



Workers in the north clean paddy with the help of a machine. The rice procurement drive in Dinajpur came to a standstill because of a shortage of storage facilities.

Rice procurement drive in Dinajpur hits snag

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Dinajpur

The rice procurement drive in Dinajpur came to a standstill midway because of a shortage of storage facilities.

This unsettled the rice millers of the district who were bound by contract, according to the district food control officials.

This year the Dinajpur Food Control Department targeted to procure 1,14,538 tonnes of rice and 5,824 tonnes of un-husked rice from 1,931 rice mill operators in the district. The procurement move began on May 15.

But the drive came to a halt after procurement of 56,757 tonnes of rice and

4,658 tonnes of un-husked rice, which is almost half the target for the Boro season.

Officials said there are one central storage depot (CSD) and 25 local supply depots (LSD) in Dinajpur with a capacity of 63,500 tonnes, which already had a previous stock of 55,000 tonnes.

Despite a huge previous stock and a low storage capacity, the Dinajpur Food Control Department went ahead with the drive to procure rice.

The authorities shifted 35,000 tonnes of food grains to other districts and 5,000 tonnes of rice were distributed under various Test Relief and Food for Work programmes to vacate the

place, said officials.

They said the procurement drive could continue if a previous stock of 15,000 tonnes of rice was shifted to other nearby districts in the north.

They said at least 73,313 tonnes of food grains have previously been crammed into different warehouses in the district against their capacity of only 63,500 tonnes.

The contracted rice millers in the district expressed concerns over the lack of storage facilities in Dinajpur, a food surplus district of the country. They claimed that this is the reason why they face losses in business.

Some rice millers of the district alleged that authori-

ties are even bypassing the rice millers who are under contract to serve political interests.

Abdullah Al-Mamun, an official of District Food Control of Dinajpur, admitted that the lack of storage might be the key reason behind why they are unable to fulfil the procurement targets.

But he is optimistic as they still have two months before the drive ends on August 31 this year.

Md Mosaddeque Hossain, vice president of Dinajpur Chamber of Commerce and Industry and president of Dinajpur Rice Mill Operators, urged the government to improve the storage facilities in the district.

CCCI to watch prices in Ramadan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) yesterday decided to form a monitoring cell to keep a tab on the wholesale and retail prices of essentials in the month of Ramadan.

Chamber leaders also urged the government to keep all the border stations open round the clock to ensure the smooth transport of imported goods and stabilise market prices.

The calls were made at a discussion meeting between the CCCI leaders and leading importers of commodities at the CCCI office, chaired by its president MA Latif.

Speakers stressed the need to monitor the gap between wholesale and retail prices.

Latif said the prices of several commodities have started dropping after the government came to power, as businessmen

are more confident in undertaking business deals. He said the market could not be stabilised by forcefully controlling businessmen.

Importers and wholesalers at the meeting blamed the retailers for price hikes by creating an artificial crisis.

Speakers said the costs of import and price charts at both levels have to be made public through the media, to create customer awareness.

Apollo Hospitals ties up with First Assistance

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Apollo Hospitals Dhaka has recently signed a corporate agreement with First Assistance, one of the largest medical and technical assistance services suppliers to the New Zealand travel insurance market, says a press release.

Under the agreement, the hospital will provide priority corporate benefits and medical services to the members of First Assistance.

Shahjahan Majumder, acting chief executive officer of Apollo Hospitals Dhaka, and Kirsty Bell, international operations manager of First Assistance, signed the deal at a ceremony in Dhaka.

AB Bank's new director

STAR BUSINESS DESK



AB Bank Ltd has nominated BB Saha Roy, managing director and chief executive officer of Elite Group of Companies, as a director of the bank, says a press release.

The nomination came at the bank's recent annual general meeting held on Monday last.

Roy is a former general secretary of the Bangladesh Paint Manufacturers Association.

