

## BTMC closes down 4 units, 3 more in pipeline

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

In the recent spate of closing down state-owned enterprises (SoEs), the Bangladesh Textile Mills Corporation (BTMC) has shut down a number of its units and the days of at least three other enterprises are numbered.

At least four out of 15 mills under the BTMC were closed for good two weeks ago reportedly for 'want of running capital and staggering losses' and most of the rest, still functioning with a very poor production, are heading towards closure, a top BTMC official said.

Kurigram Textile Mills in Kurigram, Tangail Cotton Mills in Tangail, Kaderia Textile Mills at Tangai and Orient Textile Mills at Keriniganj, which had remained closed since July this year, were shut down completely, official sources said.

Sources also told The Daily Star Rajshahi Textile Mills, Dinajpur

Textile Mills and Rangamati Textile Mills will also be closed within a month or two.

But the BTMC authorities failed to bid farewell to the staff of the closed down mills for fund crisis that coerced the CBA (collective bargaining agent) leaders of these SoEs to campaign for movement to realise their arrears. The staff salaries for four to eight months have been unpaid.

"Roughly about Tk 26 crore is needed to pay off several thousand staff of these four mills...but we have no money and the Ministry of Finance rejected many of our appeals saying that the government cannot subsidise those mills any more," a top BTMC official said requesting anonymity.

At Rajshahi Textile Mills, the staff are not getting salaries for four months, at Kaderia Textile Mills for six months, at Rangamati Textile Mills and Sylhet Textile Mills for seven months, and at Orient Textile Mills of Keraniganj, Tangail Cotton

Mill and Kurigram Textile Mills for eight months.

Meanwhile, more than half of the total staff of the BTMC mills applied for golden handshake six months ago. But the BTMC authorities could not bid them farewell for want of money, said a senior BTMC official.

The source also said the total closure of the continuously loss-making mills of the BTMC would cost the government an estimated Tk 96 crore.

Sources in the BTMC also said trade unionism and unnecessary expenditure for years together coupled with mismanagement and corruption by the mill officials are responsible for the mills' present situation.

At least 6,639 officers, workers and employees of the 15 SoEs including Rajshahi Textiles Mills under the BTMC threatened the government to wage movement for realising their arrears before the upcoming Eid-ul-Fitr.



With Eid-ul-Fitr round the corner, a good number of handloom product fairs have sprung up in the city. Clothes especially sarees of different design, colour and texture are on sale in these fairs. Salespeople offer this Mirpur Katan saree at Tk 65,000 at a Karwan Bazar handloom product fair.

## Airlines brace for higher charges at UK airports

AFP, London

Airlines already grappling with a slide in passenger numbers face increased airport fees in Britain, notably a jump of 16 per cent next year at London Heathrow, under proposals published by regulators Friday.

The plans, unveiled by the Civil Aviation Authority, would result in real increases in the maximum allowed charges to airlines from 5.60 pounds (8.7 euros, dollars) per passenger in 2001/02 to 6.48 pounds in 2003/04 starting in April.

The allowed maximum charges would then rise by 6.5 per cent each year plus inflation, resulting in a real increase of 2.10 pounds or 38 per cent by 2008.

The main objectives of the proposals are to boost investment in airports owned by British group BAA, particularly at Heathrow, and to provide improved services for airport users, the CAA said.

"Airport charges make up a relatively small per centage of airline costs, and airport users should benefit from improved facilities and services," it said in a statement.

But the increased charges would push costs up at a difficult time for airlines, especially US carriers, struggling to ride out the turbulence unleashed on the industry by the September 11, 2001 terrorist hijackings in the United States.

A spokeswoman for British Airways said the carrier had not yet prepared a response to the proposals or made a decision on whether the levies would mean passenger fares would rise.

"Essentially it's a fee that the airline pays and then chooses how to reflect that to passengers," she said.

The proposals will now be subject to consultation with the industry until January, with a decision expected by the CAA in February. The CAA's decision will be final.

## Japan, India plan to build 100-seater passenger plane

AFP, Bangalore

Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes Friday said New Delhi and Tokyo were mulling forming an Asian consortium to make a 100-seater passenger aircraft.

"This idea was mooted when I visited Japan this year," Fernandes told reporters in the southern Indian city of Bangalore which is India's technology and aviation hub.

