

24 out of 44 Bangladesh missions abroad fall short of export targets

\$4179.61m fetched in Jul-Mar in FY06

MD HASAN

More than half of Bangladesh missions abroad failed to achieve their respective export targets for 11 months of the fiscal 2005-06.

A total of 24 out of 44 Bangladesh missions abroad could not achieve their respective export targets for the July-May period of the last fiscal, according to the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB).

During the period, these 24 missions lagged behind the target of exports worth \$4885 million, fetching only \$4179.61, that is \$705.39 million less.

Besides, eight out of 16 commercial wings in the foreign missions also failed to reach their export targets set for the same period.

However, although 24 missions could not achieve their export targets, export growth of 15 missions including Washington, Paris, Ottawa, Ankara, Islamabad, Beijing, Bangkok, Moscow, Manama, Nairobi, Kuwait, Pretoria, Doha, Manila and Hanoi was higher than that in the corresponding period of the previous year.

The rest 9 missions, including Tehran, Seoul, Canberra, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Tashkent, Thimphu, Katmandu and Muscat completely failed to reach the target set for 11 months for the last fiscal.

A leading businessman of the country said missions' officials are not skilled enough to understand global market trends and they even do not know how to impress the foreign buyers.

"The mission officials also fail to give update information regarding business opportunities of Bangladeshi products in their destinations," he told The Daily Star.

A commerce ministry official attributed failure in promoting country's export in the foreign market to lack of proper training of the mission officials, of whom a major portion were appointed on political consideration.

He also alleged that the missions' officials were not often found co-operating with the country's businessmen if their help sought.

He suggested establishing separate trade facilitation center in every country where Bangladeshis

export most of their products.

As per the data given by the state-run export promotional agency, of the total 44 missions, as many as 20 missions including Berlin, London, Rome, Madrid, Brussels, The Hague, Stockholm, New Delhi, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Singapore, Riyadh, Dubai, Amman, Cairo, Colombo, Rabat, Yongoon, Tripoli and Brunei successfully achieved their target set for the period.

The target for these missions was \$4400.57million whereas they fetched \$5036.44million during the timeframe, that is, \$635.87million more than the target.

From the statistics of mission-wise export target and achievement, it also shows that out of 16 only eight commercial wings achieved the export target and eight commercial wings could not achieve target set for them during the period.

These eight commercial wings are based in Washington, Paris, Ottawa, Beijing, Tehran, Canberra, Moscow and Kuala Lumpur.

Although eight commercial wings could not achieve their export

target but out of them, performance of five commercial wings based in Washington, Paris, Ottawa, Beijing and Moscow was found better than that in the corresponding period of the previous year.

The rest three commercial wings based in Tehran, Canberra, Moscow and Kuala Lumpur fully failed to achieve the target set for the period.

The target set for these unsuccessful commercial wings was \$3992.58million, whereas they fetched \$3876.72 million during the period.

However, the commercial wings in Berlin, London, New Delhi, Brussels, Tokyo, Dubai, Yongoon, and Madrid went ahead of their target of \$3302.39million, earning \$3748.02million during the period.

The actual export earning for the July-May period of FY 2005-06 was \$9410.55 million as against the target of \$9094.51 million, a 3.48 percent higher than the target and 20.89 percent more than that in the corresponding period of the previous year, EPB statistics shows.

SingTel's mobile subscriber base tops 92 million

AFP, Singapore

Strong growth in India and Indonesia helped push Singapore Telecommunications' regional mobile phone user base above 92 million at the end of June, Southeast Asia's biggest phone company said Wednesday.

The company said it added 7.4 million mobile phone subscribers in the three months to June compared with the previous quarter, the highest increase in its history.

On a year-on-year basis, SingTel's mobile users rose 30 percent from 71 million.

The bulk of the growth came at SingTel's associates, Bharti in India and Indonesia's Telkomsel, the company said in a statement.

Bharti's mobile subscribers jumped 88 percent over the year while Telkomsel recorded a 36 percent gain.

SingTel's Australian subsidiary Optus added 8.8 percent year-on-year to bring its overall base to 6.56 million.

At home, SingTel had 1.62 million mobile users compared with 1.55 million a year ago.

SingTel also has stakes in Thailand mobile operator Advanced Info Service (AIS), Globe Telecom in the Philippines and in Pacific Bangladesh Telecom Limited (PBT).

The firm is due to release its first-quarter to June earnings on Thursday.

Southeast Asia key to Japanese automakers' strategy

ANN/ THE DAILY YOMIURI

In an effort to capitalise on improved quality at production plants overseas, Japan's major automakers have started to attach greater importance to the opportunities offered by South-East Asia.

