

Star BUSINESS

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Separate bank for RMG sector sought

Bribery still remains hurdle: BGMEA outgoing chief

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A separate bank is needed to facilitate apparels-related export-import process, which would contribute to the rise in ready made garments (RMG) exports, observed the outgoing chief of the apex trade body for the sector.

"If hassle-free export is ensured, the country will soon be able to fetch \$15 billion from the RMG sector whereas the present earning is \$8 billion," S M Fazlul Hoque said yesterday at a luncheon meeting at Hotel Sonargaon where he narrated to the media people the experiences he gathered during his around one-

year tenure as the president of Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

The newly elected office bearers of the BGMEA for the 2006-07 term will formally take over charges within the next week.

The outgoing leader of the RMG makers alleged that bribery by a certain quarter of customs officials remains as a major hurdle to smooth business of the sector.

Although the present government has cracked down on corruption, bribery is yet to be stopped completely in the customs and port offices, Hoque said, adding that

rather the corrupt officials has resorted to a new tactic to charge the exporters a certain amount of money as bribe, which is now made payable either in their houses or at some other secret places.

He said, "This new tactic has been in force for the last two months."

"As a whole, we are falling in a new risk to export our goods to the international market," Hoque lamented, pointing his finger to such bribery.

Vice Presidents Md Lutfor Rahman Matin and Md Sirajul Islam were also present at the function.

TRIPARTITE DEAL ON RMG Proper implementation demanded

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Different NGOs, research organisations and trade unions of the RMG sector yesterday called on the authorities concerned to implement properly and immediately the tripartite agreement signed last year by the government, workers and owners of readymade garment factories.

Make Trade Fair (MTF) Alliance, a platform of non-government organisations (NGOs), and other research organisations and trade unions also demanded appropriate implementation of the labour law formulated last year.

They pressed home the demands at a press conference in Dhaka, saying many a factories still do not comply with the labour law properly.

Although a labour law was formulated and a minimum wage was announced for the RMG workers as per the tripartite agreement, the deal is hardly followed in the factories, said Shirin Akter, president of Karmojibi Nari, an organisation of the working women.

"We have conducted a survey on 20 factories but found slight implementation of the agreement in some factories," she said.

Ten factories among the 20 are providing maternity leave according to the agreement while eight factories do not offer the facility, she said, adding that four factories are providing weekly holiday, while the rest 16 are not doing it.

Labour unrest is rising in some areas due to non-implementation of the agreement, said Executive Director of Karmojibi Nari Rokeya Rafiq.

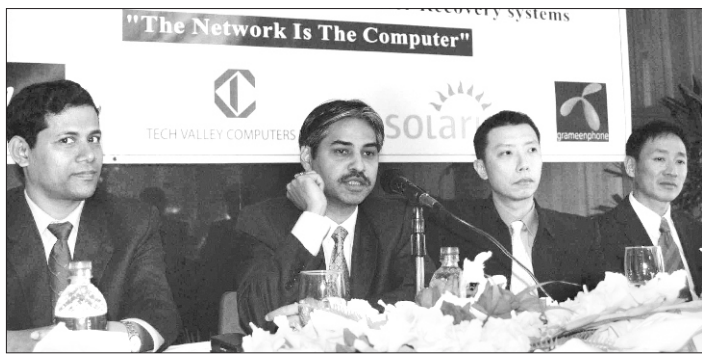


PHOTO: STAR

Tech Valley Chief Operating Officer Asif Mahmud speaks at a press conference in Dhaka yesterday marking the installation of Sun Microsystems servers. General Manager Mamnoor Rashid Shamim and Sun Microsystems Channels Director Alex Tay are also seen.

India offers to share energy technology

Saarc energy ministers meet in Delhi

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

India yesterday offered to share its technologies with other Saarc countries in energy sector projects, particularly in renewable energy segment and suggested country-to-country electricity grid interconnections for free flow of power across the region.

