

Delight for some, hopes dashed for many

DITF comes to an end

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Kamal Ahmed, a small boutique house owner, came to the Dhaka International Trade Fair this year hoping to make some liaisons with reputed boutique houses that might help him boost business.

Eventually, his dreams turned into despair, as he bagged only two orders for 500 pieces of ladies' and kids' wear from a mid-level boutique house in 31 days.

"I had this idea that investors join this fair not only to display products and services, but also to make business connections. But I have seen very little opportunities to make new connections here," he said.

"I can sell my products at my shop anyway, so what's the point coming to this fair, I don't understand," Ahmed lamented.

He was also unhappy about his sales during the fair as he said, "It was very insignificant. Most people were not interested in locally manufactured clothes whereas Pakistani dresses were hit among the visitors instead."

Shah Newaz Ali came with homemade décor items and was also dejected: "I have sold a modest number of goods, but I haven't received any big orders during the show."

However, the picture was not entirely gloomy at the closing day of the fair. There were happy pictures with huge spot orders as well.

Manufacturers of furniture, household appliances, leather footwear, knitwear, jute and jute



Visitors on the last day of Dhaka International Trade Fair in the capital yesterday.

products were on the top that received the majority of the spot orders, said the organisers.

Jinat Afroz, salesperson of Jute Emporium, said her company bagged satisfactory sales with more spot orders from the fair compared to the rest of the year.

"We received a good number of spot orders from some local corporate houses and foreign companies, as the prices of our jute made handicraft items are competitive than many other local companies," she said.

Footwear manufacturers bagged huge spot orders too, as the demand for locally made low-cost shoes and sandals have

increased manifold in recent years in the international market.

Ahmed Ali, sales manager of Picko Shoes, said his company got export orders of 4,500 pairs of women's sandals to Myanmar.

The month-long show displayed products such as aluminum utensils, leather and leather goods, footwear, handicrafts, agro-based products, light-engineering products, woven garments, knitwear, jute and jute goods, frozen foods and bicycles.

Home textiles, household appliances, ceramic tableware, pharmaceuticals, textile products, chemical products, machinery, and agriculture and

gardening equipment were also on display.

The 16th Dhaka International Trade Fair (DITF) 2011 came to a close yesterday with the participants bagging spot orders worth Tk 25 crore from the biggest trade exposition in the country. However, the spot orders were Tk 30 crore in 2010.

"The volume of spot orders would be much more if the local entrepreneurs develop their brands uniquely and enhance their products' quality. They need to utilise the opportunity of creating business links," said Faruk Khan, commerce minister.

He was addressing the con-

cluding ceremony of the 31-day DITF 2011 jointly organised by the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) and the commerce ministry at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in Dhaka.

Khan stressed the need for organising such fairs more frequently across the country for promoting locally made products.

He said the government is yet to finalise the place for DITF 2012, as the conventional Sher-e-Bangla Nagar ground is set to turn into the new secretariat building.

He, however, promised to build a 300-acre permanent exhibition centre in a year or two to relieve the visitors and participants from traffic jams, rain and fog.

EPB Vice Chairman Jalal Ahmed said around 50,000 people visited the fair every day, while the number crossed 1 lakh on holidays. The number of total visitors was more than 35 lakh.

A total of 531 national and international companies participated in the show, displaying products in 33 stalls from 14 different countries. The major foreign participants came from USA, India, Pakistan, China, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Iran, Malaysia, Turkey and Thailand.

At the concluding ceremony, the organisers awarded 47 participants in different categories, including best product quality, women entrepreneur, foreign stalls and best decorations.

AK Azad, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, and Ghulam Hussain, commerce secretary, also spoke.



GMG-Airlines has recently signed a deal with Ibn Sina Trust, which allows GMG staffs to get special corporate facilities on medical services from any Ibn Sina service points. Michael Moriarty, chief financial officer of GMG, and Saiful Alam Khan, general manager of Ibn Sina Trust, signed the deal at a programme in Dhaka.

