BSRS held at the head office of the Sangstha on Sunday.

The Board expressed its satisfaction at the earning of profit on the basis of cash realisation of interest on loan and dividend on investment and hoped that the Sangstha will continue to play its important role in the national economy in the coming years.

Japan to take US steel tariffs to WTO this week

Japan's trade minister said Monday Tokyo would lodge a protest with the World Trade Organization (WTO) this week against a US decision to slap tariffs on steel imports, a news report said.

"Immediately after (the United States) takes measures, we will appeal to the WTO," Takeo Hiranuma, Japan's trade and economic and industry minister, told Japanese reporters, according to Jiji Press news agency.

Washington announced on March 5 it would impose tariffs of up to 30 per cent on certain imported steel. The measures are due to come into effect on Wednesday.

Japan lodged an initial complaint in early March with the global trade body against the US action, but no official request has been filed yet by Tokyo for the WTO to launch a procedure over the planned US steel tariffs.

The European Union has launched a double counter-attack seeking consultations under the safeguard agreement and a case to be started in the dispute settlement body.

Japanese exports of steel to the US fell last year to 1.86 million tonnes, or 6.8 per cent of the total imported into the US, compared to 1.93 million a year earlier.

Asia starts getting serious about privatisation

REUTERS, Tokyo

Privatisation is belatedly gathering pace in Asia, offering opportunities for investors regaining an appetite for risk, but fancy political footwork will be needed to turn what is now a ripple into a wave.

Sceptics say they have heard the story before and remain to be convinced that governments are ready to take on powerful vested interests and translate fine intentions into practice.

Even optimists concede that, with the notable exception of South Korea, progress is maddeningly slow.

Still, nearly five years after Asia's financial crisis saddled governments with huge debts and added an array of failed banks and firms to an already bloated inventory of state-owned assets, they say the news flow is turning positive.

From India to Indonesia, Bangkok to Beijing, governments are responding to pressure to plug holes in their budgets by putting more assets on the block.

Pubali Bank course on computer ends

A fifteen-day training course on computer operation in branch banking organised by Pubali Bank Training Institute concluded recently, says a press release.

Khondkar Ibrahim Khaled, Managing Director of the bank, distributed certificates among trained officers at the closing ceremony of the course.

In a speech he said every official must have knowledge of computer operation to make customer service better and speedy.

He also said that all branches of Pubali Bank Limited would be computerised by 2002.

Among others, Engineer NN Haider, General Manager Human Resource Division, and MA Jalil, Deputy General Manager and Principal of the Institute, also spoke on the occasion.

Fighting crimes, curbing graft key to development

Khosru talks to The Daily Star on BDF experience

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Apart from other necessary reform measures, Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury sees addressing law and order issue and curbing corruption are the key areas which can do magic for the country's development.

"We have inherited a very bad law and order situation that has put a negative impact on the business and investment. If the trend of crime and corruption cannot be checked there is no point in bringing even substantial amount of foreign aid," the commerce minister said.

Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, who returned home yesterday morning after attending the three-day donors club meeting in Paris, was talking with The Daily Star on the different aspects of the Paris meet and the government's priority issues to bring the economy on track.

The law and order situation, corruption and governance dominated the Paris meet, where the



Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury donors talked for good governance and early implementation of promised reforms.

The minister said the government has already taken many steps to improve the law and order situation. "I am not saying we have solved the problem. We cannot change the situation overnight. It will

take time, but we are on the right track to address the issue."

The commerce minister said the meeting with the country's development partners was "very fruitful" as they reached to a consensus on core issues of reforms.

"It was a very interactive meeting. We are happy about the outcome. There was no difference between us and our development partners," Khosru said.

But the minister did not rule out the possibility of any sort of difference with the donors in the future while implementing reforms. "Still I think there will not be any problem in solving those differences."

He also said in a democratic setup the government has to go through a discussion process on reform issues in different forums, before implementing those.

