

# Muhith hints at emergency steps for crisis-hit sectors

UNB, Dhaka

Finance Minister AMA Muhith yesterday indicated emergency contingency measures -- beyond budgetary provision -- for the frozen food and other sectors, already affected by the fallout from the global recession.

"Everything does not come from budget," he told reporters after a meeting with Bangladesh Frozen Food Exporters Association (BFFEA) at the finance ministry.

The minister hinted at the extra-budget relief in response to a question whether the government would con-

sider any support in the next budget for the affected sectors.

The BFFEA delegation, led by its president Kazi Belayet Hossain, demanded government intervention in getting interest-free 'block loan' for five years as they were facing liquidity crisis. They also demanded raising cash incentive on exports from 10 percent to 20 percent to meet the financial problem to some extent.

The delegation said a slowed down demand for the high-value item from importing countries amid recession caused a huge stockpile of frozen food with the exporters, creating a fund flow crisis ahead of the shrimp

farming season that begins next month.

"They (frozen food exporters) are more affected than any other export sector," the minister said. "They want some relief. It has to be done on an emergency basis."

Muhith said the sector has so far become the worst victim of the recession, while leather, jute, jute goods and apparel sectors were also affected.

Asked if the country's safeguard measures were falling behind the pace of recession's impact on the economy, he said: "I don't think so. It (preparation) is not being delayed in that sense."

## Bankruptcy stalks automakers

AFP, Chicago

Even if General Motors and Chrysler obtain billions more in government loans, the threat of bankruptcy remains high for the troubled automakers, analysts warned Wednesday.

"Despite the extension of considerable emergency funding to GM and Chrysler and their finance arms, we continue to see a high risk of a Chapter 11 (bankruptcy) filing by one or more of the US auto makers," Bruce Clark of Moody's Investors Service said.

Moody's, a credit rating agency, estimated the likelihood of an "orderly" bankruptcy protection filing backed by the government at 70 percent.

GM and Chrysler insist they can return to profitability if the US Treasury extends up to 21.6 billion dollars in additional loans on top of the 17.4 billion approved in December. That would bring GM's total to 30 billion and Chrysler's to nine billion.

In detailed, long-term viability plans submitted to the Treasury Tuesday, they warned that the cost of doing nothing would be far higher.

## Barua seeks Chinese investment

### Beijing keen to work with Dhaka to face global crisis

UNB, Dhaka

Industries Minister Dilip Barua hoped that Chinese entrepreneurs would come forward to invest in Bangladesh's potential industrial sectors, including agro-based industries, tourism, light engineering and petrochemical fertiliser factories.

The minister made the remarks when a Chinese delegation, led by Liu Hongcai, vice-minister of International Division of the central committee of the Chinese Communist Party, met him at his ministry yesterday.

The present government has created a stable investment-friendly atmosphere in the country. Both the countries would be benefited economically if the Chinese skilled entrepreneurs come forward to invest in industrial ventures availing generous facilities, Barua said.

He observed that Chinese technical know-how and



Liu Hongcai, vice-minister of International Division of the central committee of the Chinese Communist Party, meets Industries Minister Dilip Barua at his office yesterday. Hongcai is leading a visiting delegation.

experience would be especially helpful for the growth of small and medium industries in Bangladesh.

The delegation leader assured continuing his country's active support to Bangladesh's economic development, saying that Chinese entrepreneurs would come forward soon for making investment in Bangladesh's industrial sector on priority basis.

Referring to the world

economic downturn, Liu said his country is interested to work with Bangladesh together for facing the financial slump. "As a result, it would be possible for both countries to easily face the negative effects of economic recession."

He advised turning the huge Bangladeshi population into trained human resources for achieving economic self-sufficiency.

## Asia shares edge higher

AFP, Hong Kong

Most Asia markets rose Thursday as a weaker yen eased concerns over Japanese corporate earnings, despite investor caution elsewhere driven by doubts hanging over US and European economic outlooks.

Markets were tentative after a volatile session on Wall Street where the mood seeped between hope over federal aid for struggling homeowners, and gloom over the worsening economy, analysts said.

Many players were reluctant to buy ahead of US economic data due out later in the day including wholesale inflation numbers and a regional business survey.

"There seems to be no sign that the pace of deterioration in the US economy is slowing," Tokai Tokyo Research Centre senior strategist Toshio Sumitani told Dow Jones Newswires.

Japanese share prices nevertheless rebounded 0.31 percent Thursday from a more than three-month low as a weaker yen eased worries about exports and weak corporate earnings.

Trade was little affected by a Bank of Japan decision to keep its key lending rate steady at 0.1 percent and new measures to spur lending, including purchases of corporate bonds from commercial banks.

Chinese shares closed up 0.78 percent as the market bounced back from two days of losses with steel makers leading the rise.

Hong Kong edged up 0.1 percent while Seoul fell 0.5 percent and Singapore slid 1.31 percent with few leads to inspire investors.

