

EC launches scheme to promote local apparels

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

In a bid to promote Bangladeshi apparels in European countries, European Commission has launched a project for small enterprises.

Some 85 small Bangladeshi enterprises will benefit from the project, Euro-Bangla Apparels 2005, under Asia Invest 11 programme, an initiative to promote and support cooperation between European Union members and South and Southeast Asia and China.

Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) will imple-

ment the project in cooperation with Exporters Association of Northern Greece (SEVE), Association of Young Entrepreneurs of Zaragoza, (AIJEZ), Spain and Association for the Promotion of International Relations (APRI), Belgium.

To mark the launch, Hans Farnhammer, second secretary of delegation of the European Commission, read out a written message of Esko Kentrschynskyj, ambassador and head of the delegation of the European Commission to Bangladesh.

The project is an important milestone for Bangladesh and European business cooperation to deal with the post-MFA scenario,

Kentrschynskyj said in his speech.

The project also facilitates opportunities for cooperation between European and Asian companies particularly small and medium enterprises, he added.

Bangladesh's export sector must enhance its capacity, productivity and efficiency and establish partnership agreements among target markets for better sustainability, he added. "With successful implementation of the project we are expecting an additional export of apparels worth 30 million euro to the EC."

BGMEA President Quazi Moniruzzaman, Vice-president Zinnat Ali Mian also spoke at the launching ceremony.

The BGMEA president said growth in RMG exports was possible mainly because generalised system of preference given by the EU and quota given by the US.

BGMEA vice president said under the Euro-Bangladesh Apparels 2005 project, 15-member delegation will go to Greece, Spain and Belgium on February 27.

Another 15-member delegation will also visit these three countries after one year. Besides, a 10-member delegation, mainly buyers, from these countries will come to Bangladesh and may sign several contracts.

Goods rot at Benapole as strike rolls into day 2

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jessore

Export-import activities through Benapole land port remained suspended for second consecutive day yesterday due to an indefinite strike enforced by four trade organisations.

Benapole Transport Owners' Association, C & F Agents' Association, Importers and Exporters Association and C&F Agents Employees Union enforced the strike to press home their demands including keeping cranes and forklifts in operation at the port round the clock.

A huge quantity of imported perishable items worth about Tk 2 crore went rot in Benepole port in the last two days. About 1000 trucks loaded with imported goods remained stranded from Harishpour to Bonga on the Indian side of Benepole port.

The leaders of the organisations have said that loading and unloading of imported goods are being hampered as most of the cranes and forklifts remain inoperative at the port.

DSE elects four directors today

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The election to the posts of four directors of Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) will be held today.

The elected four directors will replace directors who are retiring after serving three-year term.

The retiring directors are Abdullah Bukhari, Sharif Ataur Rahman, Anwar Hossain and Habib Abul Mustak.

Five candidates-- AS Shahudul Huq, Onu Zaigirdar, Md Sayek Khan, Md Shakil Rizvi and Md Shahjahan -- are contesting in the election.

The 175 valid members out of total 195 of the country's premium bourse will cast votes. Voting will start at 10am and end at 4pm.

There are 12 elected and 12 nominated directors in the board of directors. According to the DSE constitution, four elected directors retire every year and four others replace them through direct voting.

The elected directors will take charge at annual general meeting of the DSE scheduled for March 3. The 12 elected directors including the newly elected four will then elect one president and one senior vice-president and one vice-president for the next one year on the same day at the first board meeting of board of directors.

Advertising Club holds discussion

The Advertising Club, Dhaka held a lecture on 'Communicating to Cross-section of Audience' in Dhaka recently.

Aly Zaker, managing director and CEO of Asiatic Marketing Communications Limited, delivered the lecture, says a press release.

The lecture was part of the club's plan to organise workshops and lectures on media planning, graphic designing, modeling, social communications and jingle creation.

A large number of professionals from advertising and related professions attended the session.

Convenors of the club Wazir Sattar, Sanaul Arefeen, Yusuf Hasan and Sarwat Ahmed were also present.

CoE meeting on Safta begins today

BSS, Dhaka

The first meeting of the Committee of Experts (CoE) on South Asian Free Trade Area (Safta) begins today at Saarc Secretariat in Kathmandu aiming at negotiating on four articles of Safta agreement.

Representatives from all Saarc member states are expected to participate in the meeting, a release issued by Saarc secretariat said here yesterday.

The agreement on Safta was signed by the foreign ministers of Saarc member states on January 6 last during the 12th Saarc summit held in Pakistan capital Islamabad between January 4 and 6.

