

Star BUSINESS

E-mail: business@thedailystar.net

Govt mulls services sector regulations for foreign firms

JASIM UDDIN KHAN

As some countries now await permissions for starting their business in services sector in Bangladesh, the government mulls domestic regulations, according to official sources.

As many as 9 countries have already submitted their letters of expression of interest to the commerce ministry in this regard.

"There are some such applications pending. These should immediately be addressed to maintain a good relations with the countries concerned," a high official of the Ministry of Commerce told The Daily Star.

Repatriation of huge profits by some foreign telecommunication companies to their countries has worried the government and prompted it to actively consider

measures to control the services sector.

The telecoms and hospitality sectors are opened up to the alien firms according to a commitment given by the Bangladesh government to the World Trade Organisation in May 1997.

The country is entitled to restricting its services sector as per the WTO rules for the least developed countries (LDCs).

The rules allow Bangladesh to seek permission for the local companies to have openings for investment in any country to which it has already opened up the sector.

The sources said a meeting would soon be convened at the commerce ministry to decide on a study to determine the impacts of the openings for the foreign businesses.

The government also wants to

have an idea of the sectors that are suitable for investment by the local entrepreneurs.

Although a study on Bangladesh's services sector that was conducted voluntarily by United States International Trade Commission (USITC) is lying undecided at the relevant ministry, the ministry has asked the USITC to conduct a study afresh as they were not satisfied with the previous one describing it as 'incomplete'.

The commerce ministry is learnt to have taken an initiative to submit a proposal on such assessment to the Council of Advisers for its approval. On receipt of the advisers' nod, the ministry would appoint a consultant to do the needful.

The government will also seek assistance from donor countries in having such a study.

Anglo-Bangla chamber leaders visit Sylhet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

The leaders of Bangladesh-British Chamber of Commerce (BBCC) yesterday visited Sylhet to seek cooperation from all concerned to make Expo Bangladesh 2007 a success.

The single country fair is scheduled to be held in the UK in October this year.

While addressing a press conference here yesterday, the BBCC leaders said the chamber is now leading a delegation to discuss various aspects of the fair with different chambers, government officials, UK representatives in Bangladesh and local businesses who wish to participate in the fair.

BBCC Chairman Wali Tasar Uddin, among others, spoke at the press conference.

New DMD of NCC Bank



SM Shamsul Alam has recently joined National Credit and Commerce (NCC) Bank Ltd as its deputy managing director, says a press release.

Alam, who started his banking career as a probationary officer of Sonali Bank in 1977, was senior executive vice president of Bank Asia Ltd before joining NCC Bank.

IDLC EGM approves company's new name

Industrial Development Leasing Company (IDLC) of Bangladesh Ltd, a joint venture multi-product financial institution, has approved the change of its name to IDLC Finance Ltd subject to the approval of the appropriate authority.

The approval came at an extraordinary general meeting (EGM) of the shareholders of the company held on Monday in Dhaka, says a press release.

Anwarul Huq, chairman of the company, presided over the EGM, which was also attended by Ahmed Rajeb Samdani, Rubel Aziz, Elias Ahmed, Shah Md Nurul Alam, Yongbok Jo, Jeong Won Byun and Md Habibur Rahman Mollah, directors, and Anis A Khan, CEO and managing director.

British Airways voted Airline of The Year

British Airways has been voted "Airline of the Year" by frequent travellers from across the world for the fifth time in the 25-year history of the Official Airline Guide (OAG) Airline of the Year Awards, says a press release.

The airline also clinched the prestigious "Best Europe Asia/Australasia Airline", "Best Transatlantic Airline" and "Best Airline Based in Western Europe".

The awards were presented to British Airways CEO Willie Walsh at a gala dinner in London. The airline was also nominated for best economy, best business class and best first class.

Amanda Amos, Area Commercial Manager, South Asia, said, "We are delighted to have won these awards, particularly as they are voted for by frequent travellers from across the world."

Increased budgetary allocation sought for women

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Speakers at a seminar yesterday urged the government to increase budgetary allocation for women in the next budget to improve their health and education and increase their access to bank loans.

They also stressed the need for launching of a 'social movement' to create pressures on policymakers to up budgetary allocation for the women.

They were addressing the seminar on 'Budget Allocation in a Gender Perspective' jointly organised by Bangladesh Economic Association (BEA) and Action Aid Bangladesh in Dhaka.

Presenting the keynote paper, Dr Abul Barakat, general secretary of BEA, said in the upcoming budget for 2007-08, the government should increase the allocation for detection and treatment of tuberculosis by at least 50 percent.

Besides, the authorities need to increase the allocation by four times

to ensure safe childbirth, 30 times to eliminate violence against women and two times to promote science education for girls at secondary level, Barakat added.

He also said it is necessary to increase the allocation by three times for enhancing girls' participation in sports.

He also said credit facilities from public commercial banks should be increased by five times for economic empowerment of women.

Presiding over the function, BEA President Dr Qazi Kholiqzaman said besides carrying out a social movement, mindset of men should also be changed about gender aspects in the national budget.

Dr Zafarullah Chowdhury, chairman of Gonoshasthaya Nagar Hospital, said it is not possible to eliminate the gender discrimination only through increasing allocation for women in the budget.

Dipu Moni, secretary (woman affairs) of Bangladesh Awami League, said tools for gender bud-

geting are yet to be developed in Bangladesh.

Shamima Akhter, deputy head of Economic Relations Division, Ministry of Finance, also spoke on the occasion.

