

Star BUSINESS

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Vigorous bid on to explore job markets in ME, Europe

UNB, Dhaka

The government has vigorously set about exploring the job markets in the Middle East and European countries to meet its target of sending some 2,20,000 lakh Bangladeshi workers abroad during the current year.

"We're hopeful about meeting the target this year... In last six months, we have already sent abroad 114,543 of our workers," Major (ret) Mohammed Qamrul Islam, state minister for Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment, told UNB.

Manpower export is increasing every month, fulfilling the target and raising the remittances, he said.

Non-resident Bangladeshis (NRBs) remitted US\$ 1594.46 million (Tk 9,297.40 crore) in January-June of 2003, up from US\$ 1386.78 million (Tk 8023.82 crore) that came during the same period last year.

Statistics available with the concerned ministry shows some 21,995 people were sent abroad, mainly to the Middle East, 20,902 in January, 13,111 in February, 20,902 in March, 19,261 in April, 17,935 in May and 21,339 in June.

Some 1,14,543 workers were recruited by companies abroad in January-June 2003 while the figure was only 89,143 in the first six months of the previous year (2002).

Major Qamrul, who is in charge of the newly established ministry, said, "Our efforts are on to explore the job markets abroad and send more people."

Iftikher Ahmed acting SEC chairman

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Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) Chairman Manir Uddin Ahmed yesterday handed over charges to Senior SEC Member Iftikher Ahmed.

Iftikher Ahmed will perform as the chairman (current charge) until the government appoints a new chairman.

Prior to becoming chairman on July 12, 2000, Manir Uddin Ahmed served as a member of the SEC.

WB sends more officials to Iraq

REUTERS, Washington

The World Bank is beefing up its team in Iraq and now has officials in the country looking at the investment climate, financial sector, food, water and agriculture, a bank official said Friday.

The bank currently has ten officials in Iraq and Joe Saba, who has responsibility for Iraq and a few other countries in the region, is set to arrive in Baghdad this weekend. At the beginning of this month the bank also had an official in the country looking at needs in the health sector.

The World Bank has been given the task of putting together an assessment of how much the rebuilding of Iraq is likely to cost, before a meeting of donors scheduled to take place at the end of September or October.

"We have a team on investment climate and we have a team on banking and the financial sector and a team on agriculture, water resources and food security," the official told Reuters.

Druk Air to double fleet with 2 Airbus jets

AFP, New Delhi

Bhutan's Druk Air has signed a memorandum of understanding with Airbus to buy two planes that would double the fleet of the only carrier serving the Himalayan kingdom, state media reported Saturday.

Druk Air is negotiating the purchase agreement with the European air consortium and hopes to have the A-319 planes delivered in the second half of 2004, the Kuensel newspaper said on its website.

The A-319 is among the smallest commercial airplanes, with a typical passenger capacity of 124.

Kuensel said the memorandum of understanding was signed last week in Bhutan between Druk and an Airbus representative.

Druk Air currently has a fleet of two BAe 146-100 aircraft, which each can carry 72 passengers, according to the airline's website. The airline flies to Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Nepal and Thailand.

Paro, at 2,225 meters (7,300 feet) above sea level, is the landlocked Buddhist state's sole airport.

Market access hinges on product quality

PM tells WEA award giving ceremony

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday said quality and competitive prices will determine the entry of Bangladeshi products into the international market.

She said all government efforts to expand export market might prove to be futile without ensuring quality and price competitiveness.

The prime minister was speaking at an award giving ceremony organised by Women Entrepreneurs' Association, Bangladesh (WEA) at the Osmani Memorial Auditorium in Dhaka.

Presided over by WEA President Rokia Afzal Rahman, the ceremony was also attended by Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury.

Assuring government supports to the women entrepreneurs the prime minister called upon them to come forward in setting up of agro-based industries, small and medium enterprises as well as other businesses.

"We want to see the women side by side with the men in trade and industry. The government will extend all possible assistance to them," she said.

She referred to the present government's liberal industrial policy and other initiatives taken for industrial development including simplification of the process of importing capital machinery and industrial raw materials.

"Taking these advantages provided by the government, women entrepreneurs can engage themselves in setting up industries," Khaleda said.