He said the talks went further when Tokyo governor Shintaro Ishihara visited India last week.

"The Tokyo governor has also visited facilities in Bangalore and was impressed with the facilities," Fernandes said.

"We are keen on India and

Japan jointly producing a passenger aircraft. What I have also suggested is that the aircraft should not be confined to India and Japan, we should also ask other countries to be partners in it.

"It should be a consortium on the same lines like the Airbus Industrie," he said.

Fernandes said the issue was yet to be taken up by both the governments.

India and Russia are also to discuss the joint manufacture of passenger planes during next week's visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin to New Delhi, senior defence industry sources said Friday.

## Nandan Mega Shop opens in city tomorrow

Nandan Mega Shop, a superstore, will be opened at Gulshan in the city tomorrow.

Land Minister M Shamsul Islam will inaugurate the shop, financed by non-resident Bangladeshis, says a press release.

It will be a chain store with enormous parking space for up to 45 cars and all other state-of-the-art facilities, made as the supermarkets of western countries. Nandan Group has taken much more initiatives and plans to create several mega shops in other parts of the country by foreign investments.

Nandan Mega Shop will provide exclusive and convenient solution to all shopping needs to the customers. At Nandan, green vegetables, fruits, fresh meat and fish, milk and dairy products, seafood, groceries, frozen foods, bakery and confectioneries, beverages, cosmetics, fast food etc will be available.

It will also offer an attractive gift voucher for the customers for the first 15 days from its opening.

"Nandan Mega Shop" is a sister concern of Nandan Group which is also going to set up country's largest family amusement park, a project of Tk 20 crore at Savar near Dhaka, Nandan Park Ltd, a joint venture between Nicco Parks & Resorts Ltd India and Bangladesh entrepreneurs.

Nandan Park Ltd, spreaded over 20 acres, is expected to be opened by March 2003.

## Pakistan's forex reserves rise to \$8.951b

REUTERS, Karachi

Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves rose to \$8.951 billion in the week ending November 23, up \$238 million from the previous week's \$8.713 billion, the central bank said Thursday.

The State Bank of Pakistan gave no reason for the rise, but bankers said it was partly due to inflows from Pakistanis working abroad through official banking channels since a crackdown on money-laundering after September 11, 2001.

## Toyota hopes to start US banking services next yr

AFP, Tokyo

Japan's biggest car maker Toyota Motor Corp. said Friday it has applied for a US banking licence and hopes to offer services such as loans and credit cards as early as April.

"We have submitted a banking licence application to the US authorities, and we hope that we can obtain it in six to nine months," Toyota spokesman Hitoshi Nagashima said.

"We hope that we can begin financial services as early as April 2003," Nagashima said.

Toyota plans to offer products including loans on homes and lending to car dealers to finance showroom expansion, company officials said.

## US zero tariff plan positive contribution to WTO talks

AFP, Paris

WTO chief Supachai Panitchpakdi said Thursday a US plan to eliminate global tariffs on consumer and industrial goods was a "positive contribution" to jump-starting sluggish trade negotiations.

"We need ambitious proposals to get the round moving forward... and we need leadership. I welcome this initiative by the US government to help us push for more dynamic

momentum," Panitchpakdi told reporters after meeting with French President Jacques Chirac at the presidential Elysee palace.

The United States on Tuesday unveiled a bold plan to eliminate global tariffs on consumer and industrial goods by 2015, saying it would benefit developing countries as well as the US economy.

The plan is to be presented to the World Trade Organisation in Geneva next week.

WTO director-general Panitchpakdi said the US initiative "actually sets the kind of standard that we can aim at and it sets also the standard for other areas of negotiations to follow. I find this a positive contribution."

The 145-member WTO is due to conclude the so-called Doha round of global trade liberalisation negotiations, begun a year ago in the Qatari capital, by January 2005.

## Australia to champion poor in industrial tariff reform

AFP, Sydney

Australia pledged Thursday to champion the cause of developing countries in global trade deliberations over tariff reform for industrial goods.

A spokeswoman for Trade Minister Mark Vaile said Australia, which will submit its tariff reform proposal to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in February, favoured special treatment to protect developing nations.

"We will have an aggressive proposal in terms of developing nations, as we've done in agriculture, as we did in medicines. Developing nations will be important and we will continue to put

them forward," the spokeswoman said.