An example of this strategy is the speeding up of efforts to adopt an integrated system covering development, production and distribution in the key markets of the Association of South-East Asian Nations.

Japanese manufacturers see the acceleration of Asean moves to conclude free trade agreements with countries including Japan—a Japanese-Malaysian FTA came into effect on July 13—as an opportunity to focus on the region in an effort to secure a larger global market share.

On July 20, Nissan Motor Co. announced a plan to set up an export base for automobile parts near the Thai port of Laem Chabang, 130 kilometers southeast of Bangkok.

Components manufactured by 94 makers in Thailand will be shipped abroad with the Tiida compact model's body panels, with interior parts being exported to Mexico and engines parts to South Africa for local assembly.

The Thai base is part of Nissan's global strategy to include Asean countries in its component supply network, said Yasuaki Hashimoto, corporate vice president of Nissan, during a press conference in Singapore.

The export base is scheduled to become fully operational in January 2007, handling an estimated 300 million dollars worth of shipments per year, the second largest amount for Nissan, after Japan.

Nissan also plans to build a similar base in Indonesia in August 2007.

Mitsubishi Motors Corp., meanwhile, last year fully updated its Thai-centric pickup truck, and is now exporting the new model, Triton, from Thailand.

In early July, Toyota Motor Corp. established a production support company in Thailand manned by a Japanese task force with the goal of improving the speed and efficiency of individual production companies in Asia.

from traditional Chinese pig breeding and vegetable growing. China already has many small businesses in Siberia, on the borders of its territory, and also has a project to exploit one million hectares of forest in the western Siberian region of Tioumen. The Asian giant is also eyeing up immense hydrocarbon resources in the region that it would like to exploit. Concerns that fighting in the area might spark a wider conflict in the

ICB AMCL dividends on mutual, unit funds okayed

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

ICB Asset Management Company Ltd (AMCL), a subsidiary of Investment Corporation of Bangladesh (ICB), has declared dividends on its two mutual funds and two unit funds for the financial year 2005-2006.

The ICB AMCL declared 16 per cent dividend on the ICB AMCL First Mutual Fund while Tk 12 per unit for ICB AMCL Unit Fund, six per cent for ICB AMCL Islamic Mutual Fund and Tk 9 per unit (including Tk 4.50 paid for the 1st half of FY 2005-2006) for ICB AMCL Pension Holders Unit Fund.

The dividends were approved at a meeting of the Board of Directors of the company held in Dhaka on Monday, says a press release.

Md Fayekuzzaman, chairman of the company, presided over the meeting, which was attended by, among others, Dina Ahsan, chief

executive officer of ICB AMCL.

In FY 2005-2006, the ICB AMCL First Mutual Fund, ICB AMCL Unit Fund, ICB AMCL Islamic Mutual Fund and ICB AMCL Pension Holders' Unit Fund earned net profit of Tk 175.95 lakh, Tk 459.86 lakh, Tk 61.01 lakh and Tk 55.63 lakh respectively.

As on June 30 this year the above funds had net asset value (NAV) of Tk 123.14, Tk 122.41, Tk 102.23 and Tk 86.16 per unit respectively against face value of Tk 100.00 each.

The release said the ICB AMCL was established as part of restructuring programme of ICB under Capital Market Development Program initiated by the Bangladesh government and Asian Development Bank (ADB). The company became operational from July 1, 2002 by a government gazette notification.

Women entrepreneurs need incentives

Workshop told

As women entrepreneurs in the country are lagging behind in export sector, congenial environment and adequate incentives should be ensured for them to augment their performance in the sector, speakers at a workshop suggested.

For overall economic well-being of the country, women's participation in export sector is essential, Mirza Nurul Ghani, president of the NASCIB, said at the workshop, adding that they should be allowed to play their desired role in the sector.

National Association of Small and Cottage Industries of Bangladesh (NASCIB) organised the workshop on 'Access to Export Market for Women Entrepreneurs' in Dhaka on Monday, says a press release.

Joint Secretary (Export) of Commerce Ministry Md Ghulam Hussain and former director of the BSCIC M Azizur Rahman, among

others, were present at the workshop, which was chaired by the NASCIB president and attended by around 40 women entrepreneurs.

Ghulam Hussain advised the women entrepreneurs to produce quality goods of improved design to compete in the export market in the context of free market economy.

He urged the NASCIB to submit a project to a donor for capacity building of the association and assured it of giving required support in this regard.

Azizur Rahman also emphasised the need for producing quality goods, reasonable pricing and timely delivery of the products to the customers to gain access to the export market.

He advised the NASCIB to set up display centres for products of its members and participate in trade fairs at home and abroad.

