

Mongla port ready for neighbours: Officials

QUAZI AMANULLAH, *Khulna*

Mongla seaport is equipped enough to take the loads of goods that may come to the port once it is opened up to India, Nepal and Bhutan, officials said yesterday.

The port now can accommodate at least 33 seagoing vessels per day and is capable of handling 65 lakh tonnes of cargos and 50,000 TEU (twenty equivalent units) containers, they said.

However, the officials of the port authorities said there are some problems with handling of cargos which they said would be solved after implementation of four ongoing development projects.

Md Mahabullah, director (Traffic) of Mongla Port Authority (MPA), said: "The port can be used by these countries without facing any major problems."

Chairman of the port authorities Commodore M Farukh could not be contacted as he has been abroad for the last three weeks.

The MPA will earn an additional revenue of around Tk 30 crore a year if

India, Nepal and Bhutan use the second seaport of the country, according to the officials, who said the existing problems should be solved before allowing the neighbours to the port.

The authorities have also sought immediate intervention of the government to solve these problems with top priority.

The port now needs some necessary equipment, transit sheds, warehouses and container yards for accommodating additional loading and unloading and containers, MPA officials said.

The MPA is also understaffed in addition to siltation of the river Passur. The siltation of the Passur and other rivers is creating serious problems in movements of seagoing vessels, said the officials.

Crisis of important equipment and watercraft, absence of railway link, gas supply, oil depot and food silo are also surfacing, they added.

There are now 1,377 officials and employees against 2,800 posts in the MPA. The remaining 1,423 vacant posts are yet to be filled. "Of course, four

development projects are now under implementation during the current fiscal year. Once implemented, there would be no problems in handling additional loads," said Mahabullah.

Around 10.93 lakh tonnes of cargos were loaded and unloaded and 21,201 TEU containers handled at the port during fiscal year 2008-2009. The MPA officials said 60,300 tonnes of Nepalese cargos were transported to Nepal by road and railway through the seaport from December 1997 to November 1998 under an agreement between the governments of the two countries and the MPA.

The port earned Tk 95.91 lakh as revenue by unloading the Nepalese cargos during this one-year time, the officials said.

But Nepal could no longer enjoy this facility from December 1998 as India imposed some restrictions on carrying the Nepalese transit cargos.

The port, which started operations in December 1, 1950, will regain its lost glory once it is opened up to the neighbours, Mahabullah said.



Representative dealers from all over Bangladesh pose at the Dealers Conference 2009 of Transcom Electronics Ltd at Bangabandhu International Conference Center in Dhaka recently. Arshad Huq, chief executive officer of the company, was also present.



National Assets gets new MD

STAR BUSINESS DESK

National Asset Management Ltd appointed Md Amanullah, former managing director of Bangladesh Shilpa Bank (now defunct), as its managing director and chief executive officer, says the company in a statement.

Amanullah, with over 30 years of banking experience, previously served Sonali Bank Ltd as managing director (additional charge) and Rupali Bank Ltd as deputy general manager.

He was a nominated director of the Investment Corporation of Bangladesh.

Gaibandha hosieries post high turnover this time

Small entrepreneurs seek policy support

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Hosieries and other areas in Gobindaganj upazila in the district post high turnover this time, riding on wider demand for warm clothes because of the prolonged cold wave in the country's northern part.

Around 2,000 small and big cottage industries that sprang up in 50 villages in a span of five years can now meet almost 80 percent demand of the poor across the country, claim the industry insiders. The main items these hosieries manufacture include sweater, cardigan, muffler, socks and cap.

Gaibandha's Kochashaer, Shibpur, Mohimaganj, Salmara unions and Gobindaganj Municipality where the industrial units are set up -- are now renowned for these economy priced warm clothes.

Pepulia in Kochashaer

union is the village where the first hosiery started its operation two decades back. This small industry then changed the life of area people, once mainly engaged in farming and petty trade.

However, the hosieries faced many ups and downs. The big ones, patronised by Dhaka-based garment factories, make quality goods with the respective factory's brand name and sell those to foreign buyers.

"Yearly turnover of hosiery product of Gobindaganj upazila is nearly Tk 200 crore," said Anisur Rahman, president of Kochashaer Hosiery Owners Samity.

This association occasionally provides running capital on soft terms for small hosieries, which grapple with fund constraints, as banks often remain reluctant in lending those.

Such a small entrepreneur needs at least Tk 200,000 the half for buying

machine for his or her unit and the rest amount as running capital to go into production. A single new socks manufacturing machine, either made by India or China, costs Tk 45,000-60,000, but many a small owner procures reconditioned machine from Dhaka-based garment units at Tk 15,000-20,000.

Local lenders provide capital to small hosieries at high interest, for which many found no other way to winding up their small units. This high interest rate, high labour cost and price hike of inputs forced many to shut down their units. Even some small hosiery owners, who failed to sustain competition, sold out their products to money lenders at a throw-away price.