"We have to carry out reforms for our own good. And whatever the reform measures the donors are asking for is basically our (government's) agenda and we initiated those during our last tenure,"

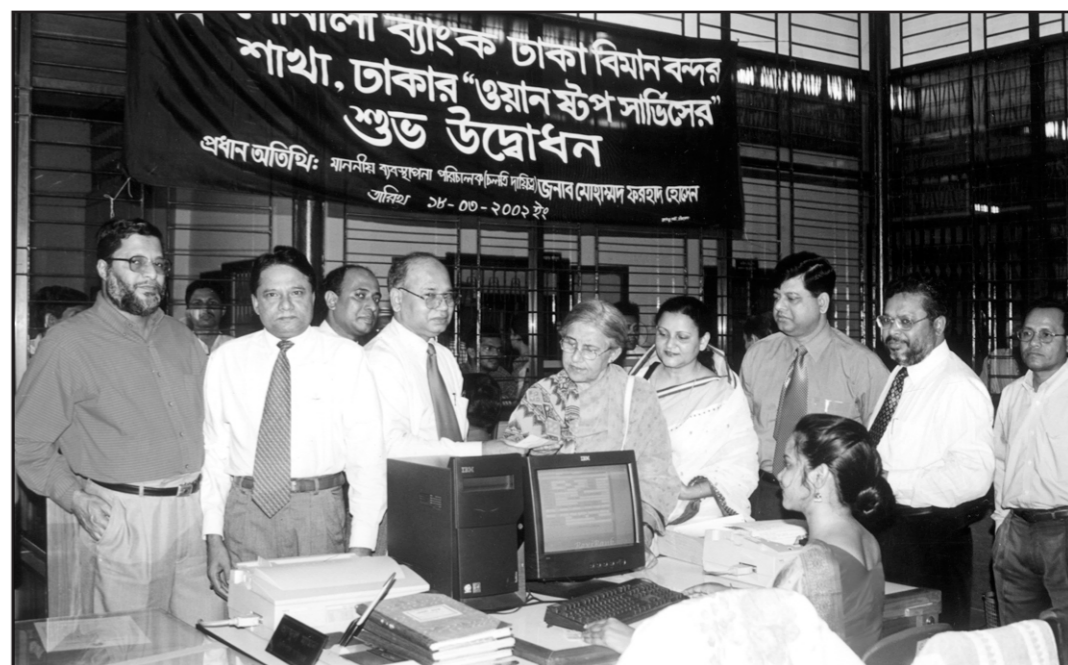
Khosru said.

"Most of the reforms measures taken in the early 1990s were stalled. And the immediate past government had gone for piecemeal approach of reform. But we will go for all-out reform as we believe this is the remedy of many of our malaise," he added.

He said the government has already taken up massive plan to privatise the state-owned enterprises (SOEs). "We are also mulling over the idea of setting up IT (Information Technology) village in the premises of some of the loss making SOEs by closing those."

Turning to the country's overall business climate, the minister said the government is taking measures by reducing port charges, slashing bank interest rate and other initiatives to give the country's business an 'extra edge'.

"Our aim is to reduce the business cost at least by 15 per cent so that our companies can compete internationally," he added.



Mohammad Farhad Hossain, acting Managing Director of Sonali Bank, and Sarifa Khatun, Chief Psychologist of Public Service Commission, jointly inaugurate the bank's 4th One Stop Service at its Old Airport Branch yesterday.

Workshop calls for uniform public procurement system

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

A uniform public procurement system should be introduced for all public procurement agencies to curb graft as well as to eliminate ambiguity in the process, a workshop in the city observed yesterday.

Discussions and participants in the workshop on "Public Procurement" also stressed the need for constitution of a separate body for overseeing lapses in the public procurement process.

Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) organised the seminar in cooperation with Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE), an affiliate of the US Chamber of Commerce. International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), Bangladesh chapter President Mahbubur Rahman chaired the seminar where AN Wahid, former economic minister in Bangladesh Embassy in Beijing, presented the keynote paper.

