

Mercantile Bank waives interest on loans of RMG entrepreneurs

UNB, Dhaka

Mercantile Bank Limited, a private-sector commercial bank, yesterday announced the waiver of all the interests on loans taken by textile and apparel entrepreneurs.

Awami League General Secretary Abdul Jalil, also the bank's chairman, made the declaration at the closing ceremony of the three-day Bangladesh Apparel and Textile Exposition (Batexpo) in Dhaka.

"You are exempted from paying the interest, but, please, give back the loan money you had taken earlier," he told the apparel exporters.

RMG entrepreneurs at the ceremony hailed the decision with a hail of clapping.

OIC calls for Islamic free trade area

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

The 57-member Organisation of the Islamic Conference on Saturday urged Muslim nations and business leaders to support an Islamic free trade area, saying it was the way forward for economic progress.

The initiative would "enable us to overcome the obstacles and bottlenecks that hinder the development of trade and investment between our countries," OIC secretary general Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu said.

A number of Muslim nations are to sign a protocol on a preferential trading system in November, but that only represents "very modest progress", Ekmeleddin told the World Islamic Economic Forum in a speech read out by another official.

While the share of intra-OIC trade in Muslim countries' overall trade had improved in the last few years from 10 percent in 2000 to 13.5 percent in 2003, it remained low, he said.

"Such a situation is the result of a large number of major obstacles, which impeded the wide expansion of trade and investment, namely tariff, non-tariff and administrative obstacles and lack of communication and transport means and inappropriate financing schemes," he said.

Ekmeleddin warned that Muslim nations would be disadvantaged if they failed to forge multilateral trading alliances.

"The current world conjecture is marked by the increasing emergence of regional groupings where isolated countries cannot survive," he said.

Limo Traders distributor of RanksTel products

Limo Traders Ltd will distribute the products of Ranks Telecom (RanksTel) Ltd, a public switched telephone network (PSTN) operator and concern of Rangs Group, throughout the country.

An agreement to this effect was signed between the two companies recently in Dhaka, says a press release.

Zakaria Swapan, chief operating officer of RanksTel, and Md Altaf Hossain, executive director of Limo Traders, sign the deal on behalf of their companies. Other senior officials from both the sides were also present.

Rapid trade liberalisation costs Bangladesh dearly

Says Tofail as Batexpo-2005 ends

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Former commerce minister Tofail Ahmed yesterday said rapid trade liberalisation has cost Bangladesh dearly as the country has become a market of other nations.

He also said lack of negotiating skills in bilateral trade discussions is hampering Bangladesh's economic growth.

"Our market was rapidly opened to satisfy the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund which was not necessary at all. And we could not pursue our interest properly in the bilateral negotiations," he said while speaking at the closing ceremony of Bangladesh Apparel & Textile Exposition (Batexpo-2005) at

Sonargaon Hotel in Dhaka.

Bangladesh must improve its negotiating skills if it wants to protect its interest at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) where important decisions are taken, determining the fate of many countries.

Blaming the present government for making the commerce ministry an inefficient one, Tofail, who is also the president member of Awami League, said conflicts among the ministers and lack of coordination between ministries will surely have an adverse impact on the country's economy in the coming days.

General Secretary of Awami League M Abdul Jalil also spoke at the function presided over by Bangladesh Garment

Manufacturers and Exporters Association President Annisul Huq.

Jalil blamed the government for gradually withdrawing cash subsidy from readymade garment sector, which is now facing stiff competition in the global market.

Annisul Huq said the two major political parties should sit together, discuss key issues and come to an understanding for the overall benefit of the country.

The BGMEA president reiterated his stance on declaring only Sunday as weekly holiday.

He also urged the Awami League leaders to keep the buses carrying garment workers outside the purview of hartal.

CityCell launches new package

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Mobile phone operator CityCell yesterday announced a new package, which offers no charge for outgoing calls to any CityCell number during its super off-peak hours (11pm to 8am) until March 31 next year.

Other major features of 'Alap Super', a mobile to mobile package, include 300 free SMS and Tk 50 free talk time, Intekhab Mahmud, senior vice president (Marketing) of CityCell, said at a press conference in Dhaka.

It is the first package after CityCell joined hands with telecoms giant Singapore Telecommunications Limited (Singtel), Mahmud added.

This new package will be available in market from today with three handsets priced at Tk 2,499, Tk 3,499, and Tk 4,499.

Outgoing charges of CityCell-CityCell are Tk 1.50 for 30-second and Tk 0.75 for CityCell-One2One mobiles from 8 am to 11 pm.