## India's fraud-hit Satyam sharply cuts costs

AFP, New Delhi

India's fraud-hit Satyam Computer Services announced stringent cost-cutting moves Thursday, warning it faced "extraordinary" challenges due to its own financial woes and those worldwide.

In January, the outsourcing giant's founder B. Ramalinga Raju declared he overstated profits for years and had inflated Satyam's balance sheet by over one billion dollars, leaving the company struggling for survival.

"All capital expenditures... are being suspended till further notice," company chief executive AS Murty said in an employee notice that was released to AFP.

"The global economic condition and outlook remain dismal even as we begin our own financial recovery. This means our challenges are extraordinary and meeting them will require extraordinary effort," he said.

"To do this, we must control costs and conserve cash," he said.

At the same time, he expressed confidence that, "We can -- and we will -- rebuild this great company" which is India's fourth-largest outsourcing.

## Apollo signs deal with GBG

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Apollo Hospitals Dhaka has signed an agreement with Global Benefit Group/Tie Care International (GBG) to help GBG-insured members with priority corporate benefits and medical services from the hospital.

Shahjahan Majumder, acting chief executive officer of Apollo Hospitals Dhaka, and Anne Davis, chief financial officer of GBG, signed the deal, according to a press statement.

Global Benefit Group/Tie Care International, a US-based international insurance products and services provider, has been providing services to clients for the last 25 years.

It develops and implements benefit programmes that encompass all areas of the financial field from health insurance to retirement planning for those who live and work outside their native countries.

# Bangla processing software launched



The Centre for Research on Bangla Language Processing at BRAC University launches the first Bangla language processing software package in Dhaka yesterday.

STAR BUSINESS DESK

The Centre for Research on Bangla Language Processing (CRBLP) at BRAC University yesterday launched the first official release of a Bangla language processing software package.

The software package includes text to speech (TTS) and optical character recognition (OCR) named "Katha" and BanglaOCR, respectively, according to a press statement.

CRBLP has been working on Bangla language pro-

cessing since 2004.

The TTS system can help tackle illiteracy problems, empower the visually impaired and increase the possibilities of improved human-machine interaction, CRBLP said.

Bangla OCR takes scanned images of a printed document as input and converts it into editable text.

The TTS and OCR will run on Linux, Windows and Mac OS X. There is also a web-enabled front-end for the TTS, making the tools available anytime, anywhere.

Although such software exists for other languages, this is the first release for Bangla in Bangladesh. All the software are released under an open source licence.

Dr Salehuddin Ahmed, pro-vice-chancellor of BRAC University, was present as the chief guest.

The centre is supported by grants from the PAN Localisation Project (PanL10n) of the International Development Research Corporation (IDRC) of Canada and Microsoft Corporation of USA.

# Ctg trade fair kicks off tomorrow

## CCCI chief backs transit to India

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The 17th Chittagong International Trade Fair (CITF)-2009 will kick off on the Railway Pologround here tomorrow with a view to promoting domestic products in the international markets.

Commerce Minister Faruk Khan is scheduled to inaugurate the month-long fair, being organised by Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI). Sprawling on around 4 lakh square feet premises, the fair this time will have 37 pavilions and 254 booths, the chamber leaders said yesterday at a press briefing.

Speaking at the briefing, CCCI President and Awami League lawmaker from Chittagong-10 (Bandar-Patenga) constituency MA Latif strongly advocated in favour of allowing transit or corridor to neighbouring countries including India for the sake of 'economic benefit of the country and its people'.

"For the economic development of the country and economic emancipation of our people I see no problem in giving either transit or corridor facility to all of our neighbouring countries including

India," the AL lawmaker said.

Latif particularly emphasised building stronger ties with land-locked seven northeastern states of India.

"The seven states are our nearest neighbours and enriched with forest, agro and mineral resources. By exploiting the existing geographical settings and economic potentials of both sides, Bangladesh can easily ensure a stable socio-economic growth," he said.

The chamber chief also said the present government would take special steps to enhance port facility and develop harbours on both the banks of the river Karnaphuli.

CITF-2009 Chairman and CCCI Director SM Abu Tayyab briefed the journalists about different aspects of the fair.

"Thailand will be the partner country of the fair for the fifth consecutive year. Pakistan, Iran and China will join the show with large pavilions, while different firms from the USA, India, Malaysia, Myanmar, South Korea and Turkey are also taking part in the exhibition," he said.

Senior Vice President of the chamber MA Salam also spoke at the briefing.



CCCI President MA Latif, also an Awami League lawmaker, speaks at a press briefing in Chittagong yesterday on the eve of the 17th Chittagong International Trade Fair-2009.

## Axa reveals 83pc profit slide

AFP, Paris

French insurance group Axa on Thursday reported an 83 percent plunge in 2008 net earnings that it blamed on asset write-downs and a weaker performance in its life insurance unit.

Net profit last year came to 923 million euros (1.2 billion dollars), the group said, a figure that eclipsed market expectations for net earnings of 600 million euros.

