

Export facilities won't work unless law & order improves

Experts, entrepreneurs in light engineering sector tell commerce minister

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Cash incentive or reduced bank rates will not be much helpful for exporters unless the government takes measures to stop illegal toll collection and improve the law and order situation.

The experts and entrepreneurs in the light engineering sector made the observation yesterday at a seminar where the commerce minister was present as chief guest.

They also alleged the businessmen are also harassed by officials of different government agencies like police and customs who frequently visit business houses and ask for different documents like income tax certificates, workers registrar only to

harass the entrepreneurs. The seminar on 'Light Engineering Industries: A Potential Sector in Bangladesh' was organised by Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) at its conference room in the city.

Earlier, speaking at the seminar Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury said the government is providing 15 per cent cash incentive to the exporters in the light engineering sector. "Besides, export-oriented industries are getting loans at seven per cent interest rate."

The government will arrange technical assistance for the entrepreneurs so that they can compete in the global market, he said urging

the entrepreneurs to go for business expansion and product development so that they can export their items to other countries.

Dr Md Kamal Uddin, associate professor of the Institute of Appropriate Technology of BUET, and Saleh Ahmed, deputy general manager of Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC), presented two key papers at the seminar presided over by EPB Vice Chairman Abu Saleh. Entrepreneurs from Dhaka, Chittagong, Bogra, Natore and other districts participated in the seminar.

Dr Kamal Uddin blamed the present tariff structure as one of the main causes for increased smug-

gling, which is hitting the local industries hard.

"The government should formulate a tariff policy that would discourage smuggling and protect local industries. Only police and Bangladesh Rifles would not be able to check smuggling," he said.

"If import duty on an item in a country is lower, the product would be smuggled into neighbouring country. On the other hand, the opposite will happen if the duty of another item is higher," he said, adding that many countries have been able to check smuggling through appropriate tariff policy.

Saleh Ahmed of BSCIC said the government should go for drastic

measures against extortionists. "My experience with the entrepreneurs is that the main problem they are facing is extortion. Even police and customs officials go to the industries to collect money through different types of harassment," he elaborated.

Abul Hashim, president of Bangladesh Engineering Industries Owners Association (BEIOA), said the present law and order situation discourages the entrepreneurs to go for business expansion.

Md Abu Hossen Khokon, general secretary of BEIOA, narrated his experience. He said a group of policemen came to his factory a few weeks back and harassed factory workers.

Greece willing to hire more Bangladeshi seamen

Law demanded for punishing seafarers fleeing without permission

RAFIQ HASAN

Greek ship-owners have expressed desire to recruit Bangladesh seamen, provided Bangladesh enacts a law that would ensure punishment to seafarers leaving without prior information.

Terminating the existing Bangladesh Flag Vessel Protection Ordinance 1982 inadequate and backdated, they called for upgrading it through amendments in order to check mass exodus of seamen from foreign ships.

It was observed by a group of Greek ship-owners during a meeting with a Bangladeshi high official in Athens last week.

Secretary in charge of the Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and

Overseas Employment Dalil Uddin Mondal paid an official visit to Athens to explore possibility of manpower export. During the visit, he had a series of talks with the Greek government officials, ship-owners and other officials concerned.

During the meeting, the ship-owners said Bangladeshi seamen often flee foreign ships without prior notice creating problem.

They said there are more than 500 ocean-going ships in Greece, which mostly employ foreign seafarers. Bangladeshi workers could get employment in those ships in at least 24 categories, they said.

Talking to The Daily Star Tuesday, Mondal said the Greek authority has handed him a list of requirements, fulfillment of which

would facilitate employment of more Bangladeshi seamen through official channel.

Mondal said his ministry is preparing a draft law that would be sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Shipping for vetting.

Around two thousands seamen are being graduated from various universities and government training institutes every year. They include naval architects, marine engineers, nautical engineers and cabin crews.

A significant number of them remain unemployed for years as the existing 26 ocean-going ships registered in Bangladesh are very inadequate to employ all the graduates.

