

Strike paralyses Mongla Port

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

A strike, called by stevedores and C & F Agents, has paralysed Mongla Port.

The dockers and clearing and forwarding agents enforced the strike on Wednesday protesting the shifting of customs office to Mongla from Khulna.

Sultan Hossain Khan, president of Mongla C & F Agents' Association, said 90 percent port users carry out their import or export related activities from Khulna where there are a lot of infrastructure facilities. These facilities are not available at Mongla where C & F agents, in particular, will face manifold problems, he added.

Neither the customs commissioner nor any other officials of the office could be reached over phone despite several attempts for their comment.

INTERCONNECTIVITY

GP, RanksTel sign agreement

GreemPhone (GP) and Ranks Telecom Ltd (RanksTel) recently signed an interconnectivity agreement in Dhaka.

Erik Aas, Managing Director of GP, and A Rouf Chowdhury, chairman of Rangs Group, signed the agreement on behalf of their organisations.

The deal allows both the companies to access to each other's network and share the revenues accordingly, says a press release.

Zakaria Swapan, Chief Operating Officer (COO) of RanksTel, and Erik Aas later exchanged the agreement documents representing their companies.

India VAT strike draws mixed response on day two

AFP, New Delhi

A nation-wide strike called to protest the launch of a Value Added Tax (VAT) across India drew a mixed response on the second day Thursday, with many stores re-opening for business, traders' associations said.

Some markets in the capital New Delhi were back to their usual bustling selves while in others many shops remained shuttered.

"We are totally against VAT," said Sushil Kumar Gupta, a shopkeeper in the upmarket Defence Colony shopping complex in south Delhi.

Microsoft, HP hold seminar on mail-server management

Microsoft and Hewlett-Packard (HP) recently held a seminar on the cutting-edge solution for mail-server management.

The seminar titled 'Best of Breed: MS Exchange on HP Server' was attended by Quazi M Murshed, business development manager of Microsoft Bangladesh Ltd, Rumesa Hussain, business development manager of HP, and Peter Karlsson, enterprise technology strategist of Microsoft Operations Pte Ltd of Singapore, says a press release.

The speakers highlighted end-user benefits, easier management and higher ROI to an audience of technical heads from leading business houses.

JS body rejects BGMEA plea to up labourers' working hour

MPs bash BGMEA as most owners do not pay minimum wage to workers

BDNEWS, Dhaka

Parliamentary standing committee on labour and employment ministry yesterday turned down a proposal of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) to increase weekly working hour for workers to 72 hours from 48 hours.

However, the standing committee formed a sub-committee headed by lawmaker Ali Newaz

Mahmood Khaiyam to prepare a report on the working environment of labourers in the garments factories.

The parliamentary body also bashed BGMEA as most of the owners do not pay the minimum wage of Tk930 a month to workers.

Chairman of the standing committee Mosharraf Hossain Mongu presided over the meeting where Awami League's Shajahan Khan came down heavily on BGMEA for

the attitude of the owners towards the workers, meeting sources said.

He said without ensuring a healthy environment for labourers in the garment industry, the owners are demanding to enhance working hours.

"The garment factories are death-traps, which claimed innumerable lives. Without solving the problems, it is unethical to extend the working hours," he told the meeting.

Bangladesh to attend trade fair in Karachi

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh will attend a trade fair in Karachi, Pakistan in June this year to promote its products.

Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) Vice Chairman Mir Shahabuddin Muhammed yesterday assured the visiting delegation from Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) of the market promotion drive at a meeting at the EPB office.

"The EPB will participate with Bangladeshi products," he said and also assured them of taking a business delegation from Bangladesh to Pakistan.

The 3-day fair titled "My Karachi" is scheduled to begin on June 24.

The KCCI delegation, led by its president Khalid Firoz, requested the EPB vice chairman to organise Bangladeshi manufacturers to participate in the fair, as part of an effort to reduce Bangladesh's trade deficit with Pakistan.

The EPB vice chairman also called upon the KCCI delegation to pursue Pak government to allow duty-free access of Bangladeshi products so that Bangladesh can increase its exports to Pakistan and reduce trade deficit.

Prime Bank declares 40pc bonus share

Prime Bank Limited has declared a 40 percent bonus share for the shareholders of the company.

The stock dividend was declared at the 10th annual general meeting (AGM) of the bank held in Dhaka Wednesday, says a press release.