"We want government support to survive. An easy flow of fund will greatly help us continue production," said Abdul Jobber, a small hosiery owner at Mohimaganj.



Hafiz Ahmed Mazumder, chairman of Pubali Bank Ltd, attends the bank's first regional and corporate branch managers' conference in 2010, in Dhaka yesterday. Helal Ahmed Chowdhury, managing director, is also seen.

Dhaka-Delhi meet soon to remove NTBs

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Industries Minister Dilip Barua said yesterday Bangladeshi and Indian experts will meet soon to identify the areas of non-tariff barriers (NTBs) to be removed to accelerate the bilateral trade between the two countries.

The era of 'multiple connectivity' and 'multiple cooperation' has begun in South Asia after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to India from January 10-14, he said.

"So, no barrier will hinder the growth of business in this region as we are trying to connect Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Bhutan by setting up road and waterway links," the minister said.

He was talking to journalists after a meeting with the newly appointed

Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh, Rajeev Mitter, at the ministry.

During the meeting they have discussed the proposed import of 250-megawatt (MW) electricity from India and individual and joint venture investments from India to Bangladesh, Barua said.

India is interested to develop small and medium enterprises in Bangladesh, he said.

Replying to a query, the minister said Bangladesh will be able to earn a handsome amount of revenue every year for allowing India to use Chittagong Port. The premier seaport will also get a modern look, he added.

"The time of 'blind opposition' to India is over. Now both the countries are heading towards an economic cooperation."

The minister said Bangladesh will not lose its business in the North Eastern region of India for allowing its transport movement through Bangladesh.

The trade and commerce of Bangladesh will rather increase in the region when the purchasing capacity of consumers will go up following vibrant business activities there, Barua said.

He ruled out the possibility of a major movement by the opposition parties if Chittagong Port is used by India.

Mitter said Indian entrepreneurs are interested to invest in ceramics, IT sector, pharmaceuticals and agro-processing business in Bangladesh either individually or in joint venture.

"Both the countries will sit together shortly to settle the issues

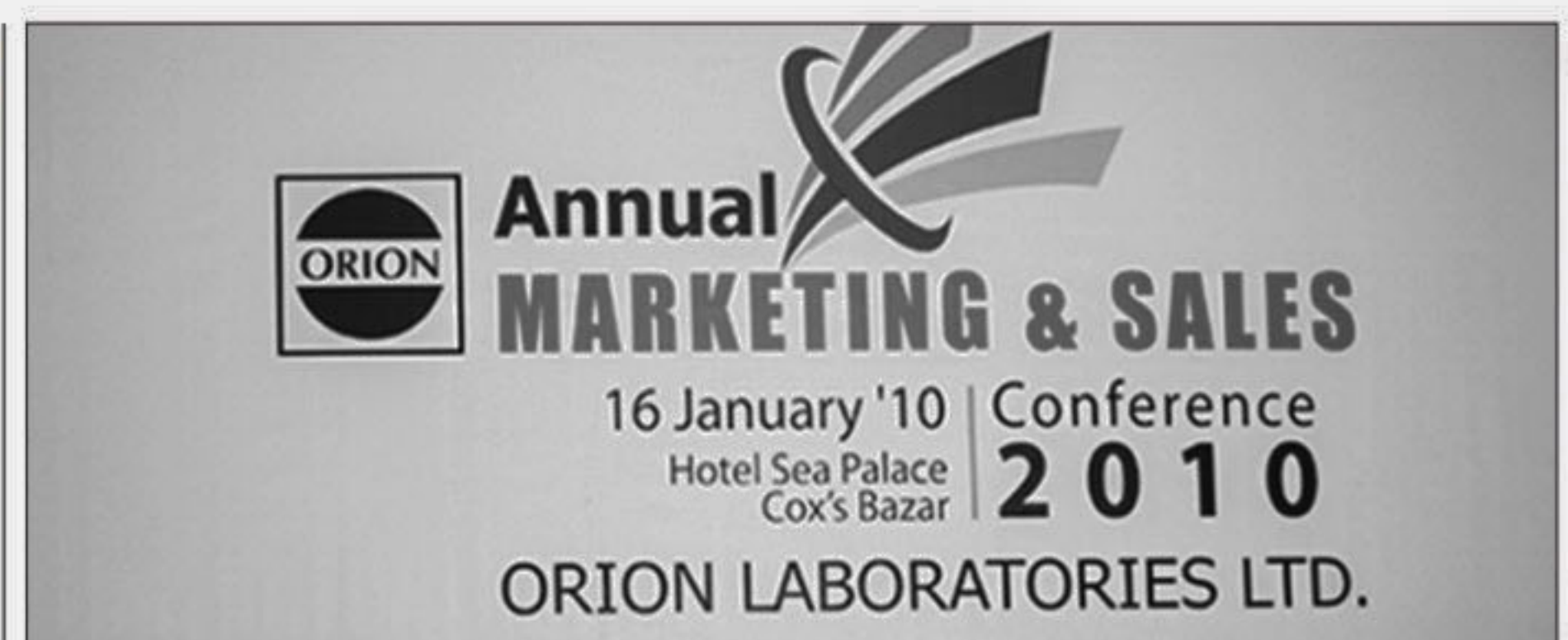
of non-tariff barriers," the Indian high commissioner said.