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Fadis Soft Winding	48 Spindle - 1 FRAME
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SSM Soft Winding	30 Spindle - 1 FRAME
Rewinding Maurata	120 Spindle - 2 FRAMES
Rewinding Maurata	90 Spindle - 2 FRAMES
Rewinding Maurata	60 Spindle - 2 FRAMES
Crane	2 Ton
Rapid Dryers	10 BAR & 6.5 BAR
Complete Lab	

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# World focuses on SE Asia for economic revival: Thai minister

AFP, Bangkok

The world is increasingly focusing on Southeast Asia as a possible source of economic recovery, Thailand's finance minister said ahead of a key meeting of his regional counterparts.

Korn Chatikavanij said the gathering of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) finance ministers in the Thai resort island of Phuket on Sunday was "very timely" because of the global financial crisis.

"Asean is increasingly the focus of the rest of the

world," Korn told AFP ahead of the meeting, which precedes a full Asean summit in Thailand from February 27 to March 1.

"Asia as a whole is seen as the world's best chance of driving economic recovery and Asean is an important component of Asia as a whole," he said in the interview late Wednesday.

The South Korean finance minister and possibly his Chinese counterpart will also attend the meeting, while new Japanese finance Kaoru Yosano is sending one of his deputies.

The Asean finance min-

isters meeting is expected to look at how the region is going to cope with the global economic crisis.

Topping the agenda is expected to be discussions on the progress of a proposal to set up a multi-billion dollar fund to help countries in the region cope with financial crises.

Last week Korn said Thailand plans to propose that Asean should extend the eventual fund to 120 billion dollars, up from the initially agreed figure of 80 billion dollars.

Thailand currently holds the rotating chair of Asean, which groups it with

Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore and Vietnam.

Korn meanwhile appealed for further economic integration within Asean and throughout Asia to help the region ride out the growing economic turmoil.

"Integration is important especially now that the Western world cannot be relied upon as a source of demand," he said.

"If we can move towards the level of cooperation seen in Europe, I think at the right time that would be beneficial."

## HK's economy to contract in 2009

AFP, Hong Kong

Hong Kong's economy grew 3.0 percent in 2008, while the government is expecting it to contract between 2.5 and 3.5 percent in 2009, Dow Jones Newswires said Thursday citing an unnamed source.

Citing a "person familiar with the situation," the report said the city's economy, which slipped into recession in the third quarter of 2008, was likely to continue to struggle as a result of the global slowdown.

If the figures for 2009 turn out to be correct, it would mark Hong Kong's first full-year economic contraction since it shrank 6.0 percent in 1998 as a result of the Asian economic crisis.

The report comes as Financial Secretary John Tsang prepares his annual

budget, which is scheduled to be released on Wednesday.

The source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Tsang would not change the standard 15 percent tax rate for individuals or the 16.5 percent rate for corporations.

However, Tsang was expected to announce a one-off salary tax rebate for individuals.

But the amount will be less than 10,000 Hong Kong dollars (1,300 US), compared with the 25,000 dollar rebate in the current fiscal year ending March 31, the source said.

No government spokesman was immediately available to comment on the report.

Hong Kong went into a recession in the third quarter of 2008, government figures showed.

### বিসিআইসি বিজ্ঞপ্তি

ইউরীয়া সারের মজুদ ও বিতরণ সম্বন্ধিত তথ্যাবলী

ফেব্রুয়ারী ০৯ মাসে ইউরীয়া সারের সরবরাহ সূচীঃ

বাক্যর গুদাম হতে	৩,৩৩,৮৬৫ মেঃ টন
কারখানা হতে	১,৭৮,১৯২ " "
মোট	৫,১২,০৫৭ মেঃ টন

উপরোক্ত সরবরাহ সূচীর বিপরীতে ১৮-০২-০৯ পর্যন্ত মোট সরবরাহ দেয়া হয়েছে ৩,২৬,২৬৮ মেঃ টন। অবশিষ্ট ১,৮৫,৭৮৯ মেঃ টন সার সরবরাহের জন্য বিসিআইসি'র নিকট ৩.০৫ লক্ষ মেঃ টন মজুদ রয়েছে। চলতি মাসে আমদানীর বিপরীতে আরো আনুমানিক ১.৮৬ মেঃ টন সার দেশে পৌঁছাবে।

মার্চ ০৯ মাসে ইউরীয়া সারের সরবরাহ সূচীঃ

বাক্যর গুদাম হতে	১,১৯,৯৭৯ মেঃ টন
কারখানা হতে	১,৫৮,৬৭১ " "
মোট	২,৭৮,৬৫০ মেঃ টন

উপরোক্ত সরবরাহ সূচী অনুযায়ী বিসিআইসি'র নিকট মজুদকৃত সার ছাড়াও মার্চ মাসে কারখানার নিজস্ব উৎপাদন ও আমদানীযোগ্য সারের মাধ্যমে চাহিদা মেটানো পরিপূর্ণভাবে সম্ভব হবে।

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