In the 2004, the bank made a net profit before tax of Tk114.61 crore, registering a growth of 38.22 percent over the last year, the AGM was told, which was presided by Azam J Chowdhury, chairman of the board of directors of the bank.

The bank's deposit rose to Tk2806.92 crore at the end of the year 2004 as against Tk2048.32 crore in 2003 registering an increase of 37 percent while risk asset portfolio increased to Tk2321.97 crore as on 2004 from Tk1649.22 crore in 2002 registering 41 percent increase, the release said.

The foreign exchange business volume also increased by 34 percent to Tk5624.88 crore as on 2004 from Tk1493.08 crore in the preceding year, the release added.

India's ICICI Bank, SEDF sign deal

India's ICICI Bank and SEDF (South Asia Enterprise Development Facility), a multi-donor funded facility established by International Finance Corporation (IFC), have signed deal to offer technical assistance to Bangladesh's financial institutions willing to help Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), says a press release.

Under this initiative, the bank and SEDF will impart training to local financial institutions to enable them to develop the requisite knowledge to build SME portfolios.

Yusuf S Saadat, chief representative, Bangladesh of ICICI Bank, said this collaboration offers an ideal opportunity to ICICI Bank and SEDF to share the best practices and experience with the financial institutions in Bangladesh in providing assistance to the SME sector.



PHOTO: STAR

Commerce Minister Altaf Hossain Choudhury speaks at a seminar on 'Proposed Companies Act 2004: Prospects & Problems' organised by the Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Managers of Bangladesh (ICSMB) in Dhaka Wednesday. Securities and Exchange Commission Chairman Mirza Azizul Islam, Commerce Secretary Siddiqur Rahman, ICSMB President AKA Muqtadir, among others, attended the seminar.

Reform Companies Act for good corporate governance Seminar in Dhaka suggests

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Companies Act should be reformed to fulfil the present needs for ensuring good corporate governance, speakers told a seminar in Dhaka.

"We don't need laws for good people but bad people always find loopholes for manipulation," SEC Chairman Mirza Azizul Islam said speaking as special guest at the seminar on 'Proposed Companies Act 2004: Prospects & Problems' on Wednesday.

Stressing the need for making true financial disclosures and maintaining business ethics, the SEC chairman added that the commission has given extensive comments on the draft Companies Act.

The Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Managers of Bangladesh (ICSMB) organised the seminar at Hotel Purbani.

Commerce Minister Altaf Hossain Choudhury spoke at the seminar as chief guest while Commerce Secretary Siddiqur Rahman was also present.

Speaking at the seminar, commerce minister said a high-powered review committee has completed the first draft of the Companies Act.

Company secretaries' independence needs to be addressed through legal provisions in the Act, he said adding that the ministry has finalised the draft of Chartered Secretaries Act in consultation with many professional bodies including the law ministry and it is now in the cabinet division for approval in principle.

About the proposed Companies Act 2004, Altaf said realising the corporate needs with the change of time, initiative has been taken to

revise it. He mentioned that the old Companies Act 1913 was last revised in 1994.

Some of the important issues regarding the role of Chartered Secretaries have been omitted, which may be reviewed and incorporated, the minister added.

Commerce secretary observed that just having a good piece of legislation is not enough. "Proper enforcement is necessary and our experience says enforcement of law is not satisfactory."

Rahman felt the government should not hurry. "Rather, we should take opinions of different stakeholders in this regard."

In his speech, President of the ICSMB AKA Muqtadir said the existing Companies Act 1994 came into effect replacing the age-old statute the Companies Act 1913, which was long outdated and unfit for the present digital era.

Long before Bangladesh's new enactment, both India and Pakistan have re-framed their relevant statutes back in 1956 and 1984 respectively. And that was not the end, rather they are reviewing their Acts almost every year and in the last two years both the Pakistani and Indian Acts have undergone massive revisions, he mentioned.

"Different provisions in the draft have already created much uproar and anguish among the various stakeholders."

Former president of the institute Muzaffar Ahmed felt that bureaucratic tangle prevails everywhere and without special effort of the ministry concerned, it might take long time to see the light.

Mercantile Bank recommends 25pc stock dividend

Mercantile Bank Ltd has recommended a 25 percent stock dividend for its shareholders for the year that ended on December 31, 2004.

The recommendation was made at a meeting of the Board of Directors on Monday in Dhaka, says a press release.

Chairman of Board of Directors of the bank Md Abdul Jalil MP, directors Dr Toufique Rahman Chowdhury and Md Abdul Hannan, Managing Director Shah Md Nurul Alam and other members of the Board and senior officials of the bank were present at the meeting.