The prime minister also mentioned that the government in this fiscal year's budget has kept a Tk 50-crore fund exclusively for setting up agro-based industries.

Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury said participation of women, who constitute half of the total population, in business and industry have to be ensured to achieve higher GDP growth target.

Participation of women in different international trade fairs has already contributed a lot in pulling huge export orders, he added.

The minister said there is tremendous potentiality for Bangladeshi pickles in European markets and women in the villages have enough potential in produc-

ing those.

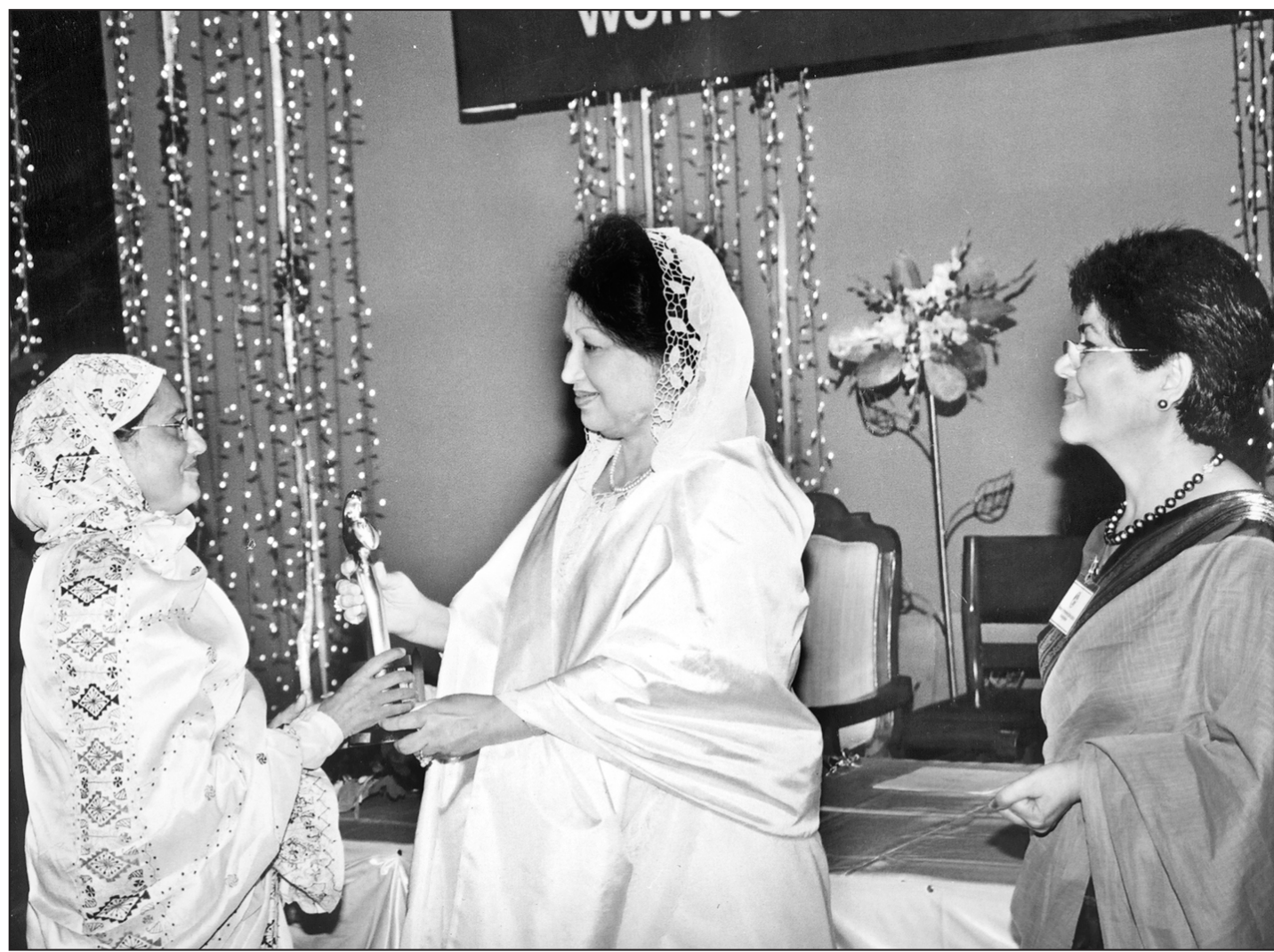
Women entrepreneurs can avail the opportunities of duty free access in the countries like Canada, Australia, Norway and the European Union, he said.