StanChart official in town

STAR BUSINESS DESK



Raheel Ahmed, group head of distribution channels for Standard Chartered Bank, arrives in Dhaka today on a brief visit. During his stay he will meet officials and clients of the Bank, says a statement.

He moved into his current role in June 2009 where he is responsible for building and implementing the distribution channels strategy across branches, phone banking, automate teller machines and online banking.

An MBA from the Institute of Business Administration, Karachi, and a bi-major in finance and marketing, he is a seasoned consumer banker with over 20 years of experience across Asia, Europe, Middle East and Africa.

In 2004, he joined StanChart in Dubai as regional head of consumer credit for Middle East and South Asia. He then moved to Pakistan to head the consumer bank for Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Minister seeks help from millers in food price control

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Food Minister Abdur Razzaque yesterday asked the millers to help the government contain the rising price of rice, which went up by 33 percent in a year.

The price of coarse rice would come down soon, as its demand at the mill gate is sliding, Razzaque told The Daily Star over the phone after meeting the millers at his ministry office.

Fine rice price should not climb much as paddy price was moderate in last Boro season when fine rice was harvested, Razzaque told the millers.

KM Layek Ali, convener of Bangladesh Auto, Major and Husking Mills Owners Association, who was present at the meeting, said they sell fine rice at Tk 47 at the mill gate. If its price rises to Tk 52, the millers have nothing to do with it, he stated.

The millers have also approved of the anti-hoarding act which the government will enact soon to better regulate the millers and traders, said the minister.

Currently, coarse rice price is Tk 35-37 a kilogram, while medium and fine rice is selling at Tk 40-52. The price hike prompted the government to extend Open Market Sales (OMS) at Tk 24 a kilogram.

In Dhaka, dealers sell rice in 160 trucks, which will be increased to 200 trucks a couple of days, the minister said. Dealers have also been increased to seven from five at upazila level, said officials at the ministry.

Besides, the government is also selling rice to the urban poor at subsidized rates through Fair Price Cards and decided to introduce rationing for fourth

Call to refurbish leather industry

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh must emphasise technical education rather than general because there is a dearth of adequately trained and competent employees, said a senior government official yesterday.

Commerce Secretary Ghulam Hussain said: "We have to focus on technical and vocational education because general education does not produce skilled human resources."

At least 70 percent of colleges should have to be converted into technical institutions to develop a skilled workforce, said Hussain.

"We need to make a separate ministry for technical education," said the commerce secretary while he was speaking as chief guest at a seminar on awareness building on product standards and environment of leather goods and footwear.

The seminar was co-organised by Leathergoods and Footwear Manufacturers (LFMEAB) and Leather Sector Business Promotion Council under the commerce ministry.

"The sector has enormous scope for capacity and export expansion due to shift of business from leading exporter countries," said Saiful Islam, president of LFMEAB. "This would mean export

expansion and job creation."

"Over 15 companies are doing business in the leather sector in Bangladesh and a couple companies are in the pipeline," said Hussain "So there would be a huge demand for skilled manpower and that's why we have to focus on developing human capital by imparting technical knowledge."

Speaking as special guest, Mustafizur Rahman, executive director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said the leather industry, whose global market is nearly \$510 million, has a tremendous potential for expansion because Bangladesh holds nearly 4 percent market share in the global leather market.

Rahman said Bangladesh has to focus on turning its comparative advantages on leather sector such as nearly zero-tariff benefit and high-quality raw material through branding and upgrading, to grab more share in the world market.

The commerce secretary also urged the business leader of the leather industry to diversify their product baskets to absorb the external shocks.

Islam said the leather industry is set to introduce a self-audit of product standardisation and environment compliance to achieve better cost control and improve operational efficiency at the factories.

Oman widens scope for foreign workers

PORIMOL PALMA

Oman has opened up five more sectors to foreigners, creating scope for Bangladeshis to take up more jobs in the Middle Eastern country, officials said.