Among others, DCCI President Matir Rahman, Director of Department of Supply and Inspection (DSI) SMA Gofran Gazi and Chief Executive Officer of Energypac Power Generation Ltd Humayun Rashid also spoke in the seminar.

In his presentation, AN Wahid said presently public procurement activities in many cases are dotted

with corrupt practices like high pricing for low quality goods. Besides, the activities of hoodlums and extortionists have been driving away the law-abiding and competent businessmen to participate in the procurement process, he added.

Their keynote paper says at least five sets of procurement procedures are being used by the agencies concerned. AN Wahid specifically mentioned out of 14 big organisations, five including Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) do not have even procurement manual. In 2000-2001, Tk 1008.16 crore was allocated for the BPDB for its development expenditure. The BPDB was among the top three organisations in terms of getting development allocation in the year.

ICC, Bangladesh President Mahbubur Rahman said in different international forums, Bangladesh is mentioned as one of the countries, where bribery and corruption are quite widespread in the case of procurement. There should be guidelines to stop bribery and corruption in the procurement process, he observed.

DSI Director Gofran Gazi said public procurement involves not only public money but also involves public interest. "There should be a uniform guideline for all procurement agencies," he said.

Energypac CEO Humayun Rashid alleged most of the organi-

sations in the country's power sector do not have definite guideline for procurement. He alleged in some cases authorities even do not verify the supporting documents provided by companies during procurement.

Regarding delays in procurement process speakers observed specific guideline should ensure both supply and payment is done within the timeframe. They also said delay in the procurement process increases the scope for corruption.

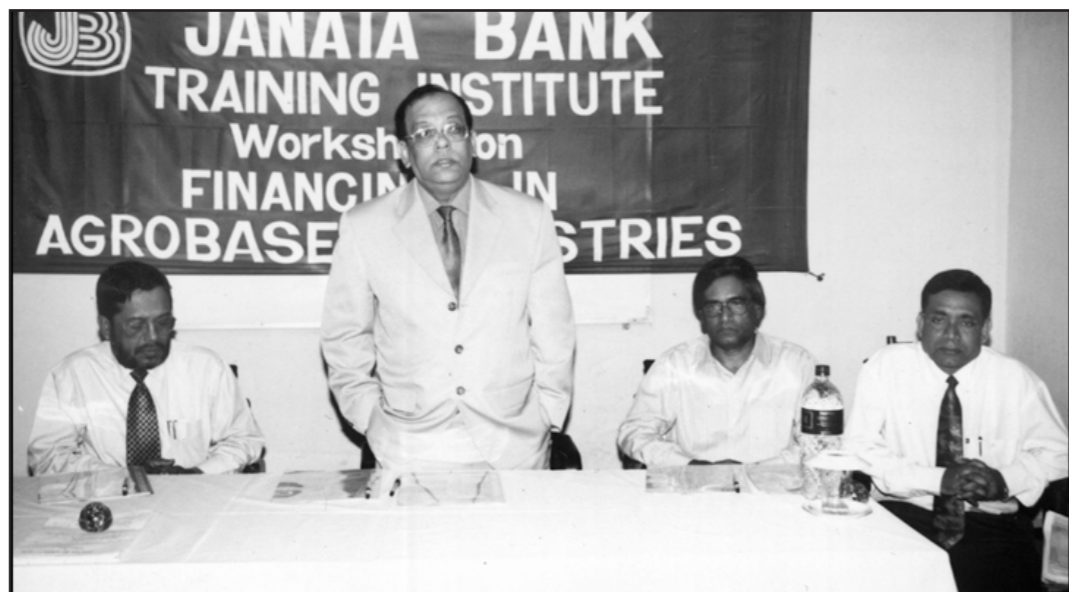
During an open discussion session, A Rauf Chowdhury, a director of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), said due to delay in procurement process a huge quantity of foreign aid cannot be utilised in the country.

Referring to a survey on 148 cases of procurement in 1997-98, the keynote paper said delays occurred in all cases.

Former DCCI president MH Rahman said public procurement system should be transparent, especially in the case of awarding work.

