Policy support to help earn $20b from RMG exports

Upbeat BGMEA leader says

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

An improvement in the country's wobbly infrastructure and policy support could help fetch more than $20 billion from apparel exports in a three years' time, a top sector leader has viewed.

"Our export earnings would have crossed a 20 billion dollar mark, had policy measures taken and infrastructure improved," Abdus Salam Murshedy, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, told the press at BGMEA office in Dhaka yesterday.

He pointed to the $65 million spot orders Bangladesh bagged this time from BATEXPO.

The three-day apparel and textile exposition concluded at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre on Saturday.

The amount of export orders from the fair is around 55 percent more than it was a year earlier. The figure was $42 million last year.

Although Bangladesh's share in global apparel exports is not over 3 percent, demand for local products is on the rise, the upbeat sector leader said.

Data show the growth in July-October exports of readymade garments at more than 37 percent, thanks to higher overseas demand and new markets exploration.

"The opportunity for us is wider. The government should extend assistance on some policy issues so that we can avail of such scope," Murshedy said.

Figuring out the 80 percent RMG contribution ($12.59 billion) to last year's national exports, he said doubling such earnings is not impossible.

On buyers' response to the BATEXPO 2010, he said, "They have shown massive interest in Bangladesh products, but we're failing to be competitive."

He stressed removing bottlenecks in infrastructure, particularly overcoming energy constraints like inadequacy in power and gas supply and raising Chittagong port efficiency, and reducing bank lending rate to be competitive for the garment industry.

About 87 companies of host country Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, China, Hong Kong, Japan, Thailand and Brazil showcased products at the event.

Around 14,990 people visited the fair this year.

Murshedy said BGMEA plans to organise seasonal fashion shows here as seen in Paris, Milan and London to promote apparel products.

He said negotiations are underway to export $8 million in the next two months, provided consensus on apparel prices is reached.

VIYELLATEX

Viyellatex Group Director Kaniz Fatema Zareen receives a crest from the Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia for the company's outstanding contribution in readymade garments sector, at BATEXPO-2010 at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in Dhaka on Saturday.

CSE

Syed Sajid Husain, deputy chief executive officer of Chittagong Stock Exchange (CSE), and Anush Amarasinghe, executive director of Sri Lanka based Millennium IT, exchange documents after signing a deal to implement the bourse's web based trading system, at CSE in the port city yesterday.

Ctg bourse to upgrade trading system

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Ctg*

Chittagong Stock Exchange (CSE) will upgrade its web-based trading system to provide faster and wider services.

The bourse yesterday signed a contract with two software firms for implementing its next generation web-based trading system (NGTS) to offer better performance of its trading activities.

The CSE signed the deal with Sri Lankan Millennium IT and Indian Polaris Software Lab at the CSE conference room.

CSE President Fakhor Uddin Ali Ahmed said the NGTS is the world's fastest order processing system through which as many as 2,250 trade orders could be received in a second, while in the old system the number was only 50.

The new system will execute 750 contracts per second, while the existing system can execute four, he said.

The NGTS has multi channel order submission system with real time risk management that would ensure maximum flexibility of the brokers and their clients to trade from anywhere using intranet, internet and mobile phone, said the CSE president.

The system was successfully implemented in Turquoise and London Stock Exchange, Ahmed added.

The Millennium IT, founded in 1996 in Sri Lanka, is a wholly owned subsidiary of London Stock Exchange, and would implement the NGTS project in association with Polaris Software Lab Limited, said the CSE officials.

Millennium IT would provide the 'exchange' solution with a robust core-trading engine, while Polaris would offer the 'brokers' solution of this project, they said.

Gaibandha job generation scheme impacts the poor

BSS, *Gaibandha*

The government's special 40-day employment generation programme has created positive impact to the poor of Sundarganja upazila in the district this lean period.

According to the Upazila Relief Office, 3337 poor people, including women, aged between 18 and 60 years have been engaged as workers with 45 projects worth Tk 2 crore.

Of the total, some 253 workers have been involved in Bamondanga union, 204 in Sonaroy union, Shantiram union and Sarbanonda union each, 220 in Tarapur union, 193 in Belka union, 258 in Dahaband Union, 230 in Ramjibon Union, 223 in Dhopadanga union, 233 in Chhaparhati union, 233 in Horipur union, 215 in Kanchibari union and Sreepur unions each, 210 in Chandipur union and 242 in Kapasia union.

The project works include construction and re-construction of Kutcha roads, earth filling in religious and social organisations including academic institutions, excavation and re-excavation of derelict ponds and canals and removing of water hyacinth from the water bodies, said M. Mizanur Rahman, upazila project implementation officer.

Each worker is getting Tk 150 as wage per day against their work and in this way, a beneficiary will get Tk 6000 after completing 40 days work, he also said.

Aziran Bewa, a beneficiary of the programme of Tarapur union, said, "We are very grateful to the government as this programme has helped us significantly pass our lean time without hardship."

M. Shamsul Azam, upazila nirbahi officer, said the programme will continue up to December 30 when the harvest of T-Aman paddy starts in full swing, to create job opportunities for the day- and farm- labourers sufficiently.

Massive onion output targeted

BSS, *Rangpur*

The government has fixed a massive target of producing 14.40 lakh tonnes of onion from 1,60,000 hectares of land this Robi season, officials and experts said yesterday.