In case of other operators the call rate is Tk 2 for 30-second from 8 am to 11 pm and Tk 1 during super off peak hours.

CityCell officials also said they eye 3.5 million subscribers' base by the end of 2006.

Berger young architects' award handed over

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The prize giving ceremony of second "Berger Young Architects' Award 2005" was held in Dhaka on Thursday.

Architect Mohammad Zakiul Islam has won the Berger Young Architects' Award 2005 for designing the Ferdous Nasir Charity Clinic located in Gazipur.

Khadem Ali, president of Institute of Architects, Bangladesh (IAB), and Masih UJ Karim, managing director of Berger Paints Bangladesh Ltd, handed over crest, certificate and a cheque for Tk 50,000 to the winner architect. Architect Muzharul Islam received the Lifetime Achievement Award at the function.

"This biennial award, organised with the assistance of IAB, aim at encouraging young architects of Bangladesh," said the Berger Paints Bangladesh MD while speaking at the function.

American Airlines blames fuel prices as services cut

AFP, Washington

American Airlines said Friday that because of "skyrocketing" fuel prices it was suspending 15 round-trip flights and scrapping its service between Chicago and the Japanese city of Nagoya.

Services out of the biggest US carrier's two main hubs at Chicago O'Hare and Dallas/Fort Worth International to other US cities, plus Toronto in Canada, are being scaled back from next Wednesday until October 29.

The service between Chicago and Nagoya in western Japan will be discontinued at the end of October.

American Airlines executive vice president Dan Garton said the suspension of the 15 services in North America would be reviewed at the end of next month based on the price of jet fuel then.

"Jet fuel prices have been rising even faster than crude oil prices for the last year, but it was the 39-percent rise in jet fuel costs in the last month alone that pushed us to make this decision," he said in a statement.

"We have made incredible progress in lowering our operational costs for over two years now. However, skyrocketing fuel costs have eaten up all of those savings and more," he said.

Local float glass factory goes into production

SARWAR A CHOWDHURY, back from Cig

PHP Float Glass Industries Limited, a newly established glass manufacturing company in Chittagong, has started commercial production of glasses with the thickness ranging from 2mm to 12mm.

The Tk 300 crore company sources about 70 percent of the raw materials locally and imports the rest 30 percent materials, mainly chemicals. And it can offer world-class glasses at competitive prices.

PHP Float Glass is the first company in Bangladesh that manufactures 2mm and 12mm float glasses. The float glass company, a concern of PHP Group, is using Chinese Luoyang float glass technology.

Built on around 28 acres of land at Barabkunda in Sitakunda, the modern local glass manufacturing unit went into trial production on June 23 this year and is capable of producing 54,000

tonnes of glass per year, enough to meet the annual glass demand of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh now imports float glass, from Sylhet and Comilla," said Shamsul Alam, general manager of PHP Float Glass. The company has also set up a sand-refining unit in Feni where the sands are purified for glass production. Describing the manufacturing process Alam said basic float glass is manufactured by melting silica sand. Besides, ingredients such as soda ash, dolomite, salt cake, feldspar, lime stone and coal powder are added to silica sand to lower the melting temperature of silica and achieve optimal clarity.

Quality control system and clean environmental are integral parts of the production process, Alam said. The company has its own 10-megawatt power plant and a chemical effluent treatment plant, which guards against any environment hazard, the general manager added.

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Meeting the huge response in the domestic market, the company is also eyeing overseas market to export float glasses. "We have already started the process of exporting glasses to Sri Lanka, our first foreign export destination," he added.

Media role seen as key to creating awareness of corporate governance

BDNEWS, Dhaka

Media's role is crucial to create awareness of corporate governance in business houses, speakers said at a roundtable in Dhaka yesterday.

Communications between media and corporate bodies directly and through efficient public relations (PR) or mass communications (MC) personnel can be vital to ensure good governance and human rights, they told the roundtable titled "Corporate Governance: Bridging Corporate Sector and Media".

Management and Resources Development Initiative (MRDI), a non government organisation (NGO), in collaboration with Manusher Jonno, another NGO, organised the roundtable, which was participated by business

association leaders, chief executives/representatives of insurance, mobile phone operators, cement and hospitality companies and newspaper editors.

Moazzem Hossain, editor of the Financial Express, moderated the roundtable where Jamal Uddin Ahmad, managing director of Jaroms Industries Ltd, said corporate social responsibility (CSR) is needed much to serve the humanity.