Jobs in sales and distribution, beauty parlour, maintenance of electrical equipment and computers, tailoring and barbershop, along with 10 other occupations were restricted by Oman in 2009 as part of its target to recruit more natives and cut unemployment.

The sultanate, however, opened seven sectors last year and recently unlocked another five considering demand for a foreign workforce, said Rabiul Islam, labour counsellor of Bangladesh embassy in Muscat.

"I cannot actually tell you on the potential in terms of figures, but our assessment suggests that the openings will be significant," he told The Daily Star in an email interview last Saturday.

The sectors are open and the critical issue for Bangladesh now is to improve bilateral relations with Oman and tap the opportunity promptly, Islam said.

Around 3.5 lakh Bangladeshis now work in Oman where Bangladeshi workers' salaries range from Omani Rial 60-200 (1 Omani Rial is Tk 183).

Presently, Oman recruits managers, engineers, electronic technicians, broadcasters, carpenters, silken net printers, textile printers, painters, building mate-

rial salesmen, masons, gardeners and mechanics from Bangladesh.

It also hires launderers, glass fixers, decorators, publicity advertisement agents, blacksmiths, electricians, plumbers, electricians for programmed machines, welders, carpet fixers, curtain tailors and masseurs, the counsellor said.

Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Secretary Zafar Ahmed Khan who recently visited Oman said they held meeting with Oman's foreign ministry officials and discussed a possible high-level visit by a Bangladesh delegation to Oman.

"This is quite a significant labour market for Bangladesh, but it remained out of focus," he said. "We want to enter new sectors."

Bangladeshis have been contributing considerably in Oman's agriculture and construction sectors and Oman is appreciative of it, said Khan who visited Muscat on January 24-26.

As part of rectifying pitfalls and bolstering the foreign labour sector, Oman last year declared a six-month amnesty. Under the programme, 11,423 irregular Bangladeshis returned home without paying any fine, said Rabiul Islam.

Those who returned can now try and go back to Oman with jobs provided there are no complaints against them, he noted.

Khan said they requested Oman to allow transfer of jobs so that after completion of a job contract under an employer there.



Ayesha Aziz Khan, director of Summit Meghnaghat Power Company; Md Asaduzzaman Khan, managing director of Industrial and Infrastructure Finance Company; and Md Jahangir Miah, chief executive officer Janata Capital and Investment Limited, sign term sheet for issuance of zero coupon bond for Tk 15 billion at Westin Dhaka recently.



Mohammad Abdullah, managing director of IFIC Bank, addresses participants of a three-week foundation course for the bank's probationary officers of 11th batch at the bank's training academy on Sunday.

Birla Group buys Colombian Chem

REUTERS, Mumbai

Aditya Birla Group on Monday said it has agreed to buy U.S.-based Colombian Chemicals for \$875 million, doubling its capacity and boosting its position to the largest carbon black manufacturer in the world.

The acquisition, through three units, will give the diversified Indian group access to markets in North America, Canada, Brazil, Germany, Italy and China, Chairman Kumar Managalam Birla said at a press conference.

The deal, to be completed in six months, will yield synergies of about \$50 million, he said.

The Indian conglomerate has interests ranging from telecom to retail and is led by Kumar Mangalam Birla, listed by Forbes as India's tenth richest man with a net worth of \$8.5 billion.

"Aditya Birla group's carbon black business and that of Columbian Chemicals complements each other and the acquisition will create a business that has advantage of advanced technologies, low costs and global footprint," Birla said.

It also controls India's largest cement maker UltraTech Cement and aluminium maker Hindalco, which acquired Canada's Novelis for \$6 billion in 2007.

Carbon black is used as a pigment in dyes and paints and for reinforcement in tyres.

Columbian, the world's third-largest manufacturer of carbon black, manufactures specialty carbon black and has 16 percent of the global market share in the segment. The Indian group's carbon black business had capacity of 0.94 million tonnes per year.

The global carbon black industry is expected to touch capacity of 14.3 million tonnes in 2011, with growth seen at 3.5 percent a year.