"India has a well-developed energy sector. A large number of our projects and entities can compete with the best in the world. We are in a position to share the state-of-the-art technologies in the energy sector with our neighbours in the region", Indian Power Minister Sushilkumar Shinde said.

Inaugurating the Saarc Energy Ministers' Conference here, he said sharing best practices in proven technologies could be considered in harnessing renewable sources of energy and promoting energy-efficient programmes.

Shinde said Saarc must accelerate its efforts for development of natural gas pipelines within the region and also from outside the region in view of South Asia's heavy

dependence on oil and gas import to meet its energy needs.

He said developing electricity grid connectivity is an essential step for exploitation of energy resources particularly in hydro power sector.

India has operational grid interconnections with Nepal and Bhutan and technical studies are underway on feasibility of similar arrangements with Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, Shinde said.

He said development of hydropower in Saarc has been identified as one of the high priority areas because this has the potential of meeting the energy needs of the region in a cost effective and sustainable manner.

Shinde stressed the need for inviting private investment in energy sector. "We need to work for facilitating private investments in energy projects", he said.

Bangladesh's Energy Advisor Tapan Chowdhury attended the conference among other ministers from the region.

China, US to meet over subsidy row

AFP, Beijing

China will hold consultations with the United States later this month on industrial subsidies that have caused Washington to drag Beijing before the World Trade Organisation, state media said Wednesday.

Meeting at WTO headquarters in Geneva, they will discuss US complaints that China subsidises industries such as steel, paper and information technology, the China Daily reported, citing the commerce ministry.

"China has accepted the US request for consultation and the two

sides will launch talks in Geneva in the last 10 days of this month," an unnamed ministry official told the newspaper.

Mexico, Japan, the European Union and Australia will join the consultations as third parties, according to the report.

Unidentified experts told the China Daily that the United States had not submitted evidence on China's industrial subsidies and argued that developed countries granted much higher subsidies, such as export tax rebates, to their own industries.

Take Australia as future market

HC urges exporters launching trade brochure

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Bangladeshi exporters should consider Australia as a market for future exports by taking advantage of duty-free access of goods there, suggested the Australian high commissioner in Dhaka yesterday.

He said in order to achieve the projected target, Bangladesh should expand its export basket and boost bilateral trade between the two countries.

Business linkages continue to be a very important part of our bilateral relationship, and the expansion of two-way trade between Australia and Bangladesh would be a very welcome reflection of the close relations we enjoy, said Douglas Foksett.

Douglas was addressing business leaders and journalists at the launch of a trade brochure styled "Australia Expanding Your Export Horizons" in Dhaka.

He urged Bangladeshi businesses and exporters to adopt active trade policy to boost economic development.

Referring to the Australians approach in this regard, he said for every country, an active trade policy boosts economic development and Australia constantly seeks to improve its exports.

Sun servers for GP billing

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As part of its plan to elevate its total system this year, Grameenphone (GP) is deploying super computer standard Sun Microsystems servers to handle its billing and data back up within June 30.

"This is the first-ever server deployed in Bangladesh," says Atan Lim, Sun Microsystems' country manager at a press conference at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel yesterday.

Sun's E25K servers and Sun Fire E6900 servers running on Solaris 10 operating system would help the GP avail billing and other data instantaneously and more efficiently than ever before and enable the mobile giant to give high quality customer service. The servers will also act as GP's data disaster recovery.

"Even three years back, we did think that Bangladesh could be its market," Lim said, noting that this server market has been created because Bangladesh is the fastest growing mobile market, and also that the GP's customer base has gone up to 11 million now.

Sun Microsystem Channels Director Alex Tay, Sun's Bangladesh partner Tech Valley's Chief Operating Officer Asif Mahmud and General Manager Mamnoor Rashid Shamim also spoke at the press conference. Sun and Tech Valley have jointly won this GP bid.