Australia eyes FTA talks with Japan

AFP, Tokyo

Australia hopes to start negotiations next year on a free trade agreement (FTA) with its largest market Japan, Foreign Minister Alexander Downer was quoted as saying Wednesday.

Japan, which is famous for protecting its agricultural sector, had earlier expressed reluctance at a trade pact, believing it would favor Australia.

"Australia hopes to start official negotiations on an FTA next year," Downer told Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Aso, as quoted by a Japanese official privy to their talks.

"It is possible to proceed with negotiations while paying consideration to sensitive issues for both countries," Downer said.

Japan during an April 2005 visit by Prime Minister John Howard agreed only to a two-year feasibility study on a free trade agreement -- not actual negotiations.

Aso said he was willing to move more quickly with the feasibility study but did not say whether Japan would open FTA negotiations with Australia.

"The economic relationship between Japan and Australia is very important and this should be

strengthened. And the feasibility study should be sped up," Aso was quoted as saying.

But he added: "Japan's agriculture sector's liberalization has been gradually proceeding step by step. This sensitivity needs to be considered."

By contrast, Australia last year agreed to open FTA talks with China in first-of-a-kind negotiations between Beijing and a developed country.

Japan has been increasingly pursuing free trade pacts seeking to secure access to raw materials and markets for its exports.

It has stepped up negotiations amid a stalemate in global trade liberalization talks, which collapsed last month.

Japan's first FTA, with Singapore, took effect in late 2002 and Japan has since agreed on deals with Mexico, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines.

It has ongoing negotiations with South Korea, Indonesia and the 10-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) as a whole.

Mahathir wants ban on dollar

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia's former premier Mahathir Mohamad has called on the world to ban transactions in US dollars and British pounds as a way to stop Israel's military campaign in the Middle East.

"The destruction and killings by Israeli terrorists would not be possible without the support and collusion of the United States of America and Europe," he said in a statement.

"The world must therefore condemn all three and act against them. The oil-producing countries can stop these atrocities by stopping all transactions in US dollars or British pounds," he said.

Mahathir, well-known for his enmity towards Israel and the West, said the United States would stop the violence if it was rendered poverty-stricken and "not able to finance war."

Mahathir also argued that economic chaos from the move would be worth the effort.

"I appeal to the world to take this simple action. Reject the dollar and the pound," he said.

"There will be economic turmoil for the whole world. But this is a price we must be prepared to pay. It would be temporary."

Mahathir was a staunch supporter of the Palestinian cause during his 22 years in power and regularly outraged Israel with incendiary comments about Jews.

Malaysia, a mainly Muslim country, has strongly condemned Israel's military campaign in Lebanon and Gaza as excessive, and will host an emergency meeting of Muslim countries on Thursday to discuss the crisis.

Ceiling on Cash sales in Zimbabwean shops

AFP, Harare

Zimbabwe's central bank has barred shops from receiving cash payments for goods worth over 400 US dollars as it battles an inflation rate of nearly 1,200 percent, a state daily said Wednesday.

"The Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) has barred all retail outlets from selling goods worth more than 100 million Zimbabwe dollars in cash to customers using old and new bearer cheques, as the clamp-down against cash holders gathers momentum," The Herald said quoting a statement from the bank.

"Such transactions should now be done through bank transfers and cheques," it said.

On Monday, the central bank slashed three zeroes from its currency to help consumers battling with bundles of money on shopping trips costing them billions and trillions of local dollars.

The central bank also devalued the country's currency by 59.5 percent to 250,000 dollars against the greenback and gave Zimbabweans up to August 21 to hand in their existing bearer cheques for a new series launched on Tuesday.

The daily said the central bank issued the directive as money launderers, selling foreign currency on the black market at 550,000 local dollars to the greenback, had turned to shopping in supermarkets to avoid state investigators probing illegal deals.



Janata Ins chairman re-elected

Abdul Gaffar Chowdhury has been re-elected chairman of Janata Insurance Company Ltd, says a press release.

A renowned industrialist, Chowdhury is a former sponsor-director of United Commercial Bank Ltd and chairman of Sagar Foods Ltd. He is the managing director of Marine Foods Ltd, Quality Stationary Ltd and Seagold Aqua Culture Ltd and a director of Elite

Int'l medical expo begins in Ctg today

With a view to introducing modern healthcare facilities to people, a three-day Chittagong International Medical Exhibition begins today.

Former commerce minister Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury MP is expected to inaugurate the show styled 'ChiMexpo-2006' at Hotel Agrabad in the port city.

Triune Exhibition and Event Management Services is organising the exposition, which will remain open for all from 10am to 7.30pm everyday without any entry fee, says a press release.

