

China keen to invest in textile sector

Visiting business team tells BTMA

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Chinese are keen to invest in Bangladesh textile sector, according to the head of a visiting business delegation from China.

"The Chinese entrepreneurs feel encouraged to invest their money in the textile sector here as Bangladesh enjoys facilities like GSP in Europe and has cheap labour force," Cao Xin Yu, the vice president of China Chamber of Commerce for Import and Export of Textile, told some local entrepreneurs yesterday at a meeting organised by Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA) at its office in Dhaka.

During the meeting, the visiting team, however, sought government policy support and BTMA's cooperation to translate such an investment plan into reality.

BTMA President Abdul Hai Sarker highlighted the business potentials of the textile industry here.

"Bangladesh can only supply 35 percent raw materials to the local woven sector and 90 percent raw materials to the knitwear sector. The Chinese investors may come up here with investment proposals to produce fabrics for the woven sector," Sarker said.

According to the industry insiders, Bangladesh exported

RMG products worth \$9 billion in the 2006-07 fiscal, of which \$4.5 billion was spent for importing fabrics mainly from China.

Sarker said since China is at the top of the list of non-cotton item producing countries it can come up with investment proposals for producing synthetic, polyester and viscose in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh has also been gradually shifting to produce non-cotton items from the cotton item, he pointed out.

As per data showed by the industry people, at present 10 percent of Bangladesh's total textile production per annum is non-cotton fabrics.

"Bangladesh has been shifting to high value addition option in RMG manufacturing to remain competitive in the world market. The Chinese are also welcome to invest in local fashion and designs," Sarker said.

During the meeting, the Sino-Bangla widening trade gap issue also came up for discussion.

The Chinese team leader pointed out that such a gap might be minimised to some extent as the export of locally made fabrics to China is on the rise.

After the meeting Cao Xin Yu told The Daily Star that the export of Bangladesh non-

cotton items to China in the 2006-07 fiscal marked a 73 percent rise over the previous fiscal.

Referring to the China Customs data, he said Bangladesh exported cotton items worth 10.2 million in that fiscal.

"Previously, Bangladesh could hardly export any textile products as China is one of the major textile producing countries in the world," Cao said.

However, the import figure reached \$1,445 billion in FY '07. According to Cao, Bangladesh imported 21.8 percent more non-cotton and cotton textile products from China in the fiscal.

\$7.2 m chemical industry in Comilla EPZ soon

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh and Indonesia will jointly set up a chemicals industry in Comilla Export Processing Zone with an investment of US\$7.2 million.

The jointly owned company named M/s TM Chemicals Limited will produce 4.1 million kg of chemicals items creating employment opportunity for 121 Bangladeshi nationals.

An agreement to this effect was signed between the Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority (Bepza) and M/s TM Chemicals Limited in Bepza Complex here on Tuesday.

Bepza Manager (Investment Promotion) AZM Azizur Rahman and Managing Director of M/s TM Chemicals Limited Tanim Ahmed signed the lease agreement on behalf of their respective organisations.

Novartis again top medicine exporter

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Novartis (Bangladesh) Limited has once again become the highest pharmaceutical exporter of the country with its global Sandoz brand products.

The company exported US\$ 15 million medicines in 2007, which is 44 percent of the total pharmaceutical exports from Bangladesh. In 2007, total pharmaceutical exports from Bangladesh were approximately \$35 million.

Novartis (Bangladesh) Country President Ashfaq-ur-Rahman said Sandoz products have become popular in many countries, helping the company expand its export basket.

He also said his company started the process of export in

1995.

The Novartis has the Certificate of Goods Manufacturing Products (cGMP) at almost all the potential export markets including the European Union.

Novartis is exporting to countries such as Germany, France, Spain, Austria, Scandinavian countries, Latin America and Asia Pacific.

The overall export of the company as well as the country fell in 2007. In 2006, the export earning of the company was \$21.4 million.

Headquarter in Basel, Switzerland, Novartis Group companies employ more than 100,000 people and operate in over 140 countries around the world.

