

Star BUSINESS

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UAE firm launches courier service in Bangladesh

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As Bangladesh's export has been showing a double-digit growth for the last few years, Empost, the United Arab Emirates based courier service company, formally announced launching its operation in the country to get benefit of the growth.

Cargo facilities do not grow in Bangladesh keeping pace with the export growth, which is the reason for Empost's coming here, Sultan Al Midfa, chief executive officer of the company, said at a press conference in Dhaka yesterday.

He said, "As the air freight industry in Bangladesh is growing our freight operation will encourage the exporters further, due to the added capacity to uplift the huge quantity of air cargo".

The aviation sector here is growing by 12 to 15 per cent annually, while the cargo service is not showing more than five per cent growth, so this sector requires development, said Mustaq Ahmed, managing director of Swift Logistic Services, the local sales agent of Empost.

Officials said Empost will start functioning in early May with two flights weekly through a 44-tonne capacity Airbus airliner.

Initially, this freight will touch the UAE, Istanbul and Amsterdam and cover all the Gulf countries as well as the whole of Europe.

At the press conference, Empost also signed a general sales agreement (GSA) with Swift Logistic Services and ground handling agreement (GHA) with Voyager Air Limited.

Vietnam to end subsidies on fuel

AFP, Hanoi

Vietnam will float retail fuel prices under a decree to take effect in coming weeks, a finance ministry official said Monday, raising fears of higher petrol prices at the pump and a rise in inflation.

The communist government's lifting of price controls and subsidies for petrol and other fuels will allow state-run energy companies to respond to the market and pass on fluctuations in world oil prices to consumers.

The ministry official, a price mechanism expert who asked not to be named, said the float would mean that "enterprises will compete with each other, trying to attract more customers with competitive prices."

But he acknowledged the risk of price collusion among the state-owned energy companies, saying that the "transparency of the enterprises' activities is not good and Petrolimex has the majority of the market share."

The government would continue to monitor prices with the right to intervene in cases of sharp price hikes and suspected collusion, the state-run Vietnam News Agency (VNA) reported.

CORRUPTION IN PUBLIC EXPENDITURE

Adviser for new mechanism to check

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The finance adviser has said the caretaker government (CG) will introduce some mechanisms in the next budget to check corruption in public expenditure.

"In order to bring greater efficiency, we must find some mechanism to reduce corruption and bring transparency in public expenditure," AB Mirza Azizul Islam told a seminar in Dhaka yesterday.

Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) organised the seminar 'National Budget and Economical Security' at its auditorium.

Ambassador Mufleh R Osmany, chairman, Board of Governors, BISS, chaired the seminar where renowned economist Dr Atiur Rahman presented the keynote speech. Major General Md Sharif Uddin, director general, BISS, delivered his welcome speech when Dr Mustafa Mujeri, professorial fellow, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) discussed the issue.

Azizul Islam said the national budget alone cannot address all the dimensions on economic security, it needs a coordinated effort to check corruption and ensure such a security to all.

He said poor people are the main victim to corruption, as they neither have connections to government machinery nor they have money to bribe government officials.

"The public offices are usually misused by corrupt people either by exploiting connection to the people of power or resorting to bribery for securing benefits," he added.

Azizul said the next budget will defiantly guided by poverty reduction strategy to ensure economic



PHOTO: STAR

Finance Adviser AB Mirza Azizul Islam (L) gestures as he addresses the seminar on National Budget and Economic Security in Dhaka yesterday. BISS Chairman Ambassador Mufleh R Osmany (C) and Director General Major Gen Md Sharif Uddin are also seen.

security to all.

Describing the possible characteristics of the next budget, he said the government would give emphasis on containing inflation for bringing macro-economic stability.

He said sectoral allocation for infrastructures, especially for power, energy and rural infrastructure, would be enhanced in the next budget, which will also be guided by objectives of containing deficit.

The social safety measures like vulnerable group feeding (VGF) programmes, old age allowances and female education stipend, which were introduced by the four-part alliance government, will be continued, the adviser said.

He, however, talked about some challenges of the budget, which included lack of capacity in timely implementation of the development projects.

"Our officers are not capable to conceive good projects and imple-

ment those timely. Due to this problem, Bangladesh always have a huge aid in the pipeline," he lamented.

