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India's non-tariff barriers on Bangladesh cement may go

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The non-tariff barriers (NTBs) Bangladesh cement exporters have been facing from India for long are likely to be removed soon as an experts team from the importing country will visit here to ascertain capabilities of Bangladeshi testing labs for certification, said industry insiders.

As per the decision in the fourth meeting of Bangladesh-India Joint Working Group in New Delhi, the four-member Indian team will be here to have ideas of the capabilities of Bangladesh Standard and Testing Institute (BSTI), which has all equipment to test cement quality.

In case of exports of cement, the BSTI certification is not allowed by India, so the local cement manufacturers need to get ISI certificate from

the Bureau of Indian Standard (BIS). These manufacturers have identified such an ISI certification as a major NTB in exporting cement to the Indian market, especially to the north-eastern states of that country.

The certification process made the export a very cumbersome, time-consuming and expensive process, they lamented.

Besides, Bangladeshi exporters have to submit other documents that include their factory plan, design, layout plan, production flow chart, qualification statement of their lab experts, statement of lab equipment, description of production equipment and road map from production factory to export-import interface.

After receiving all these documents with application for ISI

certification by Bangladeshi exporters, the Indian BIS officials visit the respective export units in Bangladesh with permission of Indian government, the local cement manufacturers said, adding that they have to bear all the cost relating to such visit and inspection of the importing country.

In addition, the Bangladeshi exporters have to pay huge amount of money as initial fee for the certification plus one percent to 1.7 percent levies on invoice value of goods.

They will also have to pay US\$2000 as annual marketing fee and additional service tax at the rate of eight percent. Apart from this cost on big heads, there are also some other costs for obtaining certification from BIS.

In the context of the imminent visit of the Indian assessment team, a high official of the commerce ministry said it would take three to four months to complete the process of increasing capacity of the BSTI.

The country has 21 cement factories with an annual production capacity of around 70 lakh tonnes.

The local annual demand is about 60 lakh tonnes and the industry reels with an saturated situation, the industry sources said.

"If the local entrepreneurs cannot export cement to the neighbouring countries, some will face extinction due to the saturated situation," Ashiqur Rahman Shipon, production manager of a leading cement factory, said.

WB to support proposed agri tech project

The government will undertake a project in order to increase agricultural productivity and farm income in Bangladesh by improving the effectiveness of the national agriculture technology system.

The World Bank will support the proposed National Agricultural Technology Project (NATP), which is aimed at promoting generation, dissemination, adoption and use of appropriate agricultural technologies through a number of policy reforms, institutional development and investment, according to a press release.

Previously, the company was rated by Credit Rating Information & Services Limited (CRISL) in 2004 and 2006 and on both occasions was awarded with 'A' rating.

Bangladesh Bank has also already given permission to float IPO share of Tk 5.00 crore in this regard and the company has already filed application with Securities & Exchange Commission (SEC) for the same.

Although the company has attained the required share & equity capital of Tk 25.00 crore in December 2003 (the amount stands at Tk 35.63 crore as of December 31, 2006), IPO will be floated to strengthen the capital market in line with the policy pursued by Bangladesh Bank and SEC.

The company will issue IPO shares on receipt of permission from SEC in the first half of 2007.

GSP Finance Company is presently dealing in loan and lease financing for capital machinery, medical equipment, construction equipment, office equipment, marine and road transport, electrical equipment, loan

GSP Finance to go for IPO

GSP Finance Company (Bangladesh) Limited has taken initiatives to go for IPO (initial public offering), says a press release.

The company has already appointed AAA Consultants & Financial Advisers as manager to the issue. Meanwhile, Credit Rating Agency of Bangladesh Ltd (CRAB) has submitted the rating report where the company has been awarded credit rating of 'A2'.

Previously, the company was rated by Credit Rating Information & Services Limited (CRISL) in 2004 and 2006 and on both occasions was awarded with 'A' rating.

Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (Bepza) has been elected vice president of the World Export Processing Zones Association (WEPZA), says a press release.

At a recent conference of the WEPZA held at Antalya in Turkey, the participants of different export processing zones (EPZs) of the world who are the members of the WEPZA have elected Bepza as vice president of the WEPZA.

The journey of EPZs in Bangladesh began in 1983 with the Chittagong EPZ and later seven EPZs were established in the last 20 years. Presently, 255 industrial units of 30 countries with US\$ 1095 million investment are operating in eight EPZs of the country and another 148 plants are under implementation. Around 2 lakh Bangladeshi nationals are working in these EPZs.

India's trade deficit widens 40.5pc

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

India's trade deficit widened 40.5 percent in the fiscal year that ended in March this year to 56.74 billion dollars while business insiders said a hardening rupee would hit exports further in the months to come.

Government statistics released on Tuesday showed economic growth has seen the trade deficit grow over the past few months and stood at 5.78 billion dollars in January as against 5.68 billion dollars in December last year.

The trade deficit in March this year fell to 3.8 billion dollars from 4.66 billion dollars in February due to slow import growth, taking the full year's deficit to 56.73 billion dollars in the entire financial year.

Exports for the full financial year (2006-7) stood at 124.63 billion dollars, up 21 percent compared with 103.6 billion dollars in 2005-6 while imports rose 26.45 percent at 181.37 billion dollars compared with 143.43 billion dollars in the corresponding financial year.

Sony Ericsson launches new Walkman series handset

Sony Ericsson Mobile Communications has launched a Walkman series mobile handset -- W200i-- in local market.

The handset with radio and music facilities was launched at a function in Dhaka on Monday, says a press release.

The phone set can store up to 37 full-length tracks or around four albums and transfer music from computer with the help of a software supplied with the handset.

The built-in FM radio of the handset, which is priced at Tk9,999, allows users to preset up to 20 stations.