Aminul Haq, a senior procurement specialist working with the World Bank, observed people who actually prepare the specifications should conduct tender evaluation.

Earlier the DCCI president said the seminar will formulate recommendations for the government to make the public procurement system transparent.



Murshid Kuli Khan, Managing Director of Janata Bank, speaks at the inaugural ceremony of a training programme on agro-based lending at Comilla Training Institute recently.

Japanese expert suggests steps to boost RMG sector

BSS, Dhaka

Some specific suggestions were put forward to a number of garment and backward linkage industries by a Japanese expert to make a further breakthrough of the sector in the world apparel market.

Yutaka Yoshioka, an apparel expert, made the suggestions after a 16-day visit to some leading backward linkage industries in garments sector in and around the city.

The Dhaka office of Japan External Trade Organisation (JETRO) organised the visit of Yoshioka, also a dyeing, printing and finishing specialist, for further promotion of garments as well as the backward linkage industries through identifying problems and recommending appropriate measures for their solutions.

Talking to BSS Monday Yoshioka said during his visits to the production units of the mills he laid importance on human resources development, especially in the backwards linkage industries to achieve optimum results.

"Bangladesh garments sector is already in the international level. Now it needs further improvement in

backward linkage side to have a complete quality products to survive in the current challenges of globalisation," he said.

The expert also suggested the owners, employees and workers to keep clean the surroundings, work places and machinery to protect the products from soiling and smearing with spot. It is vital to manufacture products keeping in mind the demand of quality conscious customers, he added.

He said if there were good machines and good materials, good products will automatically come out. But in linkage industries, he said, people behind the machine must be skilled and have confidence to produce better things.

Yoshioka who has a vast experience of long 50 years in this field said during the visits he found some common problem of the mills along with some individual problems.

The expert said he was happy to see that some industries considering the environmental aspect have prevented emitting of black smoke and treated waste water. Though it needs huge involvement, they are doing this giving importance to environment.

Yoshioka, a widely traveled man

to many countries of middle and south America and southeast Asia, said chemical mixing in linkage industries is a very complex job. One can make an excellent colour but its sustenance for a long time is very difficult. Skill of the workers must be elevated, he suggested.

For this, he said, one needs firm attitude as well as maintenance of company's regular data. Formula given by a Japanese expert cannot always bring any good results as weather condition different from one country to another, he said.

JETRO representative in Bangladesh Daisuke Arai, who oversaw the activities of the expert, said his organisation had been inviting experts in different fields to develop the quality of products and upgrade the skill of the workers and employees. This visit, he hoped, would help Bangladeshi entrepreneurs improve quality of their products.

He assured that JETRO would continue to arrange such visits in response to the call for technical and marketing help by Bangladeshi industrialists and business leaders. He said Yoshioka will also make a follow up visit to Bangladesh in near future.

Bangladesh heads WTO's regional commission

Bangladesh has been elected Chairman of the South Asia Commission of WTO for the 2000-2003 period, says a press release.

The election was held at a meeting in Madrid, Spain recently. Bangladesh Ambassador Shahed Akhtar chaired the meeting of the WTO Commission for South Asia and Joint Meeting of the WTO Commissions for South Asia and East Asia & the Pacific.

The meeting mainly discussed global and regional market trend; WTO's study of the impact of the September 11 attacks on the US on South Asian tourism industry; education and training for tourism.

The Bangladesh Ambassador who is also the Permanent Representative to the WTO led the Bangladesh delegation at the meeting.

He also suggested that the Cox's Bazar be linked with the golden beach triangle of Maldives, Sri Lanka and Kerala and sought financial and technical supports from the WTO.

He commended the WTO for preparing a CD-Rom on South Asia, which will provide all tourist information on Bangladesh and other South Asian countries.

Thai think-tank sees modest 2002 recovery

REUTERS, Bangkok

Thailand's troubled economy expanded faster than expected in the last quarter of 2001 despite a painful global slowdown but will only grow two to three per cent this year, Thailand's state economic think tank said Monday.

