

Ecneec  
okays 11  
projects

UNB, Dhaka

The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecneec) yesterday approved 11 development projects involving about Tk 1,635 crore, including Tk 229 crore from Japan Debt Cancellation Fund (JDCF).

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, also the Ecneec chairperson, presided over the meeting in the NEC conference room that approved the projects.

The projects include "procurement of equipment for search and rescue operation for earthquake and other disasters (revised)" under food and disaster management ministry, "union linkage road construction and infrastructure development project: Greater Mymensingh (Mymensingh, Tangail, Jamalpur, Sherpur, Kishoreganj and Netrakona districts)" and "linkage road construction from Fire Brigade crossing of Rajshahi city to Uttar Naodpara on Chapainawabganj-Natore highway (amended)" under local government department, and "expansion of artificial reproduction activities and implementation of embryo replacement technology (2nd phase)" under fisheries and livestock ministry.



New CDA chief takes reins

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Abdus Salam, chairman of Well Group of Industries, took the reins of Chittagong Development Authority (CDA) yesterday.

The new chairman was introduced to officials and employees after he arrived at the CDA office around 9:30pm.

Salam later sat separately with the officials, engineers, town planners and architects of different sections and sought to know about the ongoing and proposed development projects of CDA.

Earlier in the day, the new CDA chairman expressed his commitment to speed up development efforts and develop infrastructure to upgrade Chittagong into a commercial capital in true sense.

Salam got the contractual appointment on April 23 for the next two years, after Shahidullah Akhteruddin went into retirement as CDA chairman.

Salam is also the treasurer of Chittagong city unit of Bangladesh Awami League.

## OECD urges France to slash deficits

AFP, Paris

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development on Tuesday urged France to rein in its ballooning public deficit as soon as a recovery is underway, using spending cuts instead of tax hikes.

France has said it expects its deficit to rise to 5.6 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) this year and remain at 5.2 percent next year.

But the OECD estimated in a report on France that the deficit this year would actually be 6.6 percent and would rocket up to 8.3 percent in 2010.

Under EU rules, France's deficit should be below three percent of GDP.

"Once the recovery is well underway, it will be necessary to urgently implement a programme for reducing the public deficit," the OECD said.

## Production costs soar in power crisis: BKMEA

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The use of diesel due to constant power outages has increased production costs in the knitwear sector by 20 percent, said BKMEA President Fazlul Hoque yesterday.

"The power situation turned so bad that outages continue through half of the factories' total production period," Hoque said.

"The production cost is increasing significantly due to the power and energy crises in the factories as the owners will have to depend on diesel," Hoque said.

On top of that, the prices of apparel items are declining because of global recession, he told a meeting with State Minister for Power and Energy Shamsul Haque Tuku at his secretariat office.

The leaders of Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association

(BKMEA) met with the state minister to seek measures to improve power and energy supplies to their factories.

Hoque suggested the government supply gas to the knitwear factories -- even by halting gas supply to fertiliser factories -- as it has an option of importing fertiliser from the international market.

The BKMEA chief said the government can import fertiliser from the international market, but the knitwear is a local export item. "The government must keep alive the readymade garment sector," he said.

During the meeting, Hoque urged the minister to cancel the decision of fixing Tk 500,000 as licence fees on captive power plants as the business is not running well due to global recession.

The minister did not speak to reporters after the meeting.



Dilip Barua, Industries minister, receives a bouquet from Abdus Salam Murshey, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, during a meeting in Dhaka recently.

## Govt contemplating labour law reforms

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The government is contemplating reforming the labour law of 2006.

The disclosure was made yesterday in Dhaka by the chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on the labour ministry.

"The government is firm to improve the garment sector scenario, attaching importance to the workers-owners relations in the interest of productivity," Shahajahan Khan MP told a discussion, organised by Karmajibi Nari, a non-governmental organisation that works for the cause of garment workers, 80 percent of whom are females.

"Evaluating the progress of tripartite agreement on garments sector" was the topic of the discussion.

The speakers at the programme pointed to the fact that rights of these workers are being ignored, as the deal that was signed among government, garment owners and workers in the year 2006 is violated by the owners.