Loan expo begins

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

A three-day 'Mega Loan Expo' began at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in Dhaka yesterday.

Three financial institutions-- Dhaka Bank, Prime Bank and Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC) -- are showcasing their loan services in the exposition, which also includes five separate shows of construction materials, electronic equipment, computer and information technology, food products and household items.

The banks are also showcasing car loan, student loan and life-style loan.

Conference and Exhibition Management Services (Cems) Ltd, an event management company, is organising the fair.

Real estate products, construction materials, electronics, vehicles, furniture, banking services, office equipment, home appliances, and food products are being displayed in the show.

A total of 55 companies are displaying their products and services in 100 stalls in the fair, inaugurated by Chairman of Cems Shahid S Sarwar.

The exposition is open to all between 10am and 8pm everyday with a Tk 10 entry fee. Channel i, Radio Today and The Daily Star are media partners of the event.

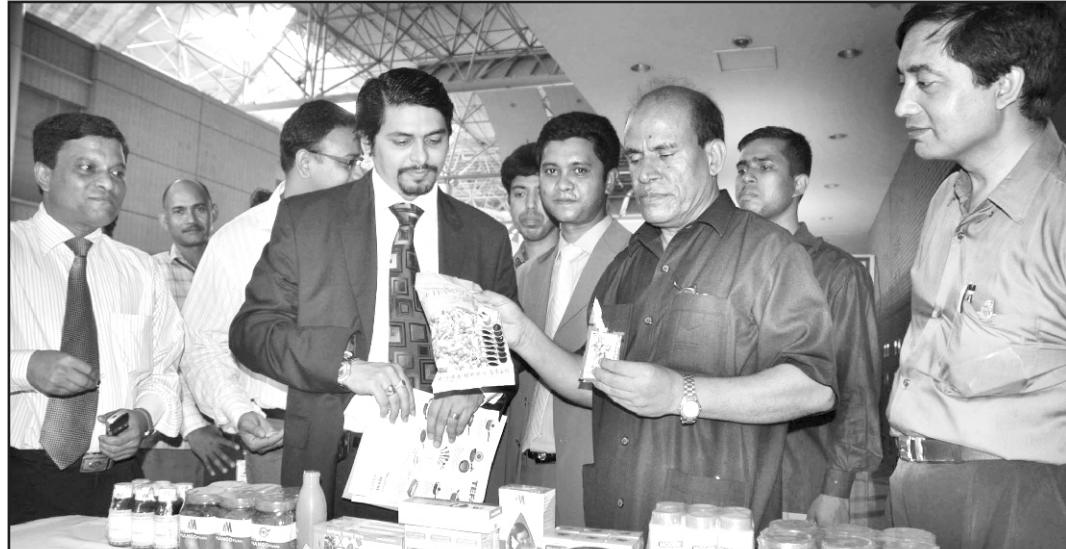


PHOTO: STAR
Visitors are seen at a stall of the three-day 'Mega Loan Expo' that began at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in Dhaka yesterday.



PHOTO: DBBL
The 11th annual general meeting (AGM) of Dutch-Bangla Bank Ltd was held on Monday in Dhaka. Chairman of the bank Abul Hasnat Md Rashidul Islam presided over the AGM, which was also attended by directors and managing director among others.

Indo-Bangla share trading should take place

CSE chief suggests

The CSE president has suggested that Bangladesh and India should explore the scopes for cross border share trading between the bourses of the two countries.

"This opportunity will raise mutual benefit of both the economies. In this respect, I urge to discuss this issue with your policymakers so that the economies of Bangladesh and India could reap optimum benefit from this facility," MKM Mohiuddin said this during a meeting Monday with S. Bhattacharjee, assistant Indian high commissioner, Chittagong, according to a press release of the Chittagong Stock Exchange.

The CSE chief said CSE is always promoting foreign investors to invest in Bangladeshi capital market.

Listing several incentives the Bangladesh government offers for the foreign entrepreneurs who are keen to invest in agro based sectors, light engineering and textiles, he said it is the high time to take advantage of this opportunity and align the Bangladesh capital market as a source of capital in the industrial financing.

"Immediate steps are necessary to reduce the huge trade deficit between the two neighboring countries and in this respect, I would like to urge our business leaders to increase bilateral technical cooperation," Mohiuddin said.

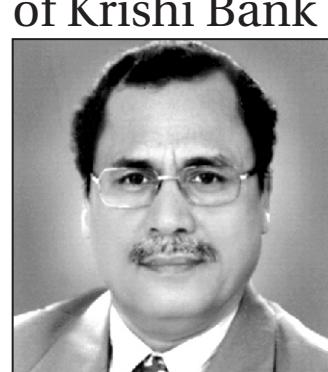
Key sectors like education, tourism and agriculture should get priority in joint ventures on these sectors and raising fund from the Bangladesh capital market, he also suggested.

He requested Bhattacharjee to make one-to-one contact between the businesspeople of both the countries to expand trade.

First Vice President Nasiruddin Ahmed Chowdhury, Vice President Fakhor Uddin Ali Ahmed, directors A.S.M. Shahidullah, Bijan Chakraborty, Chief Executive Officer AB Siddique, General Manager of IT Abdul Mutaleb and General Manager of Compliance Atiquzzaman were present in the meeting.

AKM Shahroze Alam, deputy manager of Corporate Development, made presentations on CSE and the current scenario of Bangladesh capital market.

New chairman of Krishi Bank



SA Chowdhury has been appointed chairman of Bangladesh Krishi Bank with effect from April 26, 2007, says a press release.

Chowdhury was the managing director of Sonali Bank, Janata Bank, Bangladesh Krishi Bank, Investment Corporation of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Shilpa Rin Sangstha, Jamuna Bank Ltd and Union Capital Ltd.