Dr Atur Rahman said augmenting economic security through national budget is one of the most formidable challenges amidst widespread poverty, increasing inequality, high level of unemployment and institutional malfunctioning.

The government should emphasise alleviating poverty, generating employment, combatting corruption and illegal economic activities in the next budgetary measures, he suggested.

Besides addressing the issues like arresting inflation of basic consumer items at a reasonable level, he proposed, social safety nets to the poorest segment should be extended.

Midas to offer training on 'Start Your Own Business'

Midas will organise a 5-day training course titled 'Start Your Own Business' from April 22 at its head office in Dhaka.

The course has been designed on a German model called competency-based economies through formation of enterprise (CEFE), successfully implemented in more than 50 countries in Asia, Africa, South America and Europe, says a press release.

The course will enable participants to identify and select viable business project, prepare bankable business plans covering management, marketing and production aspects, analyse profit and loss of potential business ventures.

Prospective and existing entrepreneurs, enterprise development officers, small business trainers and consultants may be benefited from the course. Interested persons may contact Midas at House 5, Road 16 (New), 27(old), Dhanmondi, Dhaka, Telephone: 8116094-5, 8116186-7, email: midas@midas-bd.com, midas@bd.drik.net for application form.

Thai exports jump 18pc in February

AFP, Bangkok

Thai exports rose by 18 percent in February from a year earlier, as overseas shipments continued to jump despite the strong Thai currency, the commerce ministry said Monday.

Exports topped 11 billion dollars in February following the 17.7 percent rise in January, Commerce Minister Krirk-krai Jirapaet said.

In total, overseas shipments jumped by 18.1 percent year-on-year during the first two months, prompting the ministry to believe that its whole-year target remains achievable, he added.

"Exports were up substantially during the first two months, so the ministry has maintained our targeted growth of 12.5 percent for the year 2007," Krirk-krai told reporters. Exporters have feared a sharp decline in exports as the baht rose 12 percent against the dollar over the past year.

A stronger baht makes Thai products more expensive overseas, hurting the kingdom's competitiveness against regional rivals.

The Thai currency is trading around 35 to the dollar, compared to last year's average of 40 baht to the greenback.

Krirk-krai said February imports expanded by 3.1 percent to 11.1 billion dollars, while two-month imports grew by 2.79 percent.

Thailand posted a trade surplus of 1.12 billion dollars in February, compared to a deficit of 316 million dollars in the same period last year.

WTO's GATS AGREEMENT

Economic feasibility a must before opening up services sector

Seminar told

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Speakers at a seminar in Dhaka yesterday urged the government not to make any commitment on any further opening up of the country's service sector under a WTO agreement before examining its economic feasibility.

They also demanded formation of a national regulatory body to assess the pros and cons of the service sector as it contributes more than 50 percent to the gross domestic product (GDP).

Karmojibi Nari organised the seminar titled Liberalisation of Trade in Services :Perspectives from Bangladesh at the Cirdap auditorium.

Ziaul Hoque Mukta, coordinator of the Livelihoods Programme of Oxfam, a foreign non-governmental organisation, spoke on the issue, while Dr Ananya Raihan, executive director of D-Net, was the coordinator of the seminar.

Representatives from NGOs and government sector also took part in the seminar.

Bangladesh opened its two service sectors like Telecommunication and Five Star Hotel under WTO's GATS agreement. Besides, 9 WTO (World Trade

Organisation) member countries, including US and EU, already requested Bangladesh to open up its service sector under the General Agreement on Trade in Services of the world trade body.

"The government should be cautious in opening up our service sector, because such openings did not yield any benefit," A M Badrul Hassan, former economic minister of the Bangladesh Permanent Mission in Geneva.

He alleged that the foreign companies here are venturing into sectors like banking and health and then repatriating huge money to its origin countries.

"If the government makes the service sectors conditional for the foreign investors, by which it binds the companies to provide some homegrown welfare activities, things would be changed," he opined.

He suggested that the government should form a body to assess the need of the services sector and then discuss the issue at the WTO.

This body should also work on determining conditions for foreign investment in Bangladesh, he added.

Ziaul Hoque Mukta, the Oxfam official, said pre-assessment is a

must before opening up any service sector to foreigners.