The dividend recommendation will be placed for approval before the bank's 6th annual general meeting scheduled for May 14, 2005.

Bank Asia opens branch at Lohagara, Ctg

Bank Asia opened its new branch at Lohagara in Chittagong on Wednesday.

M Syeduzzaman, chairman of Bank Asia, attended the inauguration ceremony of the branch as chief guest.

It is the 19th branch of the bank and 4th rural branch of the bank.

Managing Director of the bank Syed Anisul Huq presided over the function, says a press release.

Vice Chairman Arifur Rahman, directors Dr Md Shafiuddin Chowdhury, Mohd Safwan Chowdhury and Jahir Uddin and were also present.

Spectacles show kicks off

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

A three-day international spectacles show began in Dhaka yesterday to promote local products and expand export market.

The exhibition titled 'Bangla Optica-2005', the 7th version of the show, was organised by Bangladesh Optical Industries and Traders Association (Boita). The fair is showcasing a variety of optical products of 28 local companies including three foreign companies in 30 stalls.

Commerce Minister Altaf Hossain

Choudhury inaugurated the fair at Hotel Razmoni Ishakha, while Commerce Ministry Advisor Barkat Ullah Bulu was present as special guest.

The organisers, at the inaugural function, urged the government to reduce import duty from 15 percent to 7.5 percent on raw materials of plastic lenses. They also asked the government to increase export cash incentive from the existing 10 percent to 20 percent.

President of Boita Manjurul Hoque Sikder said Bangladeshi companies produce high quality lens

and frames. Local manufacturers last year exported spectacles' frames worth \$1 lakh to South Korea, Nepal, India and Saudi Arabia.

Addressing the function, the commerce minister assured the manufacturers of all possible facilities to promote the industry. He advised them to place their demands to commerce ministry through Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI).

The exposition will remain open to businesspersons from 10:00am to 8:00pm everyday.



PHOTO: PRIME BANK

Azam J Chowdhury, chairman of Prime Bank Limited, delivers his speech at the 10th annual general meeting (AGM) of the bank held in Dhaka Wednesday. The AGM declared 40 percent bonus share for the shareholders.

Imports up 24pc in eight months during FY'04-05

UNB, Dhaka

A boom in capital machinery and intermediate goods pushed up the country's imports 24 percent to US\$9,383 million during July-February period of the current fiscal 2004-05 as compared to the same period of the previous year.

Capital machinery imports grew 62 percent and intermediate goods up 59 percent during the period, according to Bangladesh Bank figures released yesterday.

"It indicates production and export growth in the near future," a senior central bank official told the news agency.

He explained that the import trend might have an adverse impact on the balance of payment situation of the country, but would yield benefit for the economy in the long run.

The official said textile and RMG entrepreneurs might have waited to see the consequences of the post-MFA (multi-fibre arrangement) trade regime and now they are coming forward to open letters of credits (L/Cs) for the import of machinery for textiles and apparels industry.

L/Cs worth \$986 million were opened for import of capital machinery and \$692 million for miscellaneous industrial machinery during the eight-month period.

Major raw material imports included raw cotton and synthetic fibre (\$428 million), yarn (\$307 million), textile fabrics and accessories (\$1,333 million) and pharmaceutical raw materials (\$128 million).

Import of petroleum and petroleum products also increased significantly by 40 percent in the first eight months of the current fiscal,

which was mainly due to price-hike of the items in the international market.

Authorised dealer banks opened L/Cs worth \$1,159 million (equivalent to Tk7,324 crore) in the month of February 2005, showing a 6 percent less import expenditure than that of January 2005.

Import L/Cs opened for food items also increased significantly during the July-February period of FY 2004-05 as compared to the same period of the previous fiscal.

Of them, L/Cs for rice and wheat imports more than doubled to \$301 million and \$331 million respectively while those for sugar stood at \$175 million, onion \$63 million, fresh and dry fruits \$47 million, pulses \$114 million and milk-food \$74 million.



Photo: Bank Asia

M Syeduzzaman, chairman of Bank Asia, inaugurates a new branch of the bank at Lohagara in Chittagong on Wednesday. Among others, Mofidul Islam, TNO of Lohagara, Vice Chairman Arifur Rahman, directors Dr Md Shafiuddin Chowdhury, Mohd Safwan Chowdhury and Jahir Uddin and Managing Director of the bank Syed Anisul Huq were present at the function.