In a separate seminar on 'Jute-the Dilemma' jointly organised by the BEA and the Action Aid, Bangladesh was also held yesterday.

Khaled Rab, a jute sector expert, presented the keynote paper at the seminar while, among others, Moazzem Hossain, professor of Economics at Rajshahi University, spoke.

The speakers at the seminar said the major problems in the jute sector include shortage of fund, power shortage, huge liability and high bank interest rate.

Only a strong industrial policy, uninterrupted power supply and lower bank interest rate will help the beleaguered jute industry to overcome crisis, they said.

Etihad Airways to offer 10pc discount at Dhaka Travel Mart

Etihad Airways Bangladesh will extend a special offer of 10 percent discount on market fares at the Dhaka Travel Mart scheduled for April 26-28, says a press release.

The offer is exclusively applicable for the duration of the fair. Interested guests can visit the Etihad stall to confirm their booking. They can also fax a reservation form to the Etihad Airways office at 8831269. After making a reservation during the period, ticketing must be completed by 3 May 2007 to avail the offer.

London, Manchester, Frankfurt, Paris, Munich, Beirut, Geneva, Toronto, New York, Johannesburg and Cairo are the destinations eligible for the discount offer.

India's new coal distribution policy soon

ANN/ THE STATESMAN

A new coal distribution policy will be announced within a few weeks, HC Gupta, secretary of the Union ministry of coal said at a workshop on "Safety Leadership Capacity building" here on Friday.

A committee was formed in January to suggest a mechanism for supply of coal to consumers in different sectors as well as to bring about transparency in coal distribution. The report is expected to be submitted soon.

The Centre would also distribute 38 more coal blocks with a total reserve of four billion tons to various public and private sector companies for their captive use.

The government had already distributed 130 such blocks with a reserve of 27 billion tons to various public and private companies, he added.

The government had advertised for the allocation of these blocks in January and received 1,400 applications. "The blocks would be distributed in the next two to three months," Gupta said.

At the workshop, professionals discussed ways in which coal mining can be made safer. When the focus is on production, the issue of safety is forgotten, Gupta observed.

India fastest growing nation in global services trade: WTO

PTI, New Delhi

India has emerged as the fastest growing nation in the global services trade and contrary to popular belief, the country's import growth in commercial services has outpaced exports in 2006, a WTO report said.

Against the world average of 10 percent, India's services imports grew by a hefty 40 percent in 2006 while exports jumped by 34 percent, thus emerging as the most dynamic country in services trade.

Ranked at the 10th position, the country's services exports totalled

USD 73 billion while imports were only a shade below at USD 70 billion with the global ranking of 12, according to the report.

"While the dynamic growth of India's commercial -- and in particular software services -- exports are widely reported, the dynamic expansion of its services imports attracts less attention even though the growth rate in 2006 exceeded that of exports," the report said.

India's commercial services imports are only about five percent short of its commercial services exports.

In goods trade, India ranked as the 17th largest importer and 28th as exporter.

India is growing at an impressive rate in both exports and imports of services amid stagnant global trend. The country's share in both global services exports and imports is 2.7 percent.

Despite a sterling performance in terms of growth, China's commercial services exports are estimated to have surpassed those of India. China was eighth among the top 10 services exporters and seventh among importers.



PHOTO: IDLC OF BANGLADESH

Anwarul Huq, chairman of Industrial Development Leasing Company (IDLC) of Bangladesh Ltd, presides over the 5th extraordinary general meeting of the company in Dhaka on Monday. Directors and managing director were also present.



PHOTO: STAR

Dr Qazi Kholiqzaman, president of Bangladesh Economic Association (BEA), speaks at a seminar on 'Budget Allocation in Gender Perspective' in Dhaka yesterday. Dr Abul Barakat (L), BEA general secretary, is also seen.

Namibia, Malaysia vow to boost trade

AFP, Windhoek

Namibian President Hifikepunye Pohamba and his Malaysian Prime Minister Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi agreed on Friday to strengthen economic ties and increase trade at a meeting in Windhoek.

"We intend to deepen our economic relations as trade between our countries is growing steadily," said Pohamba.

"We wish to encourage more investments from Malaysia in research, development and agriculture as well as mining, trade and information technologies.

The Malaysian leader said Kuala Lumpur was interested in construction and housing projects in the southern African country.

"We want to achieve a win-win cooperation and forge strategic alliances and facilitate new initiatives," he said.

Badawi is in Namibia on the last leg of a three-nation African tour which has also taken him to Sudan and Kenya.

EU-US reach accord on transatlantic trade ties

AFP, Berlin

The European Union and the United States have approved a plan to bolster the transatlantic economic partnership, to be signed at the next EU-US summit, Der Spiegel magazine reported.

In its edition to be published Monday, the German magazine said the accord had been agreed by German Chancellor Angela Merkel, as holder of the EU presidency, US President George W. Bush and European Commission president Jose Manuel Barroso.

They had agreed to "extensive economic collaboration between the EU and United States," it wrote,

of the draft accord which is due to be signed in Washington at the end of the month.

According to Der Spiegel, the plan notably says: "We are aiming for a transatlantic market without barriers."

The partnership includes common norms and standards for industrial companies and financial service providers. Balance sheet directives would be recognised on both sides of the Atlantic in 2008, it said.

That would also be the case for admission procedures in the pharmaceutical and chemical industries, as well as for the cosmetics sector and automobile parts, it added.