Mahfuz Ullah, secretary general of the Centre for Sustainable Development (CFSD) suggested the least developed countries (LDCs) demand compensation from the WTO for trade losses due to opening up market under the global trade body regulation.

Sharifa Khan, deputy director (WTO cell), Ministry of Commerce, representing the government at the seminar focused on the GATS.

She said serving the country's interest is important, whatever the offer made in any process of WTO talks.

"Before examining the economic feasibility of our services sector, government would not make any decision on it," she made an assurance, stressing the need for a comprehensive trade policy to reap benefits from the WTO.

Sirin Akhtar, president of Karmojibi Nari, Ferdaus Ara Begum, joint secretary of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce (DCCI), Akhtaruz Zaman Khan Kabir, director (WTO cell), Ministry of Commerce, Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, secretary of Supro, also spoke at the seminar.



PHOTO: DBBL

Dutch-Bangla Bank Ltd (DBBL) Managing Director Md Yeasin Ali, Additional Managing Director AHM Nazmul Quadir and Senior Vice President Md Shams-Uddin Ahmed are seen at a seminar on "Basel-II Implementation". DBBL recently organised the seminar in Dhaka for its branch managers and division heads.

Teletalk eyes 20 lakh subscribers by 2008

Celebrates 2nd anniversary

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

State owned cellphone operator Teletalk officials yesterday claimed that the company's existence forced other operators to reduce call rates and extend validity period of talk time cards drastically.

"Before we were in the market, per minute call charge was as much as seven taka, while the validity period of a Tk 300 card was 21 days. But at present per minute call charge is around Tk 2 and the validity of talk-time cards are between

one month and life time," Aminul Hassan, acting managing director of Tele Talk, said on Sunday.

He was speaking at a ceremony marking the second anniversary of the company in Dhaka. Finance Adviser AB Mirza Azizul Islam attended the ceremony as chief guest.

Speaking about the future plan, Aminul Hassan said subscribers mark is expected to reach 10 lakh by the year end and 20 lakh by the end of 2008.

Teletalk now has only 6.32 lakh subscribers, the lowest among the

five operating companies.

The adviser lauded Teletalk's role in reducing call rates and expanding network coverage.

Even though, two-year is a very short period for a cell phone operator, Teletalk has extended its network in 61 districts of the country, Azizul, who is also in charge of the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications, said.

Post and Tele Communications Secretary Mian Mustaque Ahmed also spoke on the occasion.

S'pore workers in big demand for key jobs abroad

ANN/ THE STRAITS TIMES

Singaporeans are emerging as the "foreign talent" of choice among employers in Asia and the Middle East, say headhunters seeking top managers.

"Singapore has traditionally been known as an importer of talent, but it has now gained a reputation for being a talent source itself," said Mark Ellwood, managing director of executive recruitment agency Robert Walters.

Singapore Human Resource Institute executive director David Ang said that generally, regional demand for Singaporean managers has gone up by between 30 per cent and 40 per cent in the past two years. Hundreds are being sought after in the wealth management industry alone, Ang said.

The popularity of Singaporeans has risen in recent years, surging ahead of Hong Kongers and Malaysians.

Five headhunting companies The Straits Times spoke to said Singaporeans are wanted for middle to senior positions in areas that Singapore enjoys a strong international reputation, namely finance, IT, manufacturing, pharmaceutical and health care.

While China and India used to be the key destinations, Vietnam and

the Middle East have now joined the search for talent from Singapore, headhunters told The Straits Times.

These trends are in line with an observation made by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at the Administrative Service Dinner two weeks ago, when he noted that Singaporeans are being talent-hunted in Asia because of the Singapore brand name.

He said that in China, for example, many chief financial officers are Singaporeans because of their reputation for "competence and integrity".

Headhunters listed three other reasons for the popularity of Singaporeans: strong language skills, lower wages and diverse cross-cultural work experience.

Declan O'Sullivan of Kerry Consulting said: "Someone from, say, Illinois who wants to set up a business in China will need bilingual people with experience working in a MNC. This is where the Singapore play becomes quite strong."

Singaporean managers are also cheaper. Back home, they draw pay that is, on average, between 20 per cent and 30 per cent lower than their Hong Kong counterparts, said Florence Ng of Michael Page International (Singapore).