

## Organic tea hits auction market on Tuesday

BSS, Chittagong

A new type of tea -- organic tea--grown for the first time in the country by a local company is going to hit the auction market in Chittagong on Tuesday.

Experts said Bangladesh achieved a great success in plantation of tea on plain land, which is not traditionally considered fit for tea cultivation.

Kazi and Kazi Tea Estate (KKTE) is the country's pioneer company in the field of this kind of tea production by applying the organic method in cultivation at its garden at Tentulia in Panchagarh.

Leading brokers said the new 'Meena' brand organic tea would fetch very high price and be attractive as it is considered very good quality tea among other brands being produced in the traditional tea gardens of greater Sylhet and Chittagong districts.

Experts, brokers and tea traders at a formal launching ceremony of the new brand here on Sunday highly appreciated the initiative of such tea plantation by applying new method.

They, however, expressed their optimism about Bangladesh's ability to produce world standard tea of new variety and taste.

Minister for Environment and Forests Shahjahan Siraj was the chief guest at the launching ceremony.

## Citigroup grant for microcredit summit meet

Citigroup Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Citigroup, has made a grant of \$25,000 to the Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF) for organising the 2004 Asia-Pacific Microcredit Summit Meeting of Councils to be held in Dhaka next week.

Sanjay Nayar, Citigroup country officer, India and area head of Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal, handed over a formal letter of grant to Dr Salehuddin Ahmed, managing director of PKSF, says a press release.

Mamun Rashid, Citigroup country officer, Bangladesh, was present.

PKSF in collaboration with the Microcredit Summit Campaign will organise the four-day meeting from February 16-19.

The meeting will mainly focus on the four core themes -- reaching the poorest, empowering women, building financially self-sufficient microfinance institutions and ensuring a positive measurable impact on the lives of clients and their families.

The meeting will provide inputs for programmes of the UN International Year of Microcredit 2005.

The PKSF managing director thanked the Citigroup Foundation for taking a leadership role in the area of microfinance and help in the community development programmes.

Sanjay Nayar said it has been a great honour for Citigroup to take part in this important milestone in a country like Bangladesh and help promote microcredit activities worldwide for poverty alleviation.

## US, Australia trade talks drag on

REUTERS, Washington

Top US and Australian trade negotiators grappled for a 13th consecutive day on Saturday with tough farm trade issues blocking a free trade agreement between the two allies, officials said.

The teams, led by US Trade Representative Robert Zoellick and Australian Trade Minister Mark Vaile, worked late into the night on Friday and returned to the table on Saturday, spokesmen said.

Neither side ruled out the possibility that the negotiations could last another day.

The main sticking point is US reluctance to open its highly protected sugar, beef and dairy markets to more imports from Australia.

Angry US farmers could pose risks for President Bush's re-election campaign.

Other issues include U.S. demands for changes in local content rules on Australian television and for reforms in Canberra's state-subsidized prescription drug program.

The countries have already missed a Dec. 31 deadline for finishing the pact set by Bush and Australian Prime Minister John Howard.

# Steel, iron prices still steep even after strike ends

### STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The prices of iron and steel products show no sign of easing up even one month into the end of a strike in steel and re-rolling mills.

The soaring price of MS rods and iron sheets has made construction works costly, sources in the construction industry said. They accused a section of dishonest traders of creating an artificial shortage of the construction materials in local market.

The price of rods shot up by more than 50 percent when production in all re-rolling and steel mills in the country was suspended during the strike that began in December last. The strike ended in mid-January, but the price continued to rise.

Iron rod was selling at Tk 29,000 to Tk 31,000 per tonne yesterday in Dhaka, which was Tk 18,000 to Tk 20,000 before the strike and Tk

28,000 to Tk 30,000 during the strike.

"A cartel of dishonest businessmen from both steel and re-rolling sectors are manipulating the prices creating an artificial scarcity in market," said a retail seller. "The government has no control over the soaring price of this essential construction material."

More than 300 re-rolling and 80 steel mills joined the strike but many of them did not resume production after the end of the strike. Some have resumed production after Eid-ul-Azha while some other are still closed, industry sources said.

The mill owners enforced the strike to press home their nine-point demands that included reduction of duties on raw materials, simplification of regulations on import of melted steel scraps and reduction of minimum gas bills.

The millers called off their strike on January 12 when the government assured them of fulfilling most of their demands on the basis of recommendations from the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI).

Following the recommendations, the government withdrew restriction on import of scraps by steel and re-rolling mills owners. But the implementation of other recommendations has been slowed down for administrative tangles.

Shafiuddin Ahmed, secretary general of Bangladesh Re-rolling Mills Association said scarcity of raw materials for manufacturing iron rods, iron-sheets and other iron-steel products is pushing the prices up in the local market.

The country's re-rolling mills are capable of meeting 100 percent domestic demand of MS rods.