He said Indian telecom giant Bharti Airtel has already acquired the majority stake in Warid Telecom in Bangladesh, which is a sign of growing business between the two countries.

Mitter also said the visa processing system at Indian High Commission in Dhaka has improved a lot.

"We have no plan to introduce special visa system for the businessmen right now as everybody is getting visa in normal process and a genuine businessman was never rejected."

The envoy said India will assist technically to upgrade the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI) so the certification of this institution is accepted worldwide.



Mohammad Obaidul Karim, chairman of Orion Group, attends the annual marketing and sales conference 2010 of Orion Laboratories Ltd, at Hotel Sea Palace in Cox's Bazar recently.

National tourism policy on cards

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation is set to place a draft of national tourism policy to the government, the civil aviation and tourism secretary has said.

"A draft law to preserve tourist sites and proposal to form a Bangladesh Tourism Board now await the cabinet's nod. If this draft is signed into a law, Cox's Bazar will become the most valuable tourist spot in the country," Shafique Alam Mehdi also told a press conference in Dhaka yesterday.

The press meet was arranged to announce a month-long tourism festival on the Central Public Library premises in the capital on February 1.

The festival, eyeing foreign visitors of the SA Games 2010, will have about twenty stalls where Tour Operators Association of Bangladesh (TOAB), Association of Travel Agents of Bangladesh (ATAB), Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel and other



Shafique Alam Mehdi, civil aviation and tourism secretary, speaks at a press conference in Dhaka yesterday. Md Hemayet Uddin Talukder, chairman of Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation, is also seen.

stakeholders of the tourism industry, will participate.

In connection with the festival, Bangladeshi food festival and cultural shows will be held at top hotels in the city for the foreigners visiting Bangladesh.

In response to a query, Mehdi admitted that many attractive spots, such as Kuakata, lack proper infrastructure to attract tourists.

"We have also formulated a master plan to develop tourist sites across the coun-

try," he said.

The civil aviation and tourism ministry is taking all measures to promote and diversify the tourism sector in line with the country's 2010 Vision, added the secretary.

China airlines back in black

AFP, Shanghai

China's airlines returned to profit in 2009 as traffic rose, fuel prices fell and government policies provided a favourable tailwind, but analysts warn they could face fresh turbulence this year.

The country's three biggest carriers -- China Southern Airlines, Air China and China Eastern Airlines -- all suffered heavy losses in 2008 as the global economic crisis struck, but said this month they will be in the black for 2009.

The industry as a whole posted a combined profit of 7.4 billion yuan (1.1 billion dollars) in 2009 and passenger volume grew 19.7 percent on-year to 230 million, according to the Civil Aviation Administration of China.

But analysts said while the outlook remained solid for 2010, the airlines would lose steam as the explosive

growth in passenger volume slowed, with some travellers opting to stay home and others looking at cheaper forms of transport.

"We are generally optimistic about the aviation industry, given the positive fundamentals such as the 2010 World Expo and continued economic recovery," said Chen Huan, an analyst at brokerage Guotai Junan in Hong Kong.

But he warned the 2009 turnaround was largely underpinned by non-operating profits such as gains in fuel hedging deals and nearly two billion dollars of government aid granted to the top three carriers since late 2008.

"We are going to see some ups and downs in their earnings in 2010 and maybe the following year," Chen said, noting carriers would be hit with the resumption of payments to an infrastructure fund, halted during the crisis.

DHL top brasses due tomorrow



Amadou Diallo

Thomas Tieber

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Amadou Diallo, chief executive officer (South Asia and Pacific), and Thomas Tieber, chief executive officer (South Asia) of DHL Global Forwarding, will arrive in Dhaka tomorrow, says the company in a statement yesterday.

During the visit, the duo will announce a new partnership and investment programme in Bangladesh at a function in the capital on January 27.

Diallo, a member of the freight executive board of DHL Global Forwarding, is based at the company's regional headquarters in Singapore with the responsibilities for performance and long-term strategic developments across South East Asia, South Asia and South Pacific.

Tieber oversees the DHL Danzas Lemuir Joint Venture in India, DHL Global Forwarding in Thailand, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh as well as in Laos, Myanmar and Nepal.