FBCCI POLLS

Candidates vow to work for a vibrant economy



UNB, Dhaka

A. Rouf Chowdhury and Annisul Huq, candidates in FBCCI presidential election, vowed yesterday to work for making the country's economy more vibrant if they are elected.

They also pledged to attract investment and halt the soaring prices of essentials, if they won the election for the FBCCI Presidency, to be held on

March 17.

The two business leaders made the pledges while talking to reporters on the sidelines of an election projection meeting at the Diploma Engineers Institute in Dhaka.

Bangladesh Vegetable Oil and Vanaspati Refiners Association President A Rouf Chowdhury said the FBCCI members now want such leadership whose suggestions and opinions will carry some value for the government.

"FBCCI members generate 85 percent of the country's total revenue. But, governments seldom give attention to the problems of these businessmen. If I am elected, I will ensure that our contributions to the economy are recognized," Rouf said.

He said the government likes to listen to the suggestions

of donor agencies and donor countries, though they contribute little to the Bangladesh economy.

Rouf said the national economy is passing through a very bad patch as investment climate has worsened, while prices of essentials have gone beyond the tolerable level.

"Now FBCCI needs such leadership that can offer a new life to the present bleak economy," he said.

Annisul Huq, former BGMEA president, told the journalists he would give special emphasis on the welfare of the country's small and medium entrepreneurs.

"There has not been any planned course of action for the FBCCI in the past. With my colleagues I will formulate an action plan to accelerate trade

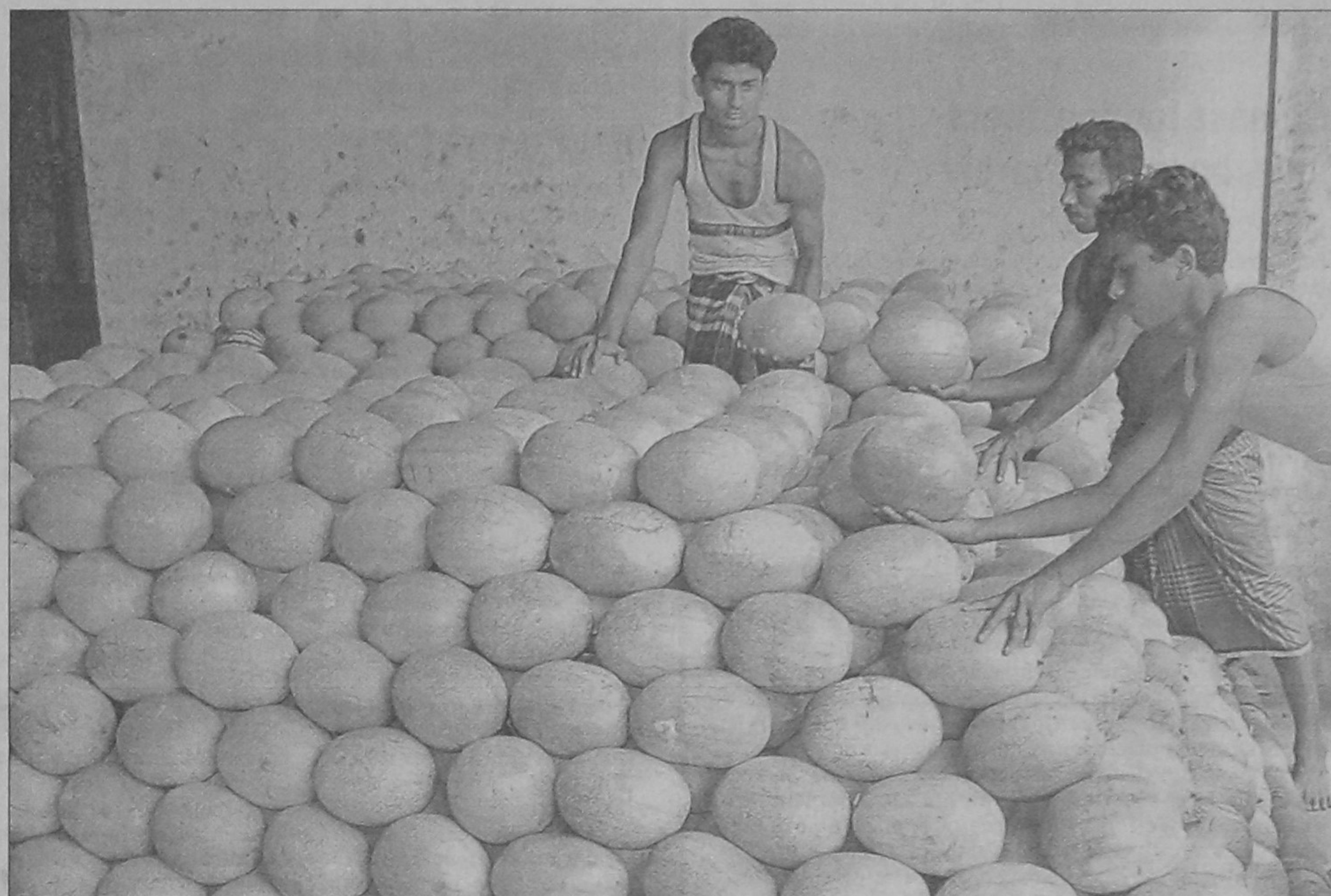
and investment, particularly in the small and medium enterprises sector," Annisul said.