Twenty healthcare providers and related companies from four countries, including host Bangladesh, will take part in the show.

The participants include Parkway Healthcare Information Centre, National Healthcare Group, KK Women's and Children's Hospital, Singapore Health Services and Raffles Hospital of Singapore, Bangkok Hospital, Bumrungrat Hospital of Thailand, Thakur Pukur Cancer Hospital, Woodlands Medical Centre, Bhagirthi Neofia Woman and Child Care Centre, Wockhard Hospital, BM Birla Heart Research Centre and Calcutta Medical Research Institute of India, and Otobi Ltd, Labaid Cardiac Hospital, Brac Bank, Navana Furniture, Softalk Online, Dalla Medical Centre and Bangladesh Medical Directory.

Seminars on 'Cancer Issues' and 'Infertility Management' will be held on the sidelines of the show while there will be a patient testimonial session organised by Singapore's healthcare providers.

\$350m ADB loan for Indonesia gas project

AFP, Manila

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) announced Wednesday it had signed a 350 million-dollar private sector loan to help develop a natural gas project in Indonesia.

The loan to the Tangguh Liquefied Natural Gas Project in Irian Jaya will help in the building and operation of gas production wells, platforms and a liquefied natural gas (LNG) facility, the ADB said in a statement.

The facility will export gas initially to China, South Korea and the West Coast of North America, it said.

"The project encourages clean energy use around the region. At the same time, it will increase revenue flows to the national, provincial and local governments," to help social development, said ADB director-general for private sector projects, Robert Bestani.

"Since this is ADB's first private sector project in Indonesia's oil and gas sector, it has the potential to spur subsequent projects not only in Indonesia but also in the region," the bank said.



PHOTO: UNITREND

Jamilud Din Ahsan, Bangladeshi ambassador to Libya, and Syed Mahmudul Huq, honorary consul of Malta in Bangladesh, met Austin Gatt, minister for Investment, Industry and IT of Malta, recently to discuss mutual cooperation for enhancement of trade and investment between Bangladesh and Malta.

Minister frustrates over less fund for rural ICT centres

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The science and ICT minister has voiced his frustration as ICT centres for the disadvantaged population are yet to be set up in the country's rural areas due mainly to inadequate fund allocation.

"I have been trying for Tk 100 crore for the last five years but I did not get it," Dr Abdul Moyeen Khan said yesterday at a workshop in Dhaka.

He was inaugurating a two-day consultative workshop on 'Establishing Rural ICT Strategy for Bangladesh' organised by Commonwealth Secretariat, a London-based international development organisation, at Brac Centre Inn.

The Commonwealth Secretariat is funding for setting up four rural ICT access centers commonly known as telecentres. Total programme outlay to assist Bangladesh ICT sector is around Tk 20 million.

Professor Arunachalam, a renowned Indian expert in the area of ICT for development and rural telecentres, is working on the project and a company from the UK is assisting him.

The project is aimed at developing an appropriate operating framework that creates an enabling environment for businesses in rural Bangladesh to effectively use ICT as a source of economic activity.

Arunachalam made a presentation on how his country built such centres in the rural areas.

Citing example of updating voter list, the minister explained had there been at least two computers in each union council office across the country, the task could have been much easier.

"If young boys and girls were engaged in this task, they could do it in less than one month," he observed, referring to the expensive budget for updating voter list.

Moyeen Khan said developing countries are facing a serious development divide but intelligent use of information and communication technology can yield digital dividends for millions of poor people in the country.

"There is development divide between the rich and the poor," he observed. "Intelligent use of ICT for the poor will lead to job growth in the country. ICT development, if implemented properly, can create digital dividends for millions of people."

Russian region seeks Chinese farmers to fill workforce gap

AFP, Moscow

The central Russian region of Sverdlovsk is seeking to overcome its lack of agricultural workers by employing farmers from northern China to fill the gap, a local official said Wednesday.

"We asked the Heilongjiang (northern Chinese) province to prepare a cooperation deal with the Sverdlovsk region so that Chinese can come and work on

our uncultivated land," administration spokesmen Anatoly Fioktistov told AFP.

Almost 100,000 hectares (247,000 acres) of abandoned land need to be cultivated in the Sverdlovsk region, he said, adding that if it was left for more than five years, weeds would grow and extra work would be necessary to make it cultivate it again.

Russia would insist that the Chinese farmers "sell their har-

vest locally", Fioktistov said.

The region, with a shrinking population like many others in Russia, has a severe shortage of farmers to work its land, despite a bonus of 1,200 rubles (35 euros, 45 dollars) offered per hectare to each Russian prepared to take up the challenge.

The local government website said that 56 local farm businesses had gone bankrupt and added that the community could benefit