WEA President Rokia Afzal Rahman said there should be a federation for women entrepreneurs that would help them contribute more in industrial development and participate in export trade.

Citing various limitations of the association she urged the prime minister to allocate a land and a building in Dhaka for the association for using as its secretariat.

The WEA at the function awarded six women entrepreneurs and three institutions for their outstanding performances in business and contributions in generating employment. The prime minister handed over trophies among the awardees.

The awardees are Binodini Rema, Anowara Begum and Halima Khatun in rural entrepreneur category, Nahida Akter Akhi, Masuda Islam and Aziron Begum in urban category. The three institutions are Banchte Shekha, Prabartana and ASA.



Prime Minister Khaleda Zia hands a trophy to a winner at an award giving ceremony, organised by Women Entrepreneurs Association, Bangladesh (WEA) in Dhaka yesterday as association President Rokia A Rahman looks on.

Tk 1.36cr anomalies in Shadharan Bima

UNB, Dhaka

Malpractices and anomalies, involving Tk 1.36 crore, were unearthed in the Reinsurance Department of Shadharan Bima Corporation by a special official audit team.

The audit team from Commercial Audit Department audited the commercial activities of the Reinsurance Department of the Shadharan Bima Corporation (head office) during February 2000-April, 2000 and April 2000-May, 2000.

The audit was conducted on commercial activities of the department during 1996-1997 and 1998-1999 fiscal years and found four serious anomalies. The audit report was placed in Parliament recently.

Irregularities unearthed during the audit on reinsurance claim, premium collection and awarding commissions were serious, the audit report said.

The Shadharan Bima Corporation is the lone institution that provides reinsurance service to all private insurance companies of the country.

The audit team found that the department suffered a loss of Tk 89.21 lakh it made payment against the claim of Janata Insurance Company for import of 1 lakh bags

of sugar. But during unloading, only 86,779 bags of sugar were found, showing a deficit of 13,221 bags.

But the department did not recover the loss it suffered from the ship authority that carried the goods, the report said. As the auditors sought an answer to this, the Ministry concerned said they filed a case in this connection to recover the money. But the Ministry could not show any document in support of its claim.

Anomalies, involving Tk 29.79 lakh, were found as the Reinsurance Department did not realise its claim as per the letter of subrogation from a marine cargo carrier that carried rice and saline water in rice packs.

The department paid the amount to Federal Insurance Company that paid the money through the letter of subrogation.

Although a transport agency Rangdhanu Transport Agency - was found responsible for the missing of textile machinery of a leasing company, the Reinsurance Department paid Tk 10.34 lakh through Janata Insurance Company causing the total loss to the Corporation's coffers.

The audit report commented that the Shadharan Bima Corporation could be made a more profitable institution by taking corrective measures.

Make economic diplomacy a success: FM

BSS, Chittagong

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan said here on Friday that the private sector specially the readymade garments could play a vital role in making the economy healthy and sound, and the government's economic diplomacy a success.

The foreign minister was speaking as the chief guest at a function marking the induction of the first batch of overseas students from Nigeria and Philippines in the BGMEA Institute of Fashion and Technology (BIFT) in Chittagong.

State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Mir Mohammad Nasiruddin and Nigerian High Commissioner Abdullahi Madaki Bage attended the function as special guests.

BIFT President M Serajul Haque, BGMEA Second Vice-President M Zennat Ali Meah, Director Helaluddin Chowdhury and M A Salam also addressed the function.

Chittagong BIFT organised the function with first vice-president of the Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) S M Nurul Haque in the chair.

The foreign students -- 24 from Nigeria and two from Philippines -- have enrolled themselves to study on the merchandising course for the first time in the BGMEA run fashion and technology institute here.

S'pore firms Chosen to run Baghdad airport

REUTERS, Singapore

A Singapore consortium has been chosen to provide ground services at Baghdad airport when it reopens for commercial services after the Iraq war, two government-linked firms said Saturday.