A total of 22 candidates from the Association Group and 27 candidates from the Chamber Group will take part in the election.

Twelve from each group will be elected as directors, while one from the Association Group will be elected as the president.

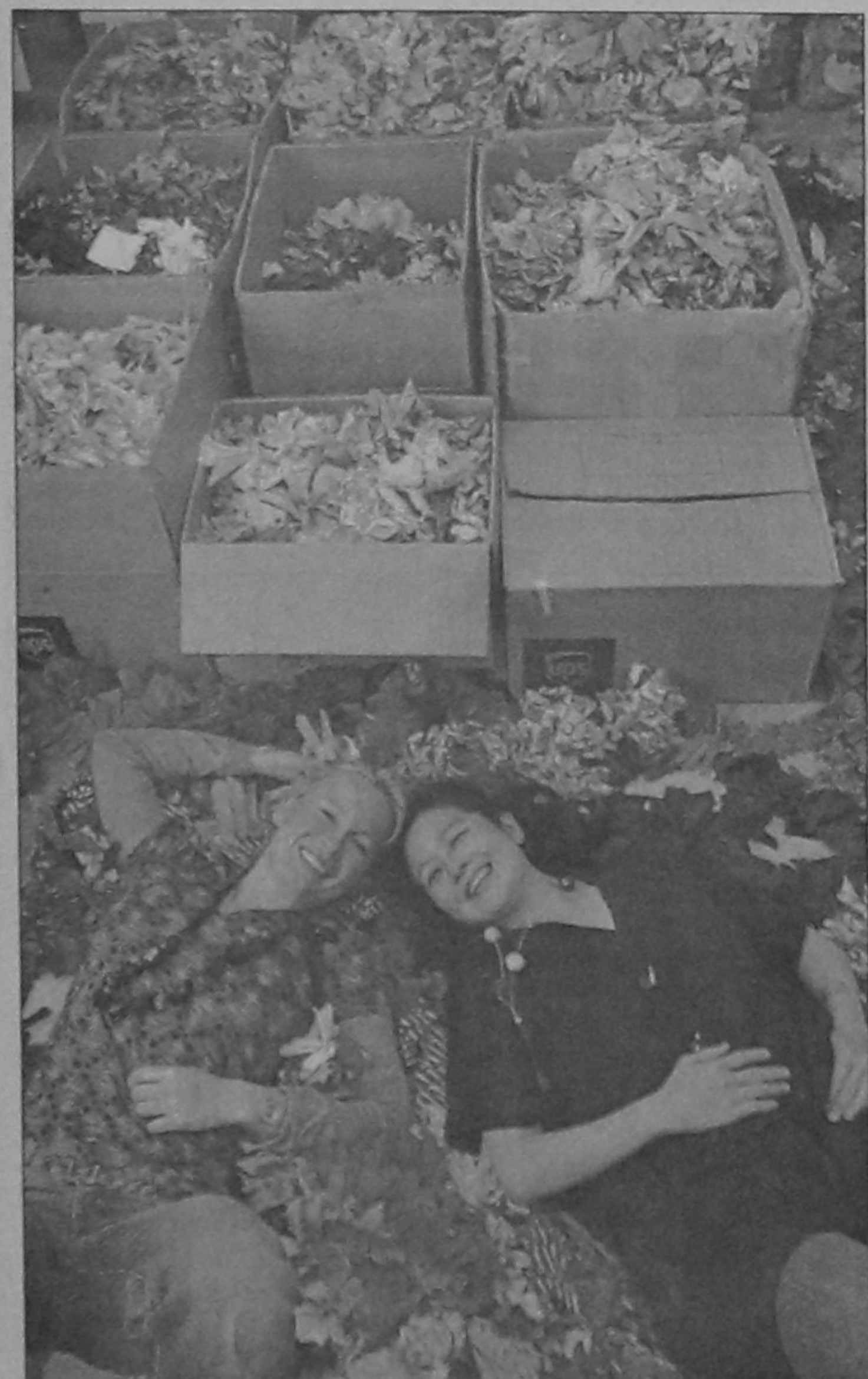
Ali Ashraf, chairman of the electoral board, moderated the projection meeting. The contestants were briefed about the rules and regulations and necessary guidelines of the election.

