

# Experts gather in Geneva Oct 24 to talk global textile

## Bangladesh team to highlight progress in unionism, child labour issues

JASIM UDDIN KHAN

Textile industry experts from around the world will gather in Geneva from October 24 to 26 to discuss integrated strategies to deal with the emerging situation in the global textile industry following the MFA phaseout.

Industry sources said participants will discuss policy responses that concern over 40 million workers worldwide and hundreds of thousands of enterprises in the global clothing and textile sector.

A group of Bangladeshi entrepreneurs from Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA) and

Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) is expected to participate in the global meet.

Sources said the meeting will also discuss strategies to improve global governance and cooperation between international organisations in dealing with trade-associated issues and clothing.

A source in the BGMEA said Bangladeshi representatives will describe the advancement achieved so far in trade unionism and child labour issues during the meeting.

"After the MFA phaseout last year, entrepreneurs and workers in the textile and clothing sector are under enormous pressure to produce the

right product at the right price. The meeting will discuss the elements involved in framing strategic and policy responses for the global supply chain," a high official of the ministry said.

The meeting of major textile and apparel industries from importing and exporting countries alike will provide participants with an opportunity to assess the implications for the industry worldwide of negotiations currently underway as part of the new WTO trade round relating to tariff and non-tariff barriers for textile and clothing products.

Around 100 representatives from more than 45 trade associations are expected to attend the international

conference in Geneva.

Delegates to the Geneva conference are expected to present their views and perspectives on market access and associated issues that will have a major impact on the future shape of the world's textile and clothing industries.

The overall picture of the textile industry, in the post MFA environment, is more complex than was earlier expected.

A number of Asian countries that were assumed to be the biggest losers do not appear to do so badly.

With increased competition from Asia, most Latin American textile and clothing producers have also lost market share in recent past.

## US to launch trade offensive in Central America

AFP, Washington

The United States, taking advantage of a newly-approved free trade agreement, begins a commercial offensive in Central America this coming week, prompting concerns that local economies weakened by recent floods could represent easy targets for US corporations.

US Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez will lead a group of 18 American executives, who will explore trade and investment opportunities in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador.

The tour, which kicks off in Guatemala City Monday, will be the first trade mission to the region since the Central American-Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) was signed by US President George W. Bush into law on August 2.

The delegation includes representatives of Ford Motor Company, computer maker Hewlett-Packard, Eastman Chemical Company and Motorola Equipment Manufacturers Association among many others.

"These companies all have one thing in common: They recognize opportunity in Central America, and they are eager to begin doing business in those markets," Gutierrez said in a statement.

"Their interest will mean more investment, more trade, and eventually more new jobs in the United States and in Central America," he added.

The agreement, narrowly approved by the US Congress in July, will immediately lift duties and tariffs on more than 80 percent of US consumer and industrial products sold to the region, creating the second-largest export market for US goods in Latin America.

# BP, HPCL plan \$3b refinery in India

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

India is set to get the first multinational energy company in its oil refining and retail business with the world's largest oil firm British Petroleum (BP) on Thursday signing an agreement with state-owned Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL).

The 50:50 joint venture between BP and HPCL would include a three billion dollar refinery having nine million tonnes per year capacity in Bathinda in Punjab state, development of a green-field refinery or a terminal project on India's east coast and opportunities for HPCL for acquiring refining and marketing assets abroad.

While BP and HPCL would hold 26 percent equity each in the refinery, which is expected to come on steam in 2010, the remaining could be with the financial institutions.

The 285-billion dollar BP has operations in more than 70 countries covering exploration of natural gas, power and renewable sources of

energy and refining and marketing.

The HPCL had earlier been in talks with Petronas of Malaysia and Saudi Aramco of Saudi Arabia to pick up interests in those countries.

The agreement between BP and HPCL marks the return of MNCs in Indian refining and marketing segments. The British energy major will be required to put in Rs 2,000 crore to be eligible to enter the retail marketing in India.

BP group's Chief Executive Lord John Browne said his company's perception about India's oil and gas potential has changed. "India is one of the fastest growing energy markets in the world and we have been evaluating a range of potentials where BP might become involved. These potential areas include exploration, production, refining and marketing."

When asked about government subsidies and price controls on petroleum products in India, he said "We have taken the decision to invest in India after examining all these issues."

"We are looking at long term partnerships. As a first step, we are exploring opportunities in the downstream sector under the brand of HPCL," Browne said.

The BP's talks in the past with state-owned Indian Oil for stakes in two separate refiners in India had failed when the British energy major declined access to Indian companies to any of its markets or stake in oilfields as part of agreement.

Meanwhile, Petroleum Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar indicated talks were on between BP and India's state-owned energy behemoth Oil and Natural Gas Corporation for partnership in collaboration both in India and abroad.

The two companies are understood to be in talks to explore an oil basin in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh and refining sector in India and abroad.

The BP is reportedly also planning to invest in developing alternative sources of energy in India.

## Banglalink mobile phone fair begins

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

A three-day Banglalink mobile phone fair that began at Bashundhara City shopping mall in Dhaka yesterday received huge response.

People, especially youths, were seen waiting in queues at level Seven of the shopping mall.

Organised by mobile phone operator Banglalink, total eight dealers of the company are participating in the fair, which is open to all from 10am to 10pm.