The companies, conglomerate Keppel Corp and Singapore Airport Terminal Services Ltd (SATS), confirmed their involvement in the consortium but declined to give further details. SATS is the ground handling and catering arm of Singapore Airlines.

"We are finalising the partnership agreement and contract, and will make an announcement once it's signed," a Keppel spokeswoman told Reuters.

A SATS spokesman said the consortium would likely make an announcement early next week on the deal.

"We are still in discussions with some parties about providing ground handling and cargo services at Baghdad Airport, but no agreement has been signed yet," he told Reuters.

The contract had been won by a consortium led by unlisted Singapore trading and logistics firm Windmill International, Singapore's Straits Times newspaper said.

Laurel for women entrepreneurs

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It was a different occasion for six women entrepreneurs and three institutions as they were honoured for their outstanding performances in businesses and contributions in employment generation and women empowerment.

They were honoured by the Women Entrepreneurs Association, Bangladesh (WEA) at a ceremony held in Dhaka yesterday. Prime Minister Khaleda Zia handed over the awards.

WEA President Rokia Afzal Rahman said the awards have been given to recognise the women entrepreneurs of both rural and urban areas and institutions, which have played a pioneering role in the empowerment of women.

Three women entrepreneurs who were awarded in rural category are Anowara Begum, Binodini Rema and Halima Khatun.

Anowara Begum, 32, from Rupashi village under Delduar upazila of Tangail, is an expert in embroidery and handloom work. She had no idea about weaving but after getting married with Karim Miah, a weaver, they bought a weaving loom to start business.

Learning the art of weaving from UBINIG in 1988, Anowara got involved in business and tried to expand it. Now, they have 11 weaving looms. She also trained seven others on weaving. "If the government helps me, I will be able to further expand my business," a cheerful Anowara said after receiving the award.

Binodini Rema, 58, president of Birishiri Bahumukhi Mohila Samity at Shushang village under Durgapur upazila of Netrokona district, is an expert handicraftswoman in traditional Garo handloom. She founded the association 24 years ago, which is involved in making Garo handloom and organising skill development training.

Besides producing handloom

products, Binodini also laid emphasis on its product marketing in Dhaka and abroad. Presently, Garo handloom produced by her organisation is sold at the outlets of Prabartana, Aranya Crafts and Folk Bangladesh.

Halima Khatun of Jessore was married off at the age of nine because of poverty. Even she had to work as a domestic help to maintain her six-member family. But a local NGO changed her life.

After joining Banchtey Shekha, an association promoting women entrepreneurs in Jessore, she received training in handicraft, sericulture and pisciculture.

Now Halima is a successful owner of farmland, a pond and a shop. She is also involved in grain business, poultry farming and kitchen gardening. "I was very poor but now I'm able to send my children to school," she said.

Three entrepreneurs have also been awarded in urban category. They are Aziron Begum, Masuda Islam and Nahida Akter Akhi.

Aziron took credit from TMSS, a non-government organisation of Bogra, and invested the money in her husband's curd business. She also obtained business development skills from TMSS. Now Aziron's monthly income is around Tk 35,000 and she also employs four people.

Masuda Islam of Dhaka started her business in 1997 with Prartina Home Made, a food-supplying house. She supplies cakes and sweetmeats to various department shops in Dhaka like Agora, Family Need, PQS and Daily Needs. Now, she earns Tk 40,000 to Tk 50,000 per month.

Nahida Akter Akhi obtained training on block and batik printing from the Directorate of Youth Development. In 1988, she started a boutique shop 'MELA' in Khulna. Then she expanded her business with the financial support of Tk 2 lakh from her family sources. Presently, her monthly profit stands at Tk 25,000 and she

employed 20 people.

Three institutions have also been awarded at the ceremony. These are Banchte Shekha, Prabartana and ASA.

Banchte Shekha, a non-government organisation, supports the development of underprivileged women and children who do not have ability to support themselves. The NGO provides training in various sectors like fish farming, handicrafts, handloom and weaving.

Prabartana was established in

1989 with the objectives of promoting local handicraft artisans at national and international levels and achieved remarkable success.

ASA, an NGO established in 1978, provides services like micro-credit, small business credit, weekly savings, voluntary savings and life insurance for its members, 97 per cent of those are women. It has recently started small entrepreneur lending programme to support micro-entrepreneurs through small capital.