Syed Manzur Elahi, the administrator of the apex trade body, also addressed the meeting calling upon the candidates to abide by the electoral rules.



Supply of the untimely yield of watermelons from Taknalf to Firingi Bazar, wholesale market for fruites in Chittagong, is aplenty. The prices of these watermelons range between Tk 120 and Tk 130 a piece.

Fashion designers aim to help Asian poor with eco-chic



This photo shows designers Cassandra Postema (L) and Dong Shing Chiu of 'dialog' posing in Hong Kong. As Western fashion brands look to Asia to provide cheap, skilled labour, the two Hong Kong-based designers are bucking the trend.

AFP, Hong Kong

As Western fashion brands look to Asia to provide cheap skilled labour, two Hong Kong-based designers are bucking the trend.

Cassandra Postema and Dong Shing Chiu are seeking out untrained workers in some of the poorest parts of the continent to help make their new range of ethically-produced, eco-friendly clothing using traditional methods.

Their staff include refugees, people in drug rehabilitation centres and young adults living in orphanages.

Many have been unemployed, suffer from long-term illness or live below the poverty line, but as long as they are willing to learn, they are given training to sew -- and a chance to improve their lives.

"We've never wanted to be another fashion company making clothes. They are so happy when they receive the money. It's rewarding to make people happy," says Postema, who has designed for Evisu, DKNY and Calvin Klein and also has her own fashion line.

Postema and Chiu work with local charities in Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines as well as Hong Kong to produce hip and stylish high-fashion products with a distinctively Asian look.

Both women have Asian backgrounds -- Chiu was born in Malaysia and spent part of her childhood there, while Postema, a Dutch native, was born in Rotterdam but grew up in Singapore, Yokohama,

Vienna and Taipei because of her father's work with an multinational corporation.

The set up Dialog in Hong Kong with the aim of helping people in the impoverished areas of Asia to make ends meet, hoping that to do so would not only boost their income but their self esteem as well.

Many of Dialog's products -- clothes, handbags, accessories and homewares -- feature a signature trim that derives from an old Malaysian technique using small folded squares of mixed fabrics.

The people they employ are trained to make these special trimmings -- using recycle materials -- with some of the products then going to the company's Chinese factories to be finished.

The pair, graduates of London's prestigious Central Saint Martins College, source discarded fabrics or surplus cloth from textile manufacturers and traders in Asia as well as from workers themselves.

"Some of them started to cut up their curtains, some cut up their blankets," laughs Postema. "We actually want the fabric to be indicative of the culture and tell different stories."

Linda Wong runs a clothing workshop in Malaysia that has provided Dialog with workers. She gives the example of one woman with a six-month-old son and elderly mother to support, who has benefited from the work, having trained to sew.

"The income certainly

makes a difference to her life. She was very happy that she could make money," Wong says.

On the outskirts of Jakarta, church minister Grace Chan says the work has helped a woman abandoned by her husband to look after their three children alone.