China fund to buy stake in Canadian miner

AFP, Beijing

China's sovereign wealth fund said it would buy 1.5 billion dollars worth of shares of the Canadian mining company Teck Resources Ltd.

The purchase by the China Investment Corp would amount to a 17.2 percent equity stake in Teck, giving the 200-billion-dollar wealth fund a 6.7 percent voting interest in the mining company, the corporation said Friday.

Skilled human resources key to exploring new labour markets

NRB seminar told

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Expatriates at a seminar in Dhaka suggested yesterday that vocational education should get due importance to build up skilled human resources.

They said there is no alternative to such education because new overseas job market exploration is the need of the hour.

Held at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel, the seminar on Overseas Employment Opportunities and Creation of New Labour Market was organized by Scholars Bangladesh and Human Resource Capital Development as part of a three-day conference for the non-resident Bangladeshis (NRBs) where recruitment agency representatives also spoke.

Dr Fahmida Khatun, additional director at the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), chaired the seminar.

The speakers also suggested Bangladesh top officials frequently go to the



countries hiring workers from Bangladesh. Besides, they said, the country's overseas missions should be reinforced with more manpower so that they turn out to be much more useful to the expatriates.

A demand was also raised from the seminar that the Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (Baira) take up programmes for workers' capacity building.

Dr Arifur Rahman, an entrepreneur who is living in Saudi Arabia, gave a presentation at the function.

Still, there is ample scope for Bangladesh to find new labour markets,

although the global recession significantly slowed down workers' migration in the last few months, Rahman viewed.

"We need to create skilled workers in order to create new markets. So, the government should introduce vocational education at secondary, higher secondary and higher education levels," he said.

He also listed some potential labour markets like Sudan, Ivory Coast, Cambodia, Namibia, Mozambique, Haiti and Tajikistan and urged the government and Baira to explore these new avenues.

Rahman also suggested

the government give extra attention to the Saudi market because of the false propaganda now going on against the Bangladeshis working there.

Former Baira president Noor Ali said the association should sit with the government to address the problems in the sector.

Kaisarul Haque, an expatriate from Canada, said, "The labour market contributes big for Bangladesh but it is now shrinking amid global recession, but there is nothing to worry about as it will once again expand once the recession is over. What we need is to create skilled manpower to meet the demand."

Dr Fahmida pointed out that manpower export has dropped by around 40 percent during the first half of the current year though it still did not affect the remittance flow.

She suggested the government rise to the occasion before it starts affecting the remittance flow.

Call for transparent overseas recruitment

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Migration experts called yesterday for total transparency in overseas recruitment process, while businesses slammed the government for its inefficiency in handling the outbound manpower sector, which is a lifeline of the economy.

They said although recruiting agencies play a crucial role in creating employment opportunities abroad for the Bangladeshis, they are yet to create a positive image for them.

"We have been demanding for years that recruiting agencies register their intermediaries. Things could be transparent if the intermediaries were brought under a legal framework," said Prof Tasneem Siddiqui, chair of Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU).

She was speaking at a seminar on 'Current Status of Local Manpower Business: Present and Future' at the concluding day of the three-day NRB Manpower Development & Opportunities Conference-2009 at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel organised by Scholars Bangladesh and Human Capital Development Ltd.

Tasneem said the govern-



Finance Minister AMA Muhith speaks at the concluding session of a three-day NRB Manpower Development and Opportunities Conference 2009 at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel yesterday.

ment in several times took actions against the Baira (Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies) members for their illegal activities, but Baira itself never took actions against those agencies.

"Baira couldn't play its due role. It should have its own code of conduct," she said, adding that a regional study found that Bangladeshi workers on an average pay the highest -- \$3,000 -- to procure work visas, which is \$700 to \$1,500 for the workers from India, Sri Lanka and Nepal.

The cost increases mainly because of the intermediaries at both the sending and receiving countries, Tasneem said.