Media must be on the front line in disseminating impartial news for ensuring transparency in the corporate sector, said Ahmed, also a former deputy prime minister.

Devan Sultan Ahmed, vice president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), said businesspeople should focus mainly on business, not politics.

Mohiuddin Babar, communication manager of Lafarge Surma Cement Ltd, said media have a watchdog role to ensure accountability and transparency of corporate sector. Media also need to improve their capacity to play the watchdog role, he added.

Nasir A Choudhury, managing director of Green Delta Insurance Company Ltd, said government should introduce incentives to those companies, which comply with corporate social responsibilities.

Shyamal Dutt, acting editor of the daily Bhorer Kagoj, said business interest of media overshadows their role towards social responsiveness. He also stressed the need for maintaining good governance in media to ensure their accountability.



PHOTO: STAR

Former commerce minister and president member of Awami League Tofail Ahmed speaks at the closing ceremony of Bangladesh Apparel & Textile Exposition (Batexpo-2005) yesterday in Dhaka.

Task force needed to up trade between Dhaka, Kathmandu

Seminar told

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

As the trade volume between Bangladesh and Nepal has decreased drastically over the decade, both the countries should form a task force to identify the hurdles and take possible measures to overcome those, businesspeople of the two countries said on Friday.

They said both the countries should try to resolve the problems relating to cargo movement and quarantine with Indian involvement, as the countries need to use Indian soil while transporting goods by road.

"The bilateral trade, which amounted to US\$ 13 million in fiscal year 1994-95, decreased to US\$ 2.56 million in FY2004-05," said Mir Nasir Hossain, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), according to a report appeared in Kathmandu Post yesterday.

He was speaking at a seminar on 'Bangladesh-Nepal Economic Relations: Prospects and Problems' held in Kathmandu on Friday.

Bangladeshi embassy in Nepal and

Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) of Bangladesh organised the seminar on the sidelines of the five-day 'Bangladesh Single Country Fair 2005' that began Thursday at the Birendra International Convention Centre (BICC).

Fifty-one Bangladeshi companies are displaying handicrafts, cosmetics, ceramics, clothes, jute products, melamine, stationery, furniture and satellite communication products at 55 stalls in the fair.

The FBCCI president pointed out that both the countries should initiate serious steps to start the Dhaka-Kathmandu direct bus service to promote bilateral trade.

South American trade summit founders

AFP, Brasilia

A South American trade summit barely got off the ground Friday, with the absence of key leaders and the opposition of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez.

Leaders of South American nations, minus Argentina, Colombia, Guyana, Uruguay and Suriname, met in hopes of mounting a South American free-trade zone, but whose structure Chavez criticized as merely a union of Mercosur and the Andean Community, both free-trade areas.

"Those institutions need to disappear," Chavez said. "If we do not do that, we are doing nothing."

"There are many potential business areas where the two countries can cooperate more extensively to up the volume of bilateral trade. Bangladesh can export pharmaceuticals, jute, fertilizer, frozen foods, handicrafts, woven garments and dry cell while Nepal's export potential lies in carpets, woolen clothes, dairy products, handicrafts and fresh fruits," he said.

Humayun Kabir, Bangladeshi ambassador to Nepal, said the governments and the private sectors should work together to remove the roadblocks that have come on the way to strengthen economic relations.

Mostafa Mohiuddin, acting vice chairman of the EPB, Dhaka, said Bangladesh was eyeing East Asian and Saarc markets in lieu of western ones. "The agreement on Safta will be a milestone to boost regional trade," he added.

Claiming that the joint venture projects set up in Nepal are successful enterprises, Chandri Raj Dhakal, president of Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI), stressed the need for expanding the areas of joint venture.

Dr Dev Bhakta Shukya, executive director of the Agro-Enterprises Centre of FNCCI, said higher tariff and special duty on Nepalese agriculture products were affecting the Nepal's export to Bangladesh.

Bangladesh has imposed 25 percent tariff on most of the Nepalese agricultural goods while Nepal has imposed only 10 percent tariff on the same category from Bangladesh, he added.



PHOTO: BERGER

Recipients of the Berger architects' award pose for photographs along with the Berger officials at the prize giving ceremony in Dhaka Thursday.



PHOTO: STAR

Intekhab Mahmud, senior vice president (Marketing) of mobile phone operator CityCell, speaks at a press conference in Dhaka yesterday to announce the launch of a new mobile-to-mobile package styled 'Alap Super'.