PHOTO: STAR

Junior Chamber Bangladesh (JCB) National President Data Magfur announces the detail programmes of a three-day Asia Pacific National Presidents Summit (APNAP) at a press conference held in Dhaka yesterday. Farzana Chowdhury, national secretary general, Aftab Mahmud Khurshid, national director of PR-marketing and brand identity of JCB, and Nessar M Khan, chief co-ordinator of the summit, are also seen in the picture. The conference begins in Dhaka on Thursday.

## Junior Chamber Asia-Pacific summit begins in Dhaka on Thursday

### STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Junior Chamber Bangladesh (JCB), country chapter of Junior Chamber International (JCI), will organise a three-day Asia-Pacific summit in Dhaka beginning on Thursday.

Sixteen national presidents from the chamber's Asia-Pacific region are expected to attend the conference titled 'Asia Pacific National Presidents Summit' at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel.

JCB will also hold the Asia Pacific Development Council meeting of the chamber during the summit.

"The aim of the conference is

to improve the country's image in the international arena and to woo investment in Bangladesh," said JCB National President Data Magfur while announcing the details of the summit at a press conference yesterday.

Magfur said the conference will cover a number of issues and needs related to young businessmen and professionals of Bangladesh.

The conference will also host innovative and interactive sessions that will help produce concrete outputs from the current generation of leaders, he added.

He said JCI World President

and other JCI high officials will attend the conference.

JCI will conduct a daylong training on leadership for the participants on Friday at the conference venue.

Apart from national presidents, other representatives will also participate in the summit, Magfur added.

Farzana Chowdhury, national secretary general,

Aftab Mahmud Khurshid, national director of PR-marketing and brand identity of JCB, and Nessar M Khan, chief co-ordinator of the summit, were also present at the press conference.

## Japan may compromise on US beef imports

REUTERS, Tokyo

Japan may be open to compromise on its suspension of US beef imports that has been in effect since December following the discovery of a case of mad cow disease, Agriculture Minister Yoshiyuki Kamei said Sunday.

The news came after Japan suspended imports of US poultry products following the discovery of a case of bird flu -- a disease sweeping Asia -- on a chicken farm in Delaware.

Washington has been pressing Japan to resume beef imports, but Tokyo has called for the introduction of tougher safeguards to match those in place in Japan, where all cattle are tested for the illness.

Asked on a Japanese television program about reports of a compromise, Kamei said he was not aware of the reports but that the most important thing was for

Japanese consumers to be able to eat beef with confidence.

When pressed about one measure -- that all US beef heading for Japan should be tested by a third party -- Kamei said: "That is one method."

"But we'd need to think about how it would be done and also work closely with food safety authorities."

Kamei reiterated that there was no change in Japan's basic stance that all U.S. beef should be tested.

"Japanese consumers won't buy U.S. beef unless this is done," he added.

Kyodo news agency quoted Japanese official sources as saying the governments of the two nations were considering a provisional measure to partly lift the ban.

They said the measure would apply to beef that had undergone voluntary private-sector inspection,

after which the U.S. government would certify it as safe, adding that the two nations were aiming to reach an agreement sometime between April and June.

An official at the Agriculture Ministry said he was not aware of any government-level discussions on the matter.

"However, it's difficult to know what sort of discussions might be going on at the private level -- say between different companies," he said.

Japanese officials have repeatedly said that consumer confidence could be eroded if the ban on US beef is lifted too soon.

Japan is the biggest foreign buyer of US beef, importing about \$1 billion worth annually.

In the year ended last March, Japan imported 534,000 tons of beef, of which 240,000 tons was from the United States.

## Consumer item import up 22pc in six months

UNB, Dhaka

Import of consumer items increased about 22 percent during the first half of the current fiscal year (2003-04) as compared to same period last fiscal, according to Bangladesh Bank.

Industrial raw materials import also rose 26 percent during the period (July-December) while industrial machinery import went up by 11 percent and petroleum and petroleum products by 6 percent.

During the period, total import increased by about 17 percent as per the amount of import LCs opened with authorised dealer banks.

In December 2003, the banks opened LCs worth US\$1,071 million, which were about 27 percent more than November 2003.

## Sonargaon hotel re-launches Italian restaurant

Pan Pacific Sonargaon hotel has re-launched an Italian restaurant with new mouth-watering dishes.

The restaurant, CIAO, offers foods including unbeatable flavours of Italian cooking with twice cooked five-spice duck on a bed of crushed beans and apple, prawn fettuccine with grilled eggplant, chilli, basil and saffron emulsion, braised spare ribs with roasted vegetables on sweet potato mash and aioli, and home made potato gnocchi with pommodoro tomato sauce and pecorino cheese in the main course.

The restaurant also offers authentic Italian pizza with pepperoni, roasted capsicum, pesto, smoked chicken, avocado, prawns, eggplant sausage mushrooms and lot more, says a press release.

