

Price hike 'normal phenomenon'

Essentials' market to come down in due course, says khosru

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The government sees the current price hike of essentials as a normal phenomenon that happens each year around this time and hopes it will come down if weather permits.

"It's a normal trend that price of essentials go up every year this time due to flood-like situation and continuous rain that disrupt communications and normal supply chain. The prices would come down after the weather becoming normal," Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury said.

The commerce minister was speaking at a meeting on 'Challenges of Export Trade and Price Situation' organised by Economic Reporters' Forum (ERF) at the National Press Club in the city yesterday.

Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury said the government is having a constant watch on the price situation and would intervene only when there is a crisis.

Talking on the rice price increase, the minister said, "In order to protect the interest of the farmers, we don't want to allow rice import as there is no supply constraint," he noted.

"If we allow rice import and there is an over-supply, farmers will not get proper price. It will have a negative impact on our agriculture discouraging the farmers," Khosru Chowdhury said.

He also said the government will start 'Food-for-Work' programme within a week, which

would help stabilise the market.

Referring to around 25 per cent hike in soybean oil price in the local market, the minister attributed the it to the recent increase in international price of the commodity that soared by about 30 per due to lower production.

Turning to the losses of the state-owned enterprises, the minister said the closing down of Adamjee Jute Mills is a clear message for other SOEs that what may happen to them.

Commenting on challenges of export trade, the minister said successive governments have

been planning for export diversification for long but it has not been implemented so far.

"We are pushing a number of things that include adding some new products in the export basket, exploring new markets, allowing cargo aircraft in private sector and restructuring Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) so that the country's export sector can do well," he said.

"We have to address each export items separately and improve efficiency and productivity apart from reducing the production cost," he went on. "If the private sector entrepreneurs seek permis-

sion for operating cargo aircraft we would have prompt decision for it."

He also said with the completion of the first phase of the planned IT Village at the BSRB Bhaban within two months the country's Information Technology and Communication (ICT) sector would be in a much better position.

Focussing on other potential sectors, he said the government wants to extend support to light engineering sector, which has so far been neglected.

Referring to the bicycle exports, he hoped it would record 100 per cent growth this fiscal.

Dhaka seeks quota-free markets for LDC textiles

Bangladesh called for lifting quotas for export of textiles and clothing items from least developed countries (LDCs) to the developed nations, says a press release.

Speaking in the General Council of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Geneva on Wednesday, Bangladesh Ambassador at WTO Dr Toufiq Ali said the country have already utilised almost three quarters of the current quota year for cotton knit shirts, cotton and MMF skirts, and MMF trousers. For cotton trousers, the quota is almost exhausted. This will severely hurt the country's exports, which registered a fall in 2001-2002 fiscal year.

It was agreed at the Doha WTO meeting that the issue of accelerated growth of quotas for LDCs and small suppliers be examined and that recommendations be made to the General Council of the WTO. Dr Ali said Bangladesh is deeply disappointed that it has not been possible to make recommendations due to opposition from the quota-imposing countries.

Jamuna Bank opens branch at Zindabazar

Jamuna Bank Limited has opened a new branch at Zindabazar in Sylhet, says a press release.

With this the total number of branch of the bank stands at 8.

Engr Mosharrif Hussain, chairman of the bank, inaugurated the branch on Wednesday.

Managing Director Solaiman Khan Majlish, Vice Chairman Mahmudul Houque, other directors of the bank business personalities, industrialists, professionals, elites, shop owners and employees of the bank attended the ceremony.

Facilitate LDC workers' access to rich nations

Bangladesh urges WTO

BSS, Dhaka

Bangladesh has urged the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to help liberalise the rigid policies of its rich members to facilitate unhindered movement of workers and professionals of least developed partners of the organisation.

In a recent communication, the Ministry of Commerce, under the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) of WTO has proposed for softening the immigration policy and qualifications and licensing requirements of those countries.