State Minister for Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment Mohammad Quamrul Islam also visited Greece in May this year. His visit helped overcome difficulties in sending remittance from Greece.

As a result of the recent visits the state minister and the secretary, Commercial Bank of Greece has agreed to co-operate with Bangladeshi banks in this regard.

According to government estimate, more than 10,000 Bangladeshis are now living in Greece illegally and above 8,000 have been legalised.

New country manager of Uzbekistan Airways

Alexander Mazilin has joined Uzbekistan Airways as country manager Bangladesh, says a press release. Joining Uzbekistan Airways in 1993 as expert in the airline's Commercial Department, Mazilin served as sales manager in London from 1995 to 1996. From 1996 to 2000, he served as commercial manager at Uzbekistan Airways Head Office.

Before taking up his present assignment Mazilin helped set up the Tokyo Station of the airline.

Earlier this year he visited Bangladesh twice as the member of a delegation to help resume the airline's flights.

Mazilin was also member of the delegation which held talks in Bangladesh for the launching of Uzbekistan Airways services in Bangladesh in 1998.

Prime Bank-IBCF meeting held

Prime Bank Ltd held a meeting with Islamic Banks Consultative Forum (IBCF) to exchange views on the development of Islamic banking operation and expansion of Islamic banking activities in the country on Tuesday, says a press release.

Shah Abdul Hannan, Chairman of IBCF and Islami Bank Bangladesh Ltd., (IBBL), Quazi Sirajul Islam MP, chairman of the board of directors of Prime Bank Limited, Shah Md Nurul Alam, managing director, and M Shahjahan Bhuiyan, additional managing director, Md Rafiqul Islam, EVP and branch in-charge of Prime Bank Limited Islami Banking Branch, Dilkusha, Dhaka, Md Habibur Rahman Bhuiyan, FCA, senior vice president of IBBL and Md Shouqat Ali, Secretary of IBCF and IBBL, were present in the meeting held at the head office of Prime Bank Ltd.

It is worth mentioning that Prime Bank Limited has two Islami banking branches at Dilkusha, Dhaka and Amberkhana, Sylhet which are operating based on Islamic Shariah principles.

Inscope to open Bangladesh pavilion in Dubai festival

The government has officially appointed UAE based private company Inscope Middleast to open and organise the Bangladesh pavilion in Dubai festival, one of the largest fairs of the world, to be held from January 15 to February 15 next year.

This is for the first time the government has officially committed to facilitating the private sector to organise the fair as Bangladeshi entrepreneurs could immensely benefit from participating in the Dubai fair.

Rehan B Khwaja, general manager of Inscope Middleast, who is now in Dhaka to contact the participants of the fair told BSS that "We are expecting more participants from Bangladesh this year due to the government's interest to make

Sugar production target fixed at 2.25 lakh MT

Sugarcane crushing for 2002-2003 season is going to commence from October 18 with a production target of 2 lakh 25 thousand metric tons of sugar, says a press release.

Sugar production in all the 15 sugar mills under Bangladesh Sugar and Food Industries Corporation (BSFIC), will start in phases within November 15.



Commerce Minister Amir Khosru M Chowdhury inaugurated Khatunganj branch of Bank Asia on Tuesday in Chittagong. Bank's Chairman M Syeduzzaman, Directors Md Shafiquddin Chowdhury, Mohd. Safwan Choudhury and Jahir Uddin and Managing Director Syed Anisul Huq are also seen in the picture.

Bank Asia opens Khatunganj branch in Ctg

The 12th branch of Bank Asia was inaugurated on Tuesday at Khatunganj in Chittagong, says a press release.

Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, minister for commerce, inaugurated the branch as chief guest.

M Syeduzzaman, chairman of the bank, presided over the function.

Managing Director Syed Anisul Huq, Directors Md. Shafiquddin Chowdhury, Mohd. Safwan Choudhury, Anwar Hussain and Jahir Uddin, were present on the occasion.