Tiramisu coffee drenched sponge cake with marscapone cream cheese and cocoa pannacotta Italian style cream brulee with cream cheese and gelatine are also available in the CIAO as desserts.

## Canada, USA to invest \$7m in CEPZ

Canada and USA will jointly set up a textile industry in the Chittagong Export Processing Zone (CEPZ) at a cost of \$7.138 million.

The new company-- Mitali Textile Industries (BD) Ltd-- will annually produce 4.5 million kg of yarn and 1.78 million kg of textile items including dyed, printed and bleached towels and cloths, bath robe sheets, pillow cases, hospital towels, aprons, dish and wash cloths, says a press release.

A lease agreement to this effect was signed between Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (Bepza) and Mitali Textile Industries in Dhaka yesterday.

Bepza Executive Chairman AFM Solaiman Chowdhury and Mitali Textile Industries Manager Md Shahabuddin signed the deal on behalf of their organisations.

The textile mill will create employment opportunity for 1043 Bangladeshi nationals.

## Japan suspends US poultry imports

AFP, Tokyo

Japan has suspended all imports of US poultry following reports on Saturday that chickens in the US state of Delaware were found infected with bird flu, according to the farm ministry here.

In a statement issued late Saturday, the Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Ministry said the action was a "temporary and precautionary measure" and it was verifying the reports through diplomatic channels.

The United States is the fourth biggest exporter of chickens to Japan following Thailand, China and Brazil.

Japan has already banned imports of cooked chicken products from China, Thailand and some other Asian countries due to the bird flu outbreak. Japan was also hit last month a single farm affected.

Japan imported about 50,000 tonnes of chicken from the United States in the year to March 2003, accounting for about three percent of its total chicken consumption.

Japan has been suspending chicken imports from the US states of Connecticut and Rhode Island after a strain of weak bird flu broke out there in early last year.



PHOTO: STAR

Two Thai exhibitors bake traditional Thai food at the ten-day Thai village handicraft and home decor fair that began on Thursday at the Udhyan Thai in Baridhara, Dhaka. The fair, which ends on February 14, is open from 9am to 9pm.

# 'One village one product' concept can be a boost to small, cottage industries

## Embassy official tells briefing on Thai fair

### STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh can initiate 'one village one product' programme replicating the successful Thai concept that will give a boost to small and cottage industries in rural areas, a Thai embassy official said yesterday.

The One Tanbon (village) One Product or 'OTOP' initiative helps in developing rural expertise on a particular product and boosting Thailand's rural economy by increasing income of people at the grassroots level.

"Bangladesh can take this initiative to reduce rural poverty," Inthorn Wankaeo, minister counsellor of Royal Thai Embassy in Dhaka, told a press briefing on Thai village handicraft and home decor fair that began on Thursday.

The Thai government launched the initiative in 2001 to identify and promote unique products made by village communities as a means of expanding domestic and international trade.

The concept coined by Thai

Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra has created huge enthusiasm among the rural people. Once fully materialised, over 20,000 Thai villages under the programme will be able to offer as many products.

Wankaeo said the Thai government would extend help if Bangladesh takes such an initiative. "It will help strengthen backbone of rural economy by promoting small and cottage industries of rural areas," he said.

"There are immense scope to improve trade ties between Thailand and Bangladesh," he said mentioning that Thai government has so far approved 40 Bangladeshi items for duty free access to Thailand and six more products will be added to the list soon.

Kraitira Kittisriswai, co-chairman of Thai Business Society in Bangladesh, said Thailand takes Bangladesh as gateway to Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation) and BIMST-EC (Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand Economic Co-

operation) regions.

Thai handicrafts and household products like pottery, woodworks, needleworks, household electrical appliances, jewellery, cosmetics, energy drink, traditional food, fruits and services like medical, health and beauty, massage are available at the fair at the 'Udhyan Thai' in Baridhara diplomatic area.

Thai embassy and Thai Business Society in Bangladesh are jointly organising the 10-day fair that will end on February 14. The fair is open from 9am to 9pm.

A total of 50 companies mainly from northern Thailand are participating in the fair.

At the end of the fair the Thai entrepreneurs will fly to Chittagong to take part in an international trade fair during February 18 to March 17. Thailand has been given the partner country status at the fair.

Thailand was also partner country at the recently concluded Dhaka International Trade Fair where it won the best prize in pavilion category.



PHOTO: CITIBANK

Sanjay Nayar, Citigroup country officer, India and area head of Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal, hands over a formal letter of grant to Dr Salehuddin Ahmed, managing director of Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF) in Dhaka. Mamun Rashid, Citigroup country officer, Bangladesh, is also seen in the picture. Under the grant, Citigroup Foundation will provide \$25,000 to PKSF to organise the 2004 Asia-Pacific Microcredit Summit Meeting in Dhaka during February 16-19.