The National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB), which compiles official gross domestic product (GDP) figures, said the economy grew 1.8 per cent last year, above the previous forecast of 1.5 per cent.

The NESDB's prediction of 2002 growth was well below the government forecast of 3.4 per cent.

Most market forecasts also expect stronger growth this year. Merrill Lynch recently raised its prediction to three per cent from two per cent, while Citibank lifted its forecast to 3.6 per cent from 2.5 per cent.

The NESDB said it expected exports to rise 2.3 per cent in 2002 after a 6.9 per cent drop in 2001. Imports were forecast to grow 4.6 per cent after falling 2.8 per cent last year.

The think tank's trade forecasts were more bullish than those of the government, which despite predicting higher GDP growth expected exports to drop 1.5 per cent and imports off 1.3 per cent.

Different currency exchange rates are one reason for the discrepancy. The government says a stable level for the baht this year is 43.5 to the dollar, while the NESDB said its forecasts were based on an average baht rate of 44.5. The baht has gained strongly against the dollar this year and was trading at around 43.30 per dollar on Monday morning.

The think tank said expansion this year would be supported by stronger exports due to an anticipated rebound in the US economy.

Khosru seeks free market access to China

UNB, Dhaka

Renewing Bangladesh's keen interest to raise its export volume to China, Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury has

sought cooperation of China for tax and quota-free access of Bangladesh goods to its market.

He made the call when a six-member team of Chinese Association for International

Friendly Contact, led by its deputy secretary Wang Gouxian, met him at his office here yesterday.

The minister said China was one of the development partners of Bangladesh and the relation between the two countries continued to widen.

There is a provision in the WTO rules to give a least developed country tax and quota-free access to other countries under bilateral trade, he said adding Bangladesh expected such advantage from China as Bangladesh was already enjoying such facilities from most EU countries.

Wang Gouxian assured the minister that positive steps would be taken so that Bangladesh could increase its export volume to China. "Bangladesh has potentials to export quality goods at competitive prices," he said.

Commerce Secretary Sohel Ahmed and secretary of Bangladesh-China Friendship Association MA Shikder were present at the meeting.



Shahed Akhtar (right), Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the WTO, speaks at a regional WTO commission meeting held in Madrid recently. Francesco Frangialli, Secretary General of the WTO, is also seen in the picture.

SIA, STB launch drive to woo more South Asian tourists

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Singapore Airlines (SIA) and Singapore Tourism Board (STB) have taken up an extensive drive to woo more tourists from the south Asian region to Singapore.

The measures to attract more travellers were announced at a seminar on SIA and STB product update yesterday in the city while introducing new services to local travel agents.

Under the drive, SIA has recently started providing its passengers with sponsorship letters to facilitate the processing of visas to visit Singapore.

This is in response to a recent requirement set by Singapore Embassy for Bangladeshis under

which tourists are to provide sponsorship letters from an individual or company based in Singapore with visa applications, said an official at the seminar.

"Last year around 42 thousand Bangladeshi tourists excluding the labourers visited Singapore and we want to attract more tourists from this part of the world," said Joseph Chai, General Manager-Bangladesh of Singapore Airlines.

Referring to Silk Air's flight operation from Chittagong to Singapore beginning March 31, Chai said the service is the recognition of importance of Bangladesh to SIA.

Silk Air is the regional carrier of SIA.

"Despite the impact of the September 11 attacks on world

tourism, over 7.5 million tourists visited the island state last year and the STB expects the figure will go up this year with significant rise of Bangladeshi tourists," he said.

"SIA's attractive packages including Experience Singapore, Singapore Medical Package, Singapore Stopover Holiday and Singapore Stopover Splendour receive great response from travellers," Yameen Kabir, Sales Manager-Bangladesh of SIA, said.

Nasrin Sultana, Customer Services Officer-Bangladesh of SIA, Chee Pey, Director-South Asia of STB, and Sonali Choturangi, Marketing Executive of STB in India, also spoke at the seminar.