Of them, 84,528 tonnes of onion will be produced from 9,392 hectares of land in all eight districts under Rangpur Agriculture Zone and farmers have already started farming the essential spicy crop.

The Department of Agriculture Extension has fixed a yield rate of 9 tonnes onion a hectare on an average throughout the country.

Meanwhile, the early variety onion has already appeared in the local markets keeping its prices reasonable now, although seeds sowing has been continuing in full swing everywhere in the country's northern region, according to the DAE.

DAE, BARI, BADC, commercial banks and Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank (Rakub) and a large number of nongovernmental organisations have taken adequate steps to make such onion farming a success.

The steps include distribution of quality seeds, disbursements of easy-term farm loans at 2 percent interest rates, providing trainings, technical assistances and inputs under various programmes.

Onion import will be reduced in future, as its production continues increasing due to the new impetuous being given to the sector and the crop is being cultivated twice a year in place of only once during the winter in the past, experts said.

Besides, growers have been showing more interests in farming onion following disbursements of easy-term agri-loans at only two percent interest rates and easier availability of the high quality seeds everywhere.

A huge amount of allocated agri-loans for increased farming of spices remained idle with banks in the past, but presently the same is being disbursed on larger scale among farmers this time.

Onion will be cultivated in 1,672 hectares of land in Rangpur, 1,527 in Gaibandha, 456 in Lalmonirhat, 1,456 in Nilphamari, 640 in Kurigram, 2,154 in Dinajpur, 557 in Thakurgaon and 930 hectares in Panchagarh districts.

BP sells stake in Pan American Energy to Bridas

AFP, *London*

BP said Sunday it has agreed to sell its 60 percent stake in Pan American Energy to Argentina-based oil and gas firm Bridas Corporation, as part of asset sales to pay for the Gulf of Mexico oil spill.

The 7.06-billion-dollar (5.33-billion-euro) sale, which British energy group BP expects to complete next year, will give Bridas total ownership of Pan American, the second largest producer of oil and gas in Argentina.

Bridas is owned 50 percent by Cnooc International, the international arm of China National Offshore Oil Company, and 50 percent by Bridas Energy Holdings, which is owned by Argentina's Bulgheroni family.

In a statement, BP said the deal was part of its plan to divest up to 30 billion dollars of assets by the end of 2011 to cover costs incurred during the devastating oil spill at a BP rig in the United States earlier this year.

It has so far raised 14 billion dollars from asset sales, before the Pan American deal.

BP group chief executive Bob Dudley said: "Today's agreement further demonstrates both the high quality and attractiveness of the assets throughout BP's global portfolio and also the company's ability to meet our significant financial commitments arising from the Gulf of Mexico tragedy.

"We now have agreements in place that should secure the majority of our divestment target.

"We will continue to identify further assets that may be strategically more valuable to others than to BP as we complete the programme."

Huntsman in focus

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Textile chemicals company Huntsman Textile Effects organised a programme in Dhaka yesterday to highlight its activity and the future of its business in Bangladesh.

The multinational's local agent, Swiss Colours Bangladesh, co-organised the event styled 'Avitera SE & Eriopon LT - A Revolution in Exhaust Dyeing' at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre.

The company described the advantages people can get by using its reactive dye, AVITERA SE, and low-temperature clearing additive, ERIOPON LT.

"This ground-breaking new technology that allows saving up to 50 percent more water and energy is an opportunity for mills, brands and retailers to make a real difference," said Rohit Agarwal, vice president of apparel and home textiles of Huntsman TE.

Both the products have unique properties that ensure lower processing costs, yet yield high-quality results and improved environmental acceptability, Agarwal added.

David Hasanat, Viyellatex Group chairman, spoke on the importance of sustainable textile manufacturing in Bangladesh.

Ajay Kanwar, sales director for South Asia, South East Asia and Middle East of Huntsman, presented the keynote paper. Akter Hossain, managing director of Swiss Colours Bangladesh, also spoke.

IIFC

The eleventh annual general meeting of Infrastructure Investment Facilitation Centre (IIFC) was recently held at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel. IIFC Chairman M Musharraf Hossain Bhuiyan and Energy Secretary Mohammad Mejbahuddin attended the meeting.

DHAKA BANK

Dhaka Bank Chairman Reshadur Rahman presides over the bank's fifth extraordinary general meeting at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel yesterday. Managing Director Khondker Fazle Rashid was also present. The bank will issue non convertible bond for Tk 200 crore.

Food festival at Radisson

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Radisson Water Garden Hotel has organised a six-day food festival to promote Bangladeshi cuisine.

The festival kicked off on November 25 and will continue serving diners until tomorrow, said Razeen Abhi Mustafiz, assistant public relations manager for the five-star hotel.

"The purpose of the festival is to endorse Bangladeshi food, which is gaining popularity around the world," he said.

Guests can choose "authentic Bangladeshi dishes" such as bhortas, bhajis and curries from the "sumptuously laid-out buffet" at Water Garden Brasserie, Radisson's restaurant.

"Diners are able to sample freely from the countless tantalising starters, main dishes as well as desserts cooked by celebrity chefs. There is also a live cooking station from where the diners can select cooked food items of choice."

Each meal costs Tk 1,700 per person.