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Star BUSINESS

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FTA can boost trade with Bangladesh: Thai envoy

Three-day Thai fruit festival begins

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Thai Ambassador in Dhaka Pithak Phrombubpha yesterday said trade between Thailand and Bangladesh can make significant improvement through a bilateral free trade agreement (FTA).

He said Thai products now find it difficult to make entry into Bangladesh market on high duty.

"But once FTA is signed between the two nations, products of both the countries will reach the consumer segment of the market," the Thai ambassador said.

His observations came during the inaugural ceremony of a three-day Thai fruit festival that started at

superstore Agora's Gulshan and Dhanmondi outlets yesterday.

The Office of Commercial Affairs of Royal Thai Embassy, Dhaka in collaboration with Agora, a sister concern of Rahimafrooz Group, organised the festival.

Speaking at the event, the ambassador said the government and the private sector of Thailand have joined hands to conduct research to improve the quality of Thai fruits.

As a result Thai fruits are becoming popular among world consumers, he added.

The ambassador said this festival is one of the activities of Thai government to promote Thai fruits in

Bangladesh.

The exhibitions like this one have an importance, which will strengthen the bilateral trade relation between the two countries," he hopped.

Speaking at the function, Niaz Rahman, managing director of Agora, said, Thai fruits provide a unique opportunity for local consumers to taste Thai fruits.

Different fruits such as tamarind, rambutan, longan, mangos teen, green mango and honey dew melon are put on display at the festival.

Another three-day Thai fruit festival will begin on Sunday at Sonargaon hotel in Dhaka.

Ceramic ware can fetch \$100m by '08, industry owners say

UNB, Dhaka

Export income from ceramic wares can be boosted above US\$ 100 million annually by 2008 from last fiscal year's turnover of US\$ 28 million if this industry is designated as a 'thrust sector' in the government's industrial policy.

Leaders of Bangladesh Ceramic Ware Manufacturers Association pointed out this to Industries Minister Motiur Rahman Nizami during a meeting on 'problems and prospects of ceramic industry' at the ministry yesterday.

Association President Rashed Moudud Khan led a delegation at the meeting that included its Vice president MH Khan, General Secretary Lutfur Rahman and members Meer Nasir Hossain, SM Mahbub Alam and Moinul Islam.

The association leaders described present status of the industry, demand of ceramic products on the world market, product quality and value addition.

After meeting local market demand Bangladesh exports the ceramic products to more than 100 countries, the meeting was told.

The ceramic ware manufacturers focused on the importance of ceramic industry amongst the non-traditional export sectors and said due to better quality, Bangladeshi ceramic wares were able to 'create a big demand on the world market'.

For exploiting the potential of this sector in future, the association leaders urged the minister to incorporate this industry in the thrust-sector section of the Industrial Policy.

Shop owners observe one-hour token strike

Protest VAT officials' authority to arrest dodgers

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Shop owners in Dhaka city kept their shutters down for an hour yesterday to protest the government decision to entrust the junior ranking VAT officials with the authority to arrest anyone from the spot on charge of evading value-added tax.

The shop owners and employees

staged peaceful demonstration in front of their shops holding black flags and banners during the token protest organised by Dhaka Metropolitan Shop Owners Association (DMSOA) from 12 noon.

Hela Uddin, president of the DMSOA, demanded immediate cancellation of the VAT officials' authority and said they will go for

greater programme if the government does not fulfill their demand by Saturday.

The shop owners demand VAT collection in annual package system as they think it is virtually impossible to pay VAT for and keep account of the sale of each and every product especially in the small shops.

Central bonded warehouse to hurt textile sector: BTMA

BSS, Dhaka

The textile sector is ready to face the challenges of upcoming globalisation with the help of government policies but the proposed central bonded warehouse will throw it to doldrums, said Chairman of the Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA) MA Awal.

"If government continues its support and refrains from taking any step like setting up proposed central bonded warehouse (CBW), the textile sector will be able to add more foreign exchanges to the national exchequer," he said.