She refused to confirm a report that Australia's submission would call for industrialised countries to scrap tariffs on manufactured goods by 2010.

The Sydney Morning Herald newspaper cited unnamed government sources as saying the government would urge industrialised countries to reduce their tariffs to zero by 2010, five years earlier than a US plan unveiled this week.

"We haven't finished the consultations with industry and we need to go through that," Vaile's spokeswoman said.

US trade representative Robert Zoellick Wednesday announced a bold plan for global tariffs on con-

sumer and industrial goods to be cut in stages to zero by 2015.

The proposal would make six trillion dollars worth of annual trade in non-agricultural goods duty free and benefit both US industries and the world's poorest states, US officials said.

The plan, yet to be presented to the WTO, received a lukewarm response from the European Union and the WTO's top executive, who said it would hurt poor countries.

It calls for the cutting of all duties on manufactured goods worldwide to less than eight per cent by 2010, and to zero over the next five years.

Duties on goods now set at five per cent or less would be reduced to zero by 2010 under the US plan.

## S'pore, Bangkok, Jakarta tie up in cable network

AFP, Singapore

Singapore Telecommunications (SingTel) said Friday it has formed a consortium with the Communications Authority of Thailand (CAT) and PT Telekomunikasi Indonesia to build a cable network linking the three countries.

The three companies also signed a contract with cable manufacturer NEC Corp. to begin con-

struction of the Thailand-Indonesia-Singapore network.

The 1,000 kilometre (600 mile) cable network will land at Songkhla in Thailand, Batam in Indonesia and Changi in Singapore, SingTel said in a statement without giving a cost for the project.

There are only a few cable networks linking Indonesia and Thailand with the rest of Asia, and only two directly link Singapore with the two other countries.

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**Eggs**

"Eggs, eggs!" I watched with curiosity as a piddling boy, hardly ten, passed the street, his inventory of boiled eggs hanging from his neck, contained in a large, light tin bowl. Someone calls him from a way side shop. He walks in. "Do you keep local eggs?"

"Yes, local, farm and duck eggs. Which one do you want?" came back the matter of fact reply, "Each for four Taka, the local for five. And the price is fixed." The shop keeper mumbles about the price being high, then settles for a local egg, local being the deshi hen's egg, not of the chicken farms abounding around Bangladesh. He asks the peddler to break the chosen egg threatening if the egg is rotten or damaged, he will refuse to pay.

The boy well conversant with his art, breaks the egg perfectly, wraps it in a piece of a Post It size newspaper piece, asks, "any salt?" Of course yes. How can you eat an egg without salt? The shop keeper eats the egg gingerly savoring and relishing each morsel, as if it was the most mouth watering thing to eat at that instant in time. Talk about satisfaction. The shop keeper even asks the boy to come back again tomorrow!

Today's customers are as fickle as the shopkeeper. Tastes have become different. I couldn't eat a duck's egg - and now it is sold as an option. The art of packaging and adding on the extra bit is part of today's marketing mix. Marketing is all about satisfying customer needs. Marketing is just not selling. It is more than that, a lot more.

At that odd hour, the egg suddenly was the most palatable thing to have. I was struck with wonder - normally eggs at breakfast (now sehn) don't warrant an eyelid's bat. But at the twilight hour after dusk, somehow the egg seemed to be the most wondrous thing to have! What ever you sell, sell it at a time when it is unusual to have - that brings out the customer's latent need and a little, will go a long way to satisfy the customer. No wonder eggs sell so well at bus or railway stations at any hour of the day or night!

This budding entrepreneur was so confident of what he was doing. It tells a lot. You must have confidence in what you do to succeed. The air of confidence he had about the eggs gave an impression as if he knew each and every one of them intimately and even their genealogical heritage. Perfect product knowledge gives you that confidence.

Don't forget packaging. The wee bit of paper, albeit an old newspaper, went a long way in appreciation by the shop keeper who had his grimy hands unclean. I have never seen an egg eaten with this kind of relish from a piece of paper!

Was pricing an issue? The boy did not give a scope for haggling. His countenance and confidence deterred any further questions. The way people stopped by to buy the eggs gave an impression that his stocks wouldn't last until the end of the road. Satisfy customer needs.

Eggs, anyone?

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