The CoE that drafted Safta was mandated to complete negotiations on four articles of the agreement on which consensus had been reached in principle, but details were to be finalised.

These will be incorporated as integral parts of the agreement before its entry into force on January 1, 2006, the release said.

Inconsistent policy drying up foreign investment flow

Japan officials tell Bangladesh businesspeople

UNB, Tokyo

Echoing Japanese investors, top Japan officials yesterday blamed inconsistent government policy as the biggest hurdle to investment from the big Asian economy to Bangladesh.

"We've seen a change of policy with the change of power in Bangladesh. Of course, you'll review but frequent policy changes give an impression of instability in policy," said Shigeru Nozaki, senior executive director of Japan Bank for International Co-operation (JBIC).

Similar observations were also made by Japan External Trade Organisation (JETRO) President Hiroshi Tsukamoto and Japan International Co-operation Agency (JICA) Vice President Sumida Eiyo in separate meetings with a Bangladesh business delegation.

Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) President Abdul Awal Mintoo led the delegation, which came here to attend the 13th meeting of Japan Bangladesh Joint Committee for Commercial and Economic Co-operation.

In the meeting, the Japanese investors repeatedly referred to complexities over Kafco and cancellation of the DAP project after the present government came to power but given re-approval only after top-

level persuasion, as a bad precedence to attract investment from Japan.

The top officials of the JICA, JBIC and JETRO similarly referred to the controversies over Kafco and DAP (di amonium phosphate) projects from the side of Dhaka. They also echoed the Japanese entrepreneurs in identifying other problems for getting FDI (foreign direct investment) by Bangladesh.

The key impediment, according to them, was the absence of an investment-friendly atmosphere, mainly due to volatile political situation, particularly hartal (strike). Other problems include procedural delay in approving projects and lack of infrastructure.

They, however, said the issue relating to the DAP project was addressed and resolved properly from the top level of Bangladesh government and felt that now the Japanese investors would be encouraged to go to Bangladesh.

JETRO President Hiroshi Tsukamoto said they understood that many things in Bangladesh were related to politics. Tsukamoto said he does not want to talk about internal matters of a country, but there are certain things, which send bad signal abroad.

"Yes, once we had similar problems when there was too much of labour unionism due to too much of

democracy, affecting the productivity. We overcame the problem and I believe Bangladesh too will be able (to do so)," he hoped.

The JETRO President as well as JICA Vice President Sumida Eiyo praised, what they said, the sincere efforts of the Bangladesh government for ensuring an "investment-friendly" atmosphere as well as government-private sector joint bid for the same.

The key officials of the Japanese agencies were also impressed with the growth of private sector that in past 15 years from nowhere came out prominently, now accounting for 76 percent of the country's total employment, 68 percent of value addition, 99 percent of export and 73 percent of investment.

Apart from persuasion for increased Japanese investment to Bangladesh and more export from Dhaka to Tokyo, FBCCI president sought co-operation from JICA, JBIC and JETRO for capacity building of the private sector.

Deputy leader of the FBCCI business delegation Abdul Haq, Bangladesh Ambassador to Japan Serajul Islam and Commercial Counsellor Hussain Ahmed also attended the meetings. Senior officials of JBIC, JETRO and JICA were present in meetings with their respective bosses.

Raffle draw of Winter Festival Chamak Part-2 held

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The raffle draw of Sony Rangs Prothom Alo Winter Festival Chamak Part-2 was held yesterday in Dhaka.

Aktar Hussain, chairman and managing director of Rangs Electronics Ltd, announced the winners coupon number at the function as chief guest.

The Daily Prothom Alo Editor Motiur Rahman, Rangs Electronics Ltd Vice-chairperson Sachimi Hussain, Deputy Managing Director J Ekram Hussain, directors Beanus Hussain and Sabur Ahmed were present at the function.

Twelve years old school boy Rafiuzzaman (coupon number 02149) of Mymensingh won the first prize -- a 1500cc Proton Saga brand new car.

A total of 30 coupon numbers for as many prizes including 1500cc car, motor cycle, Sony colour television, Rangs refrigerator, Sony DVD player, Rangs washing machine, Rangs micro wave woven and two-in-one cassette players were declared at the function.

Athoi Biswas (coupon number 17455) of Mirpur won the second prize - a TVS Victor motor cycle. The winning coupon number of third prize-- a 25 inch Sony colour television-- is 04512.