"Banglalink itself does not offer any special package in the fair. It is a fair of our dealers who are offering different packages," said an official of Banglalink.

# EU must improve offer on farm market access: US

REUTERS, Washington

US Trade Representative Rob Portman said Friday the European Union must improve its offer on access to agricultural markets if World Trade Organisation talks are to make headway.

Agreement among the 148 member countries on a deal to cut trade-distorting subsidies and tariffs on agriculture is seen as key if a WTO ministerial meeting this December is to finalise a blueprint for lowering global trade barriers.

"We will not be able to get to services or industrial tariffs or development unless we can untie the Gordian knot of agriculture. And the only way to untie it is for the European Union now to come forward with a substantial market access proposal," Portman told reporters.

Asked if it was realistic to expect the EU to improve its offer, given tensions between member states over Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson's existing proposal, Portman said: "I believe it's very realistic. I do hope that member

states understand the significance of the current situation."

He urged the EU to present an improved offer when negotiations resume in Geneva next week.

However, France, the staunchest defender of the EU's generous subsidies to farmers and its high tariffs on imports of farm produce from outside the bloc, has called a high-level EU meeting on Tuesday to discuss the WTO talks. Paris is expected to vent its fears that Europe is offering too much on agriculture in order to secure a global trade deal.



PHOTO: NCC BANK

Wazhiullah Bhuiyan, chairman of National Credit and Commerce (NCC) Bank Ltd, and BR Shetty, chief executive officer and managing director of UAE Exchange, exchange documents after signing an agreement recently in Abu Dhabi. Under the deal, Bangladeshi expatriates will be able to remit money easily and quickly through 'Xpress Money' of UAE Exchange. Other senior officials from both the sides were also present.

# Asian bird flu strain reaches Europe

AFP, Bucharest

A virulent bird flu strain has reached mainland Europe for the first time after killing scores of people in Asia, Romania said Saturday, adding urgency to crisis measures to stop it creating a feared pandemic.

Test results carried out in Britain on samples from Romania confirmed the presence of the lethal H5N1 virus, two days after its detection in Turkey forced governments to ramp up preventive strategies and stockpile anti-viral drugs, while urging people not to panic.

"The virus taken from Ceamurlia de Jos is indeed the H5N1," Romanian Agriculture Minister Gheorghe Flutur said on the Realitatea television station, following an emergency meeting on the bird flu crisis.

The tests were carried out on samples from three dead ducks from the Danube Delta region of Romania, on the Black Sea coast.

While avian influenza primarily affects birds, the H5N1 strain has killed more than 60 people in Southeast Asia since 2003.

The big fear among experts is that H5N1 may mutate, acquiring genes from the human influenza virus that

would make it highly infectious as well as lethal -- possibly killing millions worldwide as the influenza pandemic of 1918 did.

The EU commission has called on governments of the 25-nation bloc to stockpile anti-viral drugs, and said people at risk should ensure they are vaccinated against regular influenza.

On Friday EU veterinary experts demanded action to prevent migratory birds -- which could carry the deadly virus -- coming into contact with poultry or other birds.

The flurry of official advice, and the general anxiety surrounding the outbreaks, sent people flocking to pharmacists in both Turkey and Romania, stripping many stores clean of supplies.

The World Health Organisation has voiced concern about the new outbreaks, but also sought to allay panic.

"The spread of H5N1 to poultry in new areas is of concern as it increases opportunities for further human cases to occur," it said Friday, while stressing that the H5N1 virus "does not spread easily from birds to humans."

## Air India gets govt nod to buy 68 aircraft from Boeing

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

The Indian government has given the go-ahead to state-owned Air India's two separate proposals to acquire 68 aircraft from US plane manufacturer Boeing Corporation.

Indian Civil Aviation Secretary Ajay Prasad told reporters here on Thursday that the Public Investment Board has decided to recommend to the government a proposal to acquire 50 planes for Air India and 18 for its low-cost subsidiary Air India Express.

"The exact amount (for acquiring the aircraft) is going to be looked at and re-worked," he said.

The proposal, endorsed by the Investment Board, will now be put up before the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs for final approval.

In April this year, the Air India Board had approved a proposal to acquire eight Boeing 777-200s (LR), 15 B777-300s (ER) and 27 B787s at a total cost of nearly Rs 30,000 crore. Negotiations for the price between an Air India team and Boeing are on.

## ReadyCash Raffle Draw Winners

The latest ReadyCash Raffle draw took place at ReadyCash Bangladesh office at Dhanmondi on last Saturday, says a press release.

Prizes	Name of Winners	Card No
Life Style-Super Shop/Free Gift Box	Ala Uddin	5047980010036193
China Junction Chinese Restaurant Free Lunch/Dinner for two	Md. Kabir Hossain	5047980000058574
Pallabi Computers-Computer learning Centre/Free Internet Browsing	Sohail Saifidin Sabir	5047980010036152
Step And Shop-Super Store/Free Gift Box	Burhan Uddin	5047980010036264

Winners can collect their prizes from the Executive, Promotion of ReadyCash within 30 days of this news circulation by producing their ReadyCash card transaction vouchers. **ReadyCash encourages its cardholders to read The Daily Star and the Daily Prothom Alo on every Sunday or call our Customer Service at: 8123850, 8130497, and 8125294-7.**