The ministry, through the country's Geneva Mission, has also proposed for ensuring wage parity and exempting the workers and professionals of least developed countries from paying social security taxes if corresponding benefits were not ensured, commerce ministry sources told BSS

Saturday.

Workers and professionals from LDCs face a range of strict eligibility conditions from the developed WTO members for getting visa, work permit and length of stay. Some countries impose quantitative limits on visas for foreign professionals.

The Bangladesh recommendations on GATS were prepared by one of the five Working Groups constituted with local experts in respective fields under the 18-member high profile National Advisory Committee on WTO, which is headed by the Minister for Commerce.

The working groups were formed to suggest negotiation strategies for Bangladesh on WTO issues. Three sets of other recommendations on Agriculture, Agreement on Textiles and Clothing (ATC) and Special and Differential Treatment (S and D) have already been communicated to the WTO.

The Bangladesh communication mentioned that besides the immigration related hurdles, the rich WTO members do not pay matching wage to the foreign professionals with that of their own citizens.

Most WTO members impose entry barriers in the form of Economics Needs Test (ENT) and Local Market Test to determine the need for entry as well as the number to be allowed to enter.

Some WTO members even do not recognise the certificate and degrees of all the institutions the LDC professionals received in their home countries. They ask for additional licensing requirements to further restrict the movement of the people from LDCs.

The communication also mentioned that the professionals from the LDCs are being subjected to pay social security contributions in the host country even though they are not eligible to get benefits from such payments.



PHOTO: JAMUNA BANK

Engr Mosharrif Hussain, chairman of Jamuna Bank Limited, cuts tape to inaugurate the 8th branch of the bank at Zindabazar in Sylhet on Wednesday. Vice Chairman Mahmudul Houque, other directors and Managing Director of the bank Solaiman Khan were also present on the occasion.

Emirates flights to Mauritius from Sept 1

Emirates will start its flights to Mauritius from September 1, 2002, says a press release.

Announcing the new service at a press conference at Hilton Hotel in Mauritius on Wednesday, Nasser Bin Kherbash, Emirates general manager for Middle East and Africa, said, "Mauritius is renowned throughout the world as the jewel of the Indian Ocean, an ideal holiday destination, with a high standard of service."

The non-stop flights straight down to the island, off the south-eastern coast of Africa, will be operated with an Airbus A330-200 aircraft in a two-cabin configuration, with 34 Business and 251 Economy Class seats.

CURRENCY

Following is yesterday's forex trading statement by Standard Chartered Bank.

Sell	Currency		Buy		
	BC	Currency	TT Clean	OD Sight Doc	OD Transfer
58.5500	58.5800	USD	57.8050	57.6364	57.5679
58.6212	58.7081	EUR	56.3672	56.1838	56.1072
92.7460	92.7880	GBP	90.0256	89.7591	89.7045
32.3518	32.3764	AUD	30.3981	30.3057	30.2256
0.4955	0.4957	JPY	0.4820	0.4818	0.4808
40.1433	40.1678	CHF	39.0209	38.9263	38.8418
6.1576	6.1628	SEK	5.9704	5.9528	5.9368
37.1245	37.1490	CAD	36.2545	36.1609	36.0777
7.5143	7.5156	HKD	7.4068	7.3891	7.3717
33.599	33.6203	SGD	32.8812	32.8374	32.7228
16.0710	16.0886	AED	15.6019	15.5800	15.5615
15.7369	15.7553	SAR	15.2973	15.2606	15.2424

Exchange rates of some currencies against US dollar

Indian rupee	Pak rupee	Lankan rupee	Thai baht	Nor kroner	NZ dollar	AUD
48.63	59.525	96.15	42.055	7.6605	0.464	0.5390

The local interbank foreign exchange market was subdued on Saturday. Demand for dollar was steady. Demand for BDT for overnight borrowing at call was steady and the call money rate ranged between 3.5 and 3.75 per cent for the day.

STOCK