Other winners coupon number are as follow: 32376 (4th prize), 16092 (5th), 05399 (6th), 36031 (7th), 02147 (8th), 02872 (9th), 16530 (10th), 39551 (11th), 02332 (12th), 28859 (13th), 36083 (14th), 11114 (15th), 26268 (16th), 28661 (17th), 24797 (18th), 00843 (19th), 26963 (20th), 00794 (21st), 33026 (22nd), 16062 (23rd), 11750 (24th), 39568 (25th), 22849 (26th), 05095 (27th), 39653 (28th), 09234 (29th) and 30013 (30th).

Under the promotional campaign, buyers got coupon against purchase of Sony Rangs products. The campaign ran during December 13, 2003 and February 1, 2004.

Aktar Hussain also handed over a cheque for Tk 2 lakh to Motiur Rahman for Prothom Alo Anti Drug Campaign at the function.



PHOTO: STAR

The Prothom Alo Editor Motiur Rahman draws a coupon at the Sony Rangs Prothom Alo Winter Festival Chamak Part-2 raffle draw function held in Dhaka yesterday.

US chicken farmers deplore EU ban

AFP, Washington

US chicken and egg exporters on Tuesday decried as "irresponsible and unjustified" a European ban erected after a bird flu outbreak in Texas.

The US industry's Poultry and Egg Export Council, joining beef farmers on the unwanted list, warned consumers in Europe would end up unnecessarily paying higher prices.

"Really, there is no justification for halting trade or even for announcing a trade restriction," said James Sumner, spokesman for the council, which represents 95 percent of US poultry industry exporters.

The outbreak "has been confined in only one flock in one location in Texas, which is a very big state," he told AFP.

"To take action against the whole United States for this by any country is in my opinion irresponsible and unjustified," Sumner added. "Consumers in Europe soon are going to pay a much higher price."

The European Commission

suspended imports of poultry and eggs from the United States after an outbreak of highly contagious bird flu in Texas.

European Union health commissioner David Byrne said EU farm ministers next month would review the one-month import ban.

"This immediate ban is designed to protect the high health status of the European poultry flocks," he said in Brussels after the European Commission confirmed the suspension.

The ban affects trade worth more than 20 million euros (25 million dollars) annually.

The Texas outbreak was detected among a flock of chickens on a farm in the county of Gonzales, which was quarantined, the Texas Animal Health Commission said.

US chief veterinary officer Ron Dehaven told reporters Monday that the virus in Texas, first thought to be only mildly contagious, had tested positive for "highly pathogenic avian influenza."

But US authorities stressed the virus was not the same deadly strain known as H5N1 that has swept

across Asia this winter, and does not appear to be linked to the other US outbreaks.

Texas was the fourth US state to be hit with the virus following outbreaks in Delaware, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

Europe's Byrne said the Texas outbreak was more serious than the other US cases because the strain of virus there was more contagious.

China, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore and South Korea had already slapped temporary import bans on US poultry because of the other outbreaks. Russia has now barred poultry imports from Texas and Delaware.

The US Poultry and Egg Export Council's Sumner praised Russia's position as "very reasonable."

But Japan, which has already banned American beef because of an outbreak of mad cow disease, had failed to base its import ban decisions on science, he said.

"If they can't import beef, they can't import chicken, they are probably going to start depleting the oceans of fish pretty soon," Sumner said.

New MD of Shahjalal Bank



M Kamaluddin Chowdhury, immediate past executive president and CEO of Islami Bank Bangladesh Limited, has joined as Shahjalal Bank Limited as managing director.

Chowdhury is a career banker who joined Habib Bank Limited (now Agrani Bank) as probationary officer in 1963. He was head of International Division of Agrani Bank prior to joining Islami Bank Bangladesh Limited.

Chowdhury received training in international banking with Deutsche Bank, Germany and Banker's Trust Company, Singapore and attended many seminars, workshops, training and orientation programmes on banking and finance including Islamic banking at home and abroad.

Cairns Group seeks end to farm export subsidies

AFP, San Jose

Officials from 17 countries that form the Cairns Group and account for one-third of all agricultural exports called Tuesday for an end to all farm export subsidies in an effort to revive stalled global trade talks.

The trade ministers were meeting in the Costa Rican capital in a bid to thrash out a solution to a deep impasse on farm subsidies that led to collapse of broader free-trade talks in Cancun, Mexico, last year.

The thorny issue, with billions of dollars in agricultural exports at stake, has pitted developing countries against the United States and the European Union, both of which prop up their farm sectors with subsidies.

"Flexibility will be required by

everyone in order to break the impasse and get the Doha round back on the road," said Costa Rican trade minister Alberto Trejos, the talks' host.