Kaisarul Haque, an immigration consultant in Canada, said recruiting business is more a service than making money.

"We in North America do not protect the businesses when our consumers are in trouble. Here it is not the recruiting agents that Baira should protect, but the consumers," he said.

The expatriates' welfare ministry has so far failed to

render its responsibilities because of the inefficiencies of its officials and even the ministers, said Noor Ali, chairman of Unique Group that deals with manpower export.

Baira Joint Secretary Shamim Ahmed Chowdhury said there are many examples that Bangladesh mission attested work visas, but those were found fake and recruiting agencies were held responsible for these.

Baira President Ghulam Mustafa, among others, spoke.

Web-based business pulls in focus

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladeshi entrepreneurs should go for more web-based business utilising the nation-wide internet network, as the country is still lagging behind in such entrepreneurship compared to other countries, experts said at a seminar yesterday.

Now the country's ICT sector is in the spotlight as the present government's one of the major election pledges is to build a Digital Bangladesh by 2021.

For the rapidly growing mobile industry, Bangladesh has a countrywide internet network, although its internet penetration rate is only 4 percent. Besides software developing, no major internet-based business is yet to flourish in the country, the speakers said.

Trading through the internet can be a way for earning foreign exchange, they said.

"Web entrepreneurship is not much expensive," said Hasan Zillur Rahim, an IT expert who has been working at Silicon Valley, California, for the last 30 years. He shared his experiences with the local entrepreneurs.

Rahim also made a presentation at the seminar on 'Web entrepreneurship in Bangladesh: Lesson from Silicon Valley, California'.

Power and Participation Research Centre and Bangladesh Computer Samity (BCS) organised the seminar in Dhaka.

"Don't care about who is where. Let's identify the needs of the market and then start business," said Rahim, but added that shipment and payment could be a big challenge for Bangladesh to introduce such business.

Around 60 lakh people of the country are now using the internet. But the use is so far limited in checking emails, sharing documents, or in some network-

based works. E-commerce still remains a dream due to a lack of required infrastructure.

The government has announced to introduce e-commerce by 2012, and so transaction through the internet is still beyond legal guidelines.

Rahim said remittance is one of the major driving forces for the economy, and so can be web business.

Rahim also stressed the need for ensuring the quality of products.

Former agriculture adviser Dr CS Karim chaired the seminar, while former commerce adviser Hossain Zillur Rahman and president of BCS Mostafa Jabbar were present.

Zillur said: "We have a big young folk. By using their talents we can develop web business."

"We can't wait until 2012 for launching e-commerce," said Mostafa Jabbar, adding that if the government comes forward, it is possible within 2009.



Health and Family Welfare Minister AFM Ruhul Haque is shown a model of a plant of RAK Pharmaceuticals Pvt Ltd following the inauguration of the company's product launching ceremony at Radisson Water Garden Hotel in Dhaka on Friday. Dr Khater Massaad, chairman of RAK Pharmaceuticals, was also present.

Latin America poised for quick exit from crisis

AFP, Vina Del Mar, Chile

Latin America and the Caribbean are well placed to emerge from the storm buffeting much of the global economy, multilateral lenders said here Friday while meeting with regional ministers.

The finance ministers gathered at Vina del Mar in Chile agreed to seek "a more active role from multilateral lending institutions" for the crisis but also for after the crisis, said Chilean Minister Andres Velasco.