"The findings of a survey were also presented at the discussion held at WVA auditorium in Dhanmondi. The survey covered 440 garment factories in Tongi, Savar, Narayanganj, Tejgaon, Khilgaon, Mirpur, Kafraul and Atrabari.

It found that only 25.2 percent garment factories provide appointment letters to their workers, while around 47.5 percent factories pay wages to them within the first week of a month.

Around 41.8 percent factories have weekly holidays, the survey said. About 60.9 percent garment factories allow maternity leave, though in most cases it is without pay, it further detected.

Tawhidur Rahman, chair-

owners are members of parliament, they do not raise their voice to honour workers' rights.

"Our owners comply with the demands of foreign buyers. They do not go by the rules of the land," she pointed out, stressing improvement in the living condition of workers to sustain the competition in the global apparel market.

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Tawhidur Rahman, chair-

man of the Bangladesh Garment Workers' Oikyo Parishad, said workers cannot spell out their rights because of the ban clamped on trade unionism after the 1/11.

He rejected the recent survey of the Compliance Cell regarding the compliance with the tripartite agreements.

Admitting to worker rights violation, Shahadat Hossain Chowdhury, former vice president of Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) said it is not wise to go for any wages hike for now considering the tough condition the garment sector now pass through.

He said garment owners are affected by many problems, including the fallout from the ongoing global financial crisis.

But, most importantly, the current energy crisis in the country is increasing the production cost by 10 percent, Chowdhury added.

Shirin Akter, president of Karmajibi Nari, Shayamol Dutt, editor of the daily Bhorer Kajag, and Sirajul Islam, chairman of Bangladesh Garment Workers Union, also spoke.

The Federal Reserve opens a two-day meeting Tuesday with policymakers expected to keep boosting the supply of cheap credit to support a struggling economy showing only tentative recovery signs.

The Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) meeting comes amid a somewhat less bleak economic backdrop, with some improvement seen in the troubled US housing market and consumer confidence.

But Fed members will see a stark reminder of the depth of the recession with data due early Wednesday on first-quarter US economic output -- expected to show a 4.9 percent contraction at an annual pace after the fourth-quarter drop of 6.3 percent.

Analysts say this week's meeting is likely to signal no change in policy since the FOMC March gathering, when the Fed added over one trillion dollars to its arsenal to fight the economic crisis.

The FOMC statement due Wednesday is expected to depict a weak economy that still needs extraordinary support, justifying its policy of near-zero interest rates and vast lending facilities to pump up credit availability.

Currently, the government warehouses have the capacity to store 12 lakh tonnes of rice, according to the agriculture ministry.

Razzaque said the government is planning to utilise abandoned and vacant warehouses along with setting up new ones for food storage.

"The economy remains weak thus it is still too early for the Fed to consider lifting interest rates and possibly sending the economy deeper into recession," said Fredrickson, market strategist at DA Davidson & Co.

"The Fed statement might temper expectations held by a growing number of investors that the economy is about ready to bottom out and turn the corner."

Plastic surgery cornered about four percent of foreign patients treated by clinics associated only with the centre last year. But many plastic surgeons did not report foreign patients.



APOLLO HOSPITALS

Shagufta Anwar, general manager (business development) of Apollo Hospitals Dhaka, and Rafez Alam Chowdhury, president of Gulshan Club Ltd, exchange documents after signing an agreement in Dhaka recently. Under the deal, the hospital will provide priority corporate benefits and medical services for the club members.

## SKorea medical tourism booms

AFP, Seoul

Hospitals will be allowed directly to seek foreign patients from May as part of South Korea's efforts to become Asia's new medical tourism hub, officials said yesterday.

"We expect more than 40 local travel agencies and hundreds of hospitals and clinics to apply for state licences," Lee told AFP.

He forecast that about 50,000 foreigners would visit South Korea for treatment this year compared to 27,480 in 2008.

"In 2013 about 200,000 foreign patients are expected to come," Lee said, adding foreign residents are excluded from the data.

Hospitals are currently barred from directly advertising for patients or accepting them through dedicated

referral services.

US citizens accounted for 34 percent of total overseas patients last year, but the centre hopes to attract more patients from Russia, Mongolia and China this year.

Lee said South Korea could surpass Singapore and Thailand to become Asia's new medical tourism hub in five years, citing a pool of skilled surgeons. The government has eased regulations on visa issuance for overseas patients.

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