In an attempt to heal wounds that were opened in Cancun, the group has invited World Trade Organisation (WTO) director general Supachai Panitchpakdi and US Trade Representative Robert Zoellick here this week hoping to revive stalled WTO negotiations on world trade which began in Doha in 2001.

"We require clear signals for the elimination of all export subsidies from all products and goods that receive such subsidies," Trejos said in opening the talks.

"There is no other way of interpreting Doha and a rejection of this would only confirm the most pessi-

mistic view that we are a long way from reaching a common goal supported by all," Trejos said.

Zoellick has acknowledged the Cairns Group as an "important coalition" in the ongoing debate, and has said he hopes to "move Doha forward" during his meetings here this week.

Trejos told the assembled trade chiefs that it is crucial to achieve a common platform for their goal of eliminating the contested export subsidies.

He urged listening ministers to keep an "open mind" with regard to other aspects of the Doha agenda that have also proved divisive, such as the so-called Singapore agenda, whereby state would open their investment and services sectors to foreign competition.

PM sees higher growth rate in current fiscal

BSS, Sangsad Bhaban

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday told the house that the projected growth rate of 5.5 per cent for the fiscal 2003-04 was expected to cross the target like the previous year.

Answering a question from BNP lawmaker MA Hashem (Noakhali-2) Khaleda Zia said the present government has finalised the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (IPRSP) titled "Bangladesh: National Strategy for Economic Growth, Poverty Reduction and Social Development" in March 2003 to achieve the faster economic growth.

In the strategy paper, she said economic growth rates were projected at 5.2 per cent and 5.5 per cent for fiscal 2002-03 and 2003-04.

But, the prime minister told the house that in reality because of sincere efforts of the government it was possible to achieve the economic growth rate of 5.3 per cent against the targeted 5.2 per cent in the fiscal 2002-03.

In the IPRSP, the target of growth for the fiscal year 2005-06 has been fixed at 6.5 per cent, she pointed out adding that work was now progressing fast to turn the IPRSP into a final document by December 2004.

Khaleda Zia said the government has initiated a number of steps for accelerating the pace of economic growth. The steps included maintaining macroeconomic stability, mobilising more domestic resources and attracting foreign investment.

The steps would accompany efforts to establish investment climate by improving the infrastructure, increasing the foreign currency reserve rates and making successful transition to floating exchange rate by foreign currency management.

She said thrust is given to diversification and expansion of the export sector, introduction of biotechnology in the agriculture sector, development of the crop-sub-sector by crop diversification to achieve that fast growth rates.

US bans French meat

REUTERS, Washington

France has been barred from selling some of its signature delicacies in America, including pate and foie gras, after the US Department of Agriculture Tuesday said French meat imports have been suspended due to health concerns.

France's agriculture ministry was informed in a letter delivered on Tuesday that all imports of French beef, pork and poultry were immediately suspended, said Steven Cohen, a spokesman for USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service.

According to USDA statistics, France's red meat exports to the United States in 2003 were valued at about \$2 million. Figures were not available on France's poultry exports.

"This action taken suspends all

French meat and poultry exports," Cohen said, citing "general sanitation concerns" at the 11 French plants that were licensed to export meat to the United States.

He said the action came after US inspectors repeatedly cited French facilities over the past two years for violations.

Besides pate and foie gras, Cohen said French hams and other "high-end meats" also would be hit by the import ban.

In Paris, the French Farm Ministry said in a statement that the decision to suspend imports was taken despite a last-minute trip by Farm Minister Herve Gaymard to Washington on Monday to present the steps taken by French companies to comply with specific US standards.

New Product



Dr. Fixit hits the market

Associated Construction International Ltd of Bangladesh has launched Dr. Fixit brand construction chemicals in Bangladesh recently.

Dr. Fixit products include water-proofing admixtures, repair products, marble tile fixing products, sealant and putties, concrete admixtures, industrial flooring products and grouts, says a press release.

The products prevent damp walls, seepage and leakage of any buildings during monsoons ensuring durability of the constructions for years.

Dr. Fixit is a brand product of Pidilite Industries Ltd (PIL), an Indian company in the field of consumer products especially chemicals.

The other brands of the PIL include Fevicol, Fevicyrl, Fevikwik, Acron, Steelgrip, Ranipal and M-seal.

Repo auction

UNB, Dhaka

The Reverse Repo auction of Bangladesh Bank for commercial banks and financial institutions was held here yesterday.

Four bids of 1-day tenor amounting to Tk 250.00 crore were received and accepted.

The rate of interest against the accepted bids was 2.50 percent per annum, said a press release of the central bank.