With the opening of Khatunganj branch, the number of outlets of Bank Asia in the port city rose to three.

The total number of branches of the bank now stands at 12 including two rural branches at Malkhanagar in Munshigonj and Tarail in Kishoregonj.

Goldsmith opens at Uttara

A gold jewellery manufacturing and selling house, Goldsmith Bangladesh, started its journey at Mascot Plaza in Uttara area of the city Friday, says a press release.

The house of Goldsmith Bangladesh was inaugurated by Managing Director of Arab-Bangladesh Bank Ltd Abu Hanif Khan.

Meanwhile, Goldsmith has developed an international standard workshop for manufacturing jewellery items.

Sheltech, DBH sign MOU

Sheltech (Pvt.) Ltd, one of the leading developers in the country, signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Delta Brac Housing Finance Corporation Ltd. (DBH) in the city on Tuesday, says a press release.

Under the arrangement, the clients of Sheltech Ltd. will receive faster and superior customer service from DBH in getting up to 70 per cent housing loans of their apartment prices.

Shariful Ala, managing director of DBH, and Toufiq M Seraj, managing director of Sheltech Ltd, signed the MOU on behalf of their respective organisations.

DBH, a leading housing finance institution in the private sector of the country, has already registered commendable growth in business by sanctioning loans to more than 6000 clients since it commenced operation.

Ishtiaq H Chowdhury, head of operations, Syed Zubayer Ahmed, head of finance and accounts, and other officials from DBH were present in the signing ceremony where Sharif Khan, deputy manager, Shukriat Mukherjee and other executives represented Sheltech Ltd.

Vendor award ceremony of AMC held

The Associated Merchandising Corporation (AMC), Bangladesh organised a vendor award ceremony at its office in the city recently, says a press release.

Richard Kuzmich, president of AMC presented the best vendor award to KDS Garments and Daeyu Bangladesh for the year 2001.

Khalilur Rahman, chairman of KDS Garments, and J R Lee, managing director of Daeyu and Iqbal Ahmed, managing director of AMC, were also present at the ceremony.

Focus on eco-friendly characteristic can promote jute, says minister

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Jute Minister Hafiz Uddin Ahmad yesterday said jute lost its glory, as no steps had been taken to propagate the eco-friendly characteristic of the golden fibre.

He said such campaign could have helped in getting access to developed markets.

The minister also said jute sector gets a renewed hope following the outcome of the recently concluded earth summit on sustainable development.

The minister was speaking at the inaugural session of two-day 'Investors' Forum on Pulp and Paper from Jute/Kenaf 2002', jointly organised by Ministry of Jute, French government, Common Fund for Commodities (CFC), Delegation of the European Commission in Bangladesh (EC), and International Jute Study Group (IJSJG). The inaugural session was held at the conference room of the IJSJG headquarters in the city.

Jute Secretary AFM Sarwar Kamal, IJSJG Secretary General T Nanda Kumar, Anne Marchal, second secretary of the Delegation of the European Commission in Bangladesh, and First Councillor and Deputy Head of France Embassy Fabienne Drout Lozinkni were also present on the occasion.

The jute minister also put accent on diversifying jute products for increasing exports. "Jute is the golden fibre of Bangladesh providing living to millions of farmers,

industrial workers and traders. But the sector has been facing stiff competition for several years from synthetic substitute that is relatively cheaper and easier to handle."

The minister said scientists recently found that there is enormous scope for producing pulp and paper on a large scale by using jute as raw material.

He said a World Bank report revealed that pulp and paper industry is one of the five highest polluting industries in the world as the industry normally uses chemical and mechanical methods. "So it is a good news for the jute producing countries."

Speaking on the occasion, Jute Secretary AFM Sarwar Kamal said the government has set up Jute Diversification Promotion Centre (JDPC) with the support from European Commission to provide the necessary administrative framework for commercialisation of new technologies.