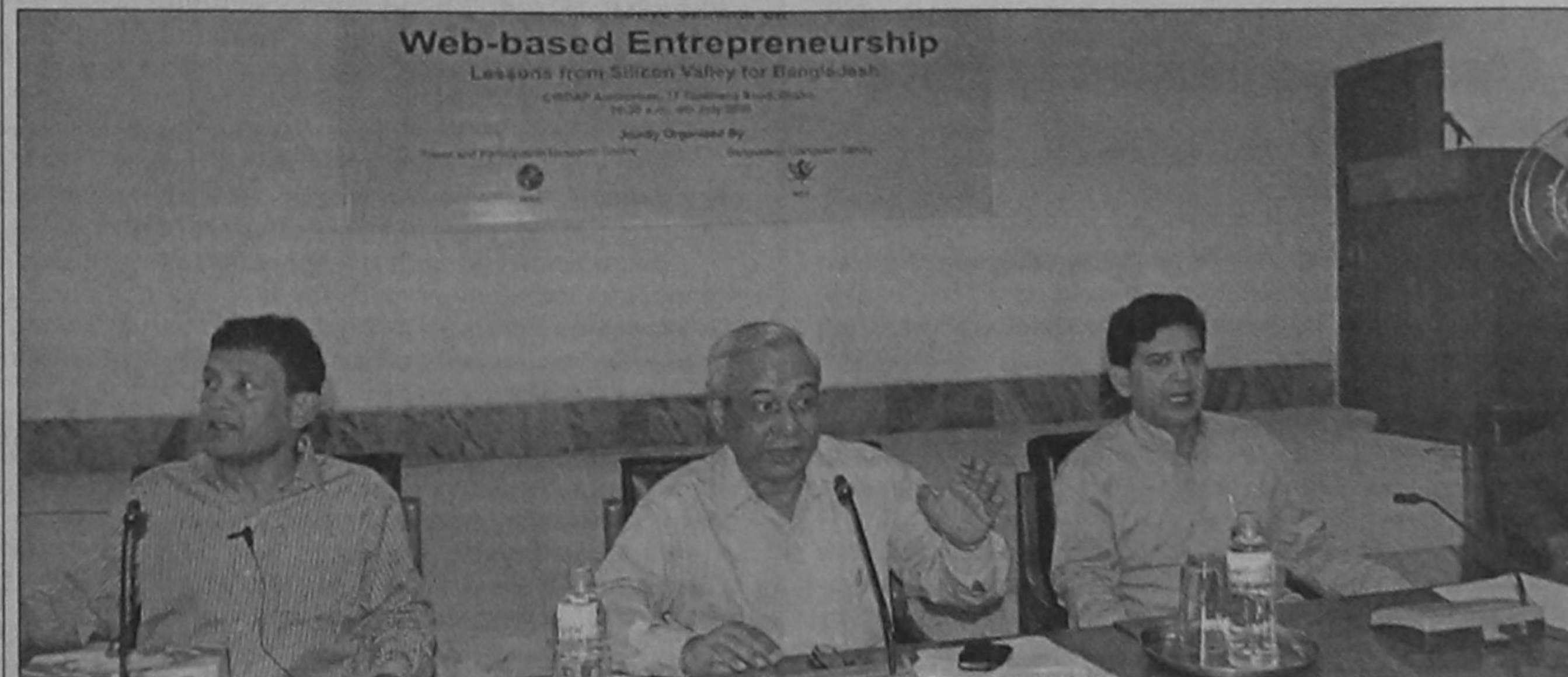
Velasco cited a World Bank report that estimated a financing shortfall of 350 to 635 billion dollars per year for emerging countries, of which Latin America accounted for 115 to 180 billion.

"The international situation continues to be our main concern and the focus of our efforts. However, we have seen that financial markets are stabilizing," said Velasco.

The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) meanwhile said it would increase its capital base by 6 billion dollars to help Latin America and the Caribbean tackle the global financial crisis.

The funds came from Canada's offer to increase to 4 billion dollars its contribution to the regional lender, the banks said in a statement.

Two more billion dollars would come from a change in an internal norm at the bank that had limited the amount of the loans depending on contributing countries.



Dr CS Karim, middle, former agriculture adviser of caretaker government, presides over a seminar on web-based entrepreneurship in Dhaka yesterday. Hossain Zillur Rahman, right, former commerce adviser of caretaker government, is also seen.