Talking to the news agency, Awal said there is a bright prospect for Bangladesh textile products that are now taking off to a global mar-

ket of over 350 billion US dollars due to the government's policies since 1992.

He said the textile industry, being the country's largest manufacturing sub-sector, accounts for five percent of GDP, 40 percent of manufacturing value additions and 77 percent of total foreign exchange earnings.

Currently, it provides employment for about four million people including 1.5 million in RMG industries and 0.28 million in the primary textile industry, he added.

Awal said the BTMA has 626 members all over the country. Of them, 176 are yarn manufacturers, 380 fabric manufacturers and owners of 70 textile product processing units with a total invest-

ment of about two billion dollars.

The BTMA member-mills now are contributing about 40 per cent to the country's export earnings of five billion US dollars on account of RMG, he claimed.

The BTMA chief said the country would face a razor-edge competition with other countries like China, India, Pakistan, Thailand and Indonesia that have stronger bases in textile products.

He said these countries will be capable of harnessing every possible opportunity to raise their exports by their own supply chain using mostly indigenous materials. This will allow them to stay in competition in the ensuing free market with a better position than Bangladesh.

Siemens introduces two 'intelligent' cellphone sets

M ABDUR RAHIM back from Singapore

In its pursuit to become global leader, Siemens recently launched two 'intelligent' mobile handsets which the German electronic giant bills as a complete solution to users' communication, business and entertainment needs.

Accomplished with integrated VGA camera, colour display, video player and recorder, the 'have it all' handsets-- CFX65 and SL65 -- are due to hit European and Asian markets in August and September this year.

German electronic heavyweight Siemens formally launched the products at a grand function last month at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in Singapore on the sidelines of CommunicAsia, Asia's largest IT exhibition.

Senior Siemens executives said the handsets have all the features evolved so far in mobile technology. They said the company will use these high-tech handsets to acquire highest share in the fiercely competitive handset market.

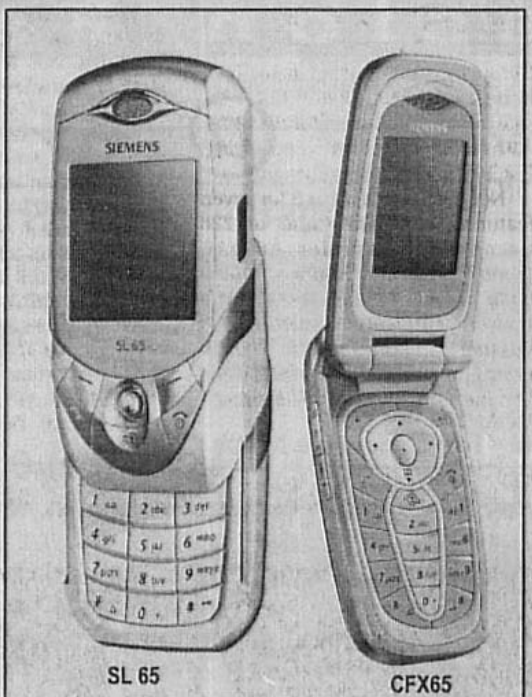
The German corporate entity that generated 10 billion euro last year from its handset segment targets younger generation and businesspeople, giving the new handsets a blend of eye-catching and iconic design and cutting-edge technology.

Addressing the launching ceremony, Senior Vice-President (Global Sales) of Siemens Mobile Phones Martin Jakob Furuseth said, "We are determined to improve our market position. We are already leaders in product quality and we hope to sustain that image."

Talking on the challenges of innovation, he said, "We were the first to bring out the GSM colour display, Java-enabled fashion mobile phones. So, our technical excellence is undisputed."

He further added that even two three years back, Siemens Mobile was very much Europe-centric. But besides focusing on Asian markets, the company now is expanding towards the US and African markets to bring worldwide acceptability of its brand.

Of the two flagship products, the Siemens CFX65 is customised for the younger generation. Lightweight and equipped with easy-to-use multimedia features such as MMS, EMS and email, the flip-phone has a VGA camera, integrated LED flash and even a emergency torch for people with jumpy lifestyle. Numerous Java applications and pre-installed games have room for adequate entertainment.