IJSJG Secretary General T Nanda Kumar said the forum has been organised to provide opportunity to the entrepreneurs in jute and other related industries and also to provide a platform for entrepreneurs, scientists and investors to work together.

First Councillor and Deputy Head

of French Embassy Fabienne Drout Lozinkni stressed the need for product diversification to help Bangladeshi farmers to earn more.

Anne Marchal, second secretary of the Delegation of the European Commission in Bangladesh, said the forum would help in providing good opportunity for transforming the scientific conclusions into a real life business proposition.

Scientists from Bangladesh, Finland, France, India, Norway, Thailand and the US and entrepreneurs from Bangladesh and India are participating in the forum.



Q M Shariful Ala, managing director of DBH (3rd from right), and Toufiq M Seraj, managing director of Sheltech Ltd (3rd from left), exchange the documents of an MOU signed between their organisations in the city on Tuesday. Also seen in the picture are Ishtiaq H Chowdhury (2nd from right), head of operations of DBH, Syed Zubayer Ahmed (extreme right), head of finance and accounts of DBH, and Sharif Kahn (2nd from left), deputy manager of Sheltech Ltd.

Global policy effort needed to cut rich-poor telecom gap

ABU SAEED KHAN

International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Secretary General Yoshio Utsumi told around 1,000 telecommunication leaders, who gathered in Morocco on Sunday, a concerted global policy effort is needed to eliminate the gap between the rich and the poor when it comes to the access to information.

He noted when telecom capacity grew by 200 times between 1995 and 2000, 1.50 million villages in the world still lack a basic telephone connections and these villages could be connected for less than the price paid for a third-generation mobile licence in one of the developed countries that is already well-served.

The ITU Secretary General was speaking at the 16th Plenipotentiary Conference of the International Telecommunication Union in Marrakech, Morocco. Prime Minister of Morocco Abderrahmane El Youssefi formally opened the conference.

Raising the necessary capital to connect these villages will require

innovative strategies but the telecommunication leaders were challenged to make bold suggestions for a global policy during their four-week conference that will provide connectivity to every village on the globe by the time of the World Summit on the Information Society.

This conference is being held at a time of unprecedented change within the telecommunication industry.

In dramatic contrast to the buoyant climate four years ago when it last convened, telecommunication manufacturers, operators, software developers and service providers must deal with harsh new realities governing a sector that has undergone a rapid and profound transformation.

In his inaugural address, the Moroccan Prime Minister urged the delegates particularly those from the developed world who have an interest in the stability and economic development of African countries to rush to help them to integrate into the new economic environment where telecommunication and information are two main pillars.

Moroccan Secretary of State for Posts, Telecommunication and Information Technologies Nasr Hajji called on the ITU to expand its activities with a common view to developing public and private partnerships.

He cited the example of Morocco, where telecommunication market liberalisation, based on a controlled regulatory framework, has led to extraordinary results.

The number of mobile phones in Morocco has increased from 150,000 in 1999 to more than 6 million now. Morocco has achieved this by taking full advantage of the convergence of information technologies. "Our E-Morocco strategy is to focus on a global and integrated approach in the field of information and communication technologies," he said.

While humanity's basic needs have long been food, clothing and shelter, the time has come to add information to the list, stated Utsumi.

"Communications, whether it is information technology, Internet protocol (IP) based, mobile or fixed, is at the crux of the current evolution

of the global society."

In the year 2000 alone, the telecommunication industry invested more than US\$ 200 billion worldwide, but the financial and social dividends have been far from optimal, because we were 'super-serving' the rich few, and failing to provide basic services to the many, said the Moroccan minister.

In the new information society, where information is key to economic, social and cultural development, Utsumi told delegates from ITU's 189 member states.

ITU is a worldwide organisation which brings governments and industry together to co-ordinate the establishment and operation of global telecommunication networks and services.

More than 1200 delegates are expected to attend this conference in Morocco, which will end on October 18.

A four-member delegate comprising secretary of the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications and chairman of Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board are attending this quadrennial global telecom summit.