"Eti and her 18-year-old son wake up at 3am every day to go to the market and collect cracked eggs to sell. She makes only about 2-3 US dollars a day," Chan says. "Now she has learned to sew and earns herself extra money to buy more food to support her family."

Dialog's products are now sold in shops and on fair trade and fashion websites in Britain, Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, France and Canada.

Although ethically-produced fashion remains a niche market, it has become increasingly popular.

In 2005, U2 singer Bono and his wife Ali Hewson launched their "socially conscious" fashion label Edun, which provides training to workers in factories where its clothes are produced, mainly in Africa.

Increasing numbers of retailers in Britain are stocking so-called fair trade fashion, according to the Fairtrade Foundation, which licenses products in the UK.

The foundation cites as an example People Tree, a pioneer of fair trade and ecological fashion based in Britain with operations in Japan, that last year doubled the wholesale and mail order sides of the business.

RanksTel package price down to Tk2500

RanksTel Limited recently reduced its package price to Tk 2,500, says a press release.

The new price is applicable for its pre-paid "Agami", post-paid "Gati" with a 120-minute talk time every month and 24-hour PCO package.

RanksTel is offering Tk 50 free talk time with its pre-paid Agami package.

Subscribers are allowed to choose 10 friends and family numbers in which they can call at a discounted rate.

Besides this, RanksTel is also offering a special package named "Kotha". This package is being introduced for the first time in Bangladesh. Using this package a subscriber can talk with his/her friends and/or relatives free of cost. To enjoy this facility, a subscriber needs to buy 2 or 3 connections together at a bundle price.

FOODEX Japan begins

UNB, Dhaka

The four-day FOODEX Japan 2008, the biggest food and beverage exhibition in Asia and Asia Pacific region, began in Japan on Tuesday.

Jetro, the official trade and investment promotion agency of Japan, has taken the initiative to promote local food items in Japanese market.

Jetro, Dhaka, has selected Bangla Natural Agro Ltd, a Bangladeshi company, for participating in the exhibition. The company is demonstrating neem leaf, turmeric, guava leaf, neem cake, and bitter gourd and other local food items in the exhibition.

8-month revenue grows 24.17pc

UNB, Dhaka

Government revenue income has increased by 24.17 percent over the first eight months of current fiscal compared to the corresponding period of previous year.

Revenue collection stood at Tk 27,061.44 crore during July-February to the satisfaction of the exchequer, according to the preliminary estimate available from NBR yesterday.

The collection during the same period of last fiscal was Tk 21,793.88 crore.

Of the total amount, Tk 5,725.91 crore came from

import duty, Tk 5,049.38 and 1,131.29 crore from VAT and supplementary duty at import level.

The collection from excise duty, VAT and supplementary duty at local level, and turn over tax stood at Tk 139.56, 5,326.94, 3,752.31, and 2.85 crore, respectively.

NBR collected Tk 5,632.12 crore in income tax, while Tk 110.04 crore have been collected from travel tax and Tk 0.34 crore from other taxes.

Target for revenue earning has been set at Tk 43,850 crore for the current fiscal that ends in June next.

UPS looks globally for growth

AP, Atlanta

Economic uncertainty in the United States means UPS Inc. will have to focus more on growth opportunities overseas, the chief executive of the world's largest shipping carrier said Wednesday.

CEO Scott Davis said at an investor conference in New York that was broadcast on the Internet that the Atlanta-based company still considers its domestic market to be important to its future.

But he noted that U.S. "economic forecasts for this year are uncertain at best." Davis said the company can't rely on U.S. package volume growth alone. International growth will become more important in

the future, he said.

"One of our real strengths is our balanced global presence," Davis said.

China, India and Europe provide good growth opportunities for UPS, said David Abney, the company's chief operating officer.

Davis said UPS also will continue to use technology to improve efficiency and financial results. He said growing Internet commerce offers more opportunities for UPS.

"I am confident we can deliver long-term results," Davis said.

Last month, UPS said a book-keeping error caused it to inflate its reported earnings for the fiscal 2007 fourth-quarter and full-year by \$65 million.