SL 65

CFX65

On the other hand, with slider keypad and video-taking capabilities, the Siemens SL65 is a fusion of high-calibre technology and design. With an integrated VGA camera, a brilliant colour display, a video player and recorder, it is available in two colour schemes - ebony and ivory. Its integrated VGA camera with 5x digital zoom allows users to record and playback films that can be viewed on a high-resolution colour display or sent via MMS or email. This mobile is ideally suited for high-flying executives as it has numerous business functions.

Executive Vice-President of Siemens Mobile for Asean, India and Pacific Joe Weller expressed hope that these top-range products would be greeted well by the technology and fashion savvy mobile users of Bangladesh and help enhance the brand image of Siemens Mobile in the fast-growing market with 2.3 million subscribers.

Winners of Meril soap lottery get prizes

Square Toiletries Limited handed over the prizes of Meril Beauty Soap, Baishakhi Lottery on Monday in Dhaka among the winners, says a press release.

Md Mahamudul Haque, general manager of Square Toiletries Ltd, distributed the awards among the winners.

Executives of sales and marketing department of the company were also present at the ceremony.

The lottery draw was held on May 29, 308 people out of 1 lakh participants were awarded.

Janata Bank gets The Banker Award 2004

Janata Bank has been awarded as 'The Bank of the year 2004 in Bangladesh' by a London based financial magazine 'The Banker' of the Financial Times Group for the second consecutive year.

The award will be officially handed over on September 7 in London, says a press release.

In 2003, the bank's return on assets was 1.36 percent and return on investment was 6.47 percent.

Most of the key financial indicators of the bank showed a positive improvement during the year.

Software piracy costs Asia more than \$7.5b in lost revenues

AFP, Singapore

Software piracy cost the Asia Pacific more than 7.5 billion US dollars in lost revenues last year, an association of software manufacturers said Wednesday.

Asia rated second highest in the world for lost revenues behind Western Europe, which gave up 9.6 billion dollars in potential legal sales, the Business Software Alliance (BSA) said.

In terms of piracy rates, the region placed fourth globally with 53 percent of the software installed in computers illegally acquired.

Vietnam and China ranked as the biggest individual culprits worldwide, with piracy rates of 92 percent. Indonesia had the fourth highest piracy rate at 88 percent, behind Ukraine on 91 percent.

The piracy rate worldwide in 2003 was 36 percent, said the BSA, which counts some of the biggest software companies as its members, including Microsoft, Adobe, McAfee and Sybase.

BSA said no meaningful comparison could be made with 2002 as last year's study was expanded to include major software segments including operating systems, consumer software and local market software.



PHOTO: PIB

Prime Minister and Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecneec) Chairperson Khaleida Zia presides over the Ecneec meeting held at the NEC auditorium in Dhaka yesterday.

Ecneec okays Tk 1,275cr development projects

UNB, Dhaka

Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecneec) has approved 12 development projects, mainly in infrastructure sector, with an outlay of Tk 1,275 crore, including Tk 753 crore in project aid.

The approval was given at an Ecneec meeting held at the NEC auditorium yesterday with Prime Minister and Ecneec Chairperson Khaleida Zia in the chair.

The approved projects include construction of a bridge on Chittagong-Kaptai road over the Halda river, construction, expansion and development of platform

sheds at Dhaka railway station, completion of unfinished construction works on Byguni-Durgahata road, including two bridges on it, construction of Muktarpur bridge on Dhaka-Munshiganj road over the Dhaleswari river and development of Bogra-Sariakandi road, improvement of interim water supply under a crash programme in Khulna city and development of infrastructure in greater Kustia district, setting up of regional training centres of Bangladesh Krishi Shiksha Pratisthan at Sylhet, Barisal, Khulna and Chittagong divisions, construction of bus and truck terminals at

Paturia ferry ghat and setting up of a 150-MW combined cycle power station in Sylhet and building up transmission systems for it.

Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman, LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Industries Minister Motiur Rahman Nizami, Communications Minister Nazmul Huda, Agriculture Minister MK Anwar, Shipping Minister Akbar Hossain, Post and Telecommunications Minister M Aminul Haq, Education Minister Osman Faruq and state ministers concerned were present in the meeting.