GP's Acting Head of IT Lutfor Rahman explains, "Bangladesh's mobile phone market is growing rapidly. With its subscriber-base expanding quickly, maintaining subscriber data and processing it efficiently and meeting regulatory compliances are the key factors to building stakeholders' confidence in Grameenphone. Sun was selected considering these factors."

Industry insiders say GP is now upgrading its system to adopt the latest 3GP technology in the country, which would push the mobile phone technology to video telecommunication level.

Dhaka Bank launches int'l credit card

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Dhaka Bank Ltd has launched an international credit card, which can be used both at home and abroad.

Users will be able to withdraw local currency at home and foreign currency abroad through the card styled 'Dhaka Bank Dual Currency VISA Card'.

"Our clients will not need to carry foreign currency anymore while visiting other countries," said Shahed Noman, managing director of the bank, at a press conference in Dhaka yesterday.

As there are different types of dual currency VISA card such as classic and premium, the yearly service charge will also depend on the types of the card. "However, the charge will range between Tk1,000 and Tk3,000," he said.

Invigorate foreign policy for trade and investment Suggests DCCI

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Though a large number of countries extended preferential and duty free access to Bangladesh's numerous products, most of the products have least scope of contributing towards export growth, Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) observed yesterday.

While met with the Foreign Affairs Adviser Dr Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury at his office in Dhaka, a DCCI delegation, led by its president Hossain Khaled, also suggested preparing an effective list of preferential items so that the benefits for duty free access could be reaped, according to a press release.

The team also put forward a 17-point recommendation for invigorating foreign policy for trade and

investment.

The chamber leaders voiced concern over the country's bad performance in international trade due to poor negotiation skills as 21 out of the 44 Bangladesh missions abroad failed to reach targets in the first six months this fiscal.

The DCCI recommendations include creating a centrally based effective portal to ensure easy and quick dissemination of information regarding export.

The chamber also called for simplification of rules and regulations on sending remittance by Bangladeshi labour force because red tape forces many to send their earnings through illegal channels.

If the red tape can be reduced, they said, additional remittance will easily jump by another US\$1.5-2

billion annually that can also offset the country's net borrowing of \$1.2 billion annually from donor agencies.

They suggested setting up of separate channels for immigration and customs at the airports for expatriate Bangladeshi workers who brought in \$4 billion in foreign currency earning last year.

The chamber suggested visa-free travel or visa on arrival among the Saarc countries and visa on arrival in the Asean countries for expanding regional trade.

Talking to the reporters, Foreign Affairs Adviser Dr. Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury said they discussed about cooperation between the government and the private sector to expand the export basket.



PHOTO: LAFARGE SURMA CEMENT

Yong Ngai Chan hands over his charge as managing director of Lafarge Surma Cement Ltd to Mike Cowell (R) through giving away a crest at a reception in Dhaka on Monday.

New MD of Lafarge Surma Cement

Mike Cowell has taken over as the new managing director of Lafarge Surma Cement Ltd. He has replaced Yong Ngai Chan who is taking up new assignment in China, says a press release.

Prior to this assignment in Bangladesh, Cowell was working with Lafarge Cement UK as Supply and Distribution director. A civil engineer and an MBA, he has a long experience of working in construction industry.

A reception was held in Dhaka on Monday to bid farewell to Yong Ngai Chan and welcome Mike Cowell. The function was attended, among others, by President of Lafarge Asia Pacific Operations Martin Kriegner.



Hossain Akhtar

Chairman of City General Ins reelected

Hossain Akhtar has been reelected chairman of City General Insurance Company Ltd and Mohd Abu Taher elected vice chairman of the company, says a press release.

Hossain Akhtar is the founder chairman of the company and a former vice president of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce & Industry while Abu Taher is a sponsor director of the company.



PHOTO: TRUST BANK

Chairman of Trust Bank Ltd Lt Gen Moeen U Ahmed, also the Chief of Army Staff, poses for photographs with the bank's directors and senior officials at the Managers' Conference 2007 of the bank yesterday in Dhaka.