BKMEA asks govt to allow yarn import thru' Benapole

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Knitwear manufacturers have again urged the government to allow yarn import through Benapole land port which they said will help cut their production cost and thus give them a competitive edge in the quota-free market.

At a meeting with Textile and Jute Minister Shajahan Siraj on Tuesday, they said the land port at the Indian border should be kept open for import of yarn only for using in the processing of export-oriented knitwear products.

As the knitwear exporters are losing competitiveness for high price of yarn, they wanted assurance from the government to get yarn at international market price.

"This is necessary for cutting

production costs as well as the lead time for export," Fazlul Hoque, president of Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA), said during the meeting with the minister.

"We have to purchase yarn at a price 20 percent higher than that in India," Hoque said. "For this, we will not be able to compete in the international market after this year," he said referring to the tough competition ahead in the quota-free regime.

The BKMEA president apprehended that the knitwear exporters may lose international buyers gradually if the problems are not solved immediately.

Average price of a kg of yarn in Bangladesh is now US\$ 2.80 while it is \$2.30 in India. But the Indian exporters can buy it at a subsidised

price of \$ 2.10. The production cost of a T-shirt in Bangladesh is 20 percent higher than that of India.

The country's spinning millers however argue that yarn import through land port will wreck local spinning industry and encourage illegal import of yarn for which the government had to ban its import through Benapole land port.

Refuting the argument the BKMEA president said most of the yarn smuggling cases were detected at Burimari land port, not at Benapole.

The BKMEA also welcomed the National Co-ordination Council's (NCC) recommendation for setting up central bonded warehouse, a long-drawn demand of apparel exporters, and urged the government to implement the suggestion.

The minister said the national economy will be badly affected if the apparel industry continues to suffer problems. So it is necessary to take a decision immediately by protecting the interest of both knitwear manufacturers and textile millers.

Habibur Rahman, first vice-president of BKMEA, Abu Ahmed Siddiqi, second vice-president, Abdur Rashed, third vice-president, and Abdur Rahman, vice-president (finance), were present at the meeting.

The knitwear sector in the first ten months of the last financial year fetched \$1669.10 million. In FY 2002-2003, the sector earned \$1653.83 million from export, which is 25.25 percent of the country's total export.

Petrobangla to be further strengthened, PM tells parliament

UNB, Sangsad Bhaban

Prime Minister Khaleida Zia yesterday said in parliament that the state-run Petrobangla would be further strengthened, according to necessity, for future exploration of gas in the country.

Replying to a supplementary question from Maj (ret'd) Manjur Kader (BNP-Pabna) during the PM's question hour, she further told the House that the government would also welcome foreign gas exploration companies if they come forward.

"We've plans to explore gas with our own money," Khaleida added.

The prime minister said that Petrobangla has already done some good jobs.

Replying to identical questions from another two lawmakers, she said gas is a very precious resource and this natural resource should be utilised after examining its commercial viability.

Stressing utilisation of gas in mills, factories and industries, she said that if gas is used only for household purpose, it would not be viable; rather, it would mean wastage.

The prime minister, however, assured that gas would be supplied to various places in Barisal and

Khulna after a decision was taken on examination of the quantity needed.

About Petrobangla, she said the government has not yet taken any decision regarding turning state-owned Petrobangla into a holding company.

Khaleida mentioned the formation of an independent Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission to look after, among other things, production of electricity, transmission of gas resources and petroleum products, bringing transparency in management, fixing tariff and protecting consumers' interest.

Besides, she said that the Petrobangla has been vested with power under the purview of Company Law 1994 to run the board of directors of various companies under Petrobangla relating to exploration, discovery, lifting, production, transmission and distribution of gas. As a result, it added new dimension to the work of the companies engaged in the gas sector.

The prime minister told the House that increasing the scope of work of Bangladesh Petroleum Exploration Company (BAPEX), a company under Petrobangla, for exploration, discovery and production of gas, was under consideration of the government.

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