

Bangladesh to get 60,000 hectares for farming in Uganda

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Uganda is interested to allocate up to 60,000 hectares of land to Bangladeshi entrepreneurs for commercial farming in the east African country, its Honorary Consul to Bangladesh said yesterday.

"The government of Uganda has shown interest to allocate more land for cultivation to Bangladeshi entrepreneurs. If it is feasible and receives attractive proposal it will provide more," said Abul Hossain, the honorary consul.

"Uganda will provide the land for free. It will however take a percentage of the produce," he said at a press conference at Ruposhi Bangla Hotel in Dhaka.

The disclosure came after a team of Bangladeshi businessmen got nod from the govern-

ment of Uganda against their proposal for commercial farming on 10,000 hectares of land (1 hectare = 2.47 acres) in the country.

Nitol-Niloy Group, which led the delegation to the African country last month, organised the press meet to announce its plan to invest \$12.5 million to grow rice on 10,000 hectares of land in Uganda in a bid to support Bangladesh's effort to ensure food sufficiency for its growing population.

With 16 crore population on 147,000 square kilometres of land, Bangladesh faces a gradual fall of arable land due to its increased use for non-farm purposes including housing.

The decline has created concerns about future food security for the nation which takes rice as staple.

Bangladesh requires additional 5 lakh tonnes of food grains every year for its rising population. Over the decades since independence, rice output tripled to over 3 crore tonnes in Bangladesh, yet the country has to depend on imports.

Abdul Matlub Ahmad, chairman of Nitol-Niloy Group, a Tk 2,000 crore company, said Bangladeshi entrepreneurs are looking for commercial rice farming in Africa to ensure food security.

Ahmad, whose company's operations range from automobile to paper to cement, said the proposed farming venture on 10,000 hectares of land would give output of 77,000 tonnes of rice from two seasons a year.

Of the produce, 20 percent will go to the government of Uganda, and the remaining will be sent to

Bangladesh with a profit of 10 percent plus production cost.

"If such 22 projects could be done, we will have the food security the government wants," said Ahmad.

He said Bangladesh has a shortfall of 14 lakh tonnes of rice, and 22 such farms can narrow the gap between the demand and supply.

Hossain said the African country has a plenty of cultivable land, with suitable weather for farming. It also produces organic cotton, coffee, tea and rice.

He said the scope for Bangladeshi entrepreneurs to invest in the country would widen if the agriculture ministries of the two countries sign cooperation deal.

Apart from Nitol-Niloy Group, some more local entrepreneurs

have also started looking for leasing land in other African countries including Tanzania.

Two local businesses including one led by Nitol-Niloy Group aim to go for farming in Uganda and Tanzania on 40,000 hectares of land, according to reports.

Bangladesh Bank, which gives permission to local entrepreneurs investing abroad, is yet to receive any application seeking clearance for foreign exchange transfer, said a top central bank official.

Ahmad expected the government would allow such investments to ensure food security in the country. He added an agreement between Bangladesh and Uganda might be signed next month.

Ahmad also announced a platform, Bangladesh Africa Business Forum, to provide support to prospective investors.



PUBALI BANK
Hafiz Ahmed Mazumder, chairman of Pubali Bank, and Helal Ahmed Chowdhury, managing director, attend the managers' conference 2011, joined by the bank's managers in Sylhet region, at Rose View Hotel in the divisional city recently.

Islami Bank re-elects top brass

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Abu Nasser Muhammad Abdus Zaher has recently been re-elected chairman of Islami Bank Bangladesh Ltd.

The bank also re-elected Yousif Abdullah Al-Rajhi and Mustafa Anwar as vice chairmen, the bank said in a statement on Thursday.

The election took place at the bank's board meeting in Dhaka on Wednesday.



Abu Nasser Muhammad Abdus Zaher

Call to ensure people's participation in budget

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The government should ensure people's participation in the process of formulating the national budget, while the draft budget should be made public three months prior to its formal presentation to the parliament, speakers said at a press conference yesterday.

Also, the national budget should reflect the demands of all segments of people, including farmers, labourers, women, and minority groups like indigenous people, Dalits and physically and mentally challenged people, they said.

Nagorik Morcha for National Budget 2011-12, an alliance of 22 political organisations and NGOs (non-government organisations), called the conference at the National Press Club in Dhaka.

"The budget should be formulated with a primary aim to protect the interest of masses, not some specific groups or sectors," said Morshed Ali, president of Bangladesh Krishok Samity, an association of farmers.

"The budget must protect the interests of workers, farmers, the disabled and ethnic people who are marginalised and underprivileged," he said.

Ali urged the government to fix wages for farmers, and introduce employment scheme for landless people.

The government should immediately open procurement centres in all upazilas to collect paddy directly from the growers so that farmers are not made hostage to the middlemen, he said.

Nagorik Morcha presented a set of recommendations that also include taking new policies to promote local agro and fisheries sectors.

The political alliance also demanded an employment scheme and individual allocations in the budget for the laid-off workers of shut-down factories across the country.

"The government should ensure jobs for educated and qualified people from all marginalised groups including Dalit, ethnic groups and physically challenged persons," said Uma Chowdhury, director of Campaign for Good Governance or

Islamic banking seminar begins in Dhaka tomorrow

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

A two-day international seminar of 300 local and foreign delegates will start tomorrow in Dhaka to discuss the strength and success of Islamic banking.

Islamic Banks Consultative Forum (IBCF), a national forum for banks providing full-fledged or partly Shariah-based financial services, will organise the event styled "The Global Financial Crisis and Strength of Islamic Banking System" at Hotel Sonargaon in the city.

Ahmad Mohamed Ali Al Madani, president of Islamic Development Bank, will inaugurate the international gathering, said IBCF Chairman Prof Abu Nasser Muhammad Abdus Zaher at a press conference at the same venue yesterday.

AKM Nurul Fazal Bulbul, director of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, said the country's economy stands on strong foothold, thanks to well-built foundation of the banking system.

"But in many countries, the financial sector has received a massive blow due to the global economic crisis," he said.

Bulbul said private banks control about 62 percent of the country's growing economy. "Islamic banks account for a significant part of that."

EXIM Bank Chief Executive Officer Kazi Masihur Rahman, Social Islami Bank Managing Director Muhammad Ali, Islami Bank Bangladesh Managing Director Mohammad Abdul Mannan and AB Bank Islamic Banking Division Head Md Fariduddin Ahmed were present on the occasion.



TRIUNE
Alphons Hennekens, Netherlands ambassador to Bangladesh; Mir Md Imam Hossain, president of Dutch Bangla Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and Kazi Wahidul Alam, managing director of Triune Exhibition and Event Management Services, attend a press meet to announce Dutch Trade Fair 2011 at Sonargaon Hotel in Dhaka yesterday. Triune will manage the three-day show that starts on October 27 in the hotel.



KOHINOOR
Kohinoor Chemical Co (Bangladesh) Ltd has recently launched its new product, am.p.m. toothpaste, at a programme in Dhaka. The product will be available in three sizes: 200gm, 100gm and 45gm.

Bourses oppose market watch by intelligence agents

Mirza Aziz disagrees with stock exchanges

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Dhaka and Chittagong stock exchanges yesterday asked the government to stop market monitoring by different intelligence agencies, which is creating panic among retail investors, officials of the twin bourses said.

Currently, the stockmarket is in a depressed mood and the market should not be monitored by intelligence agencies, representatives of the two bourses told Finance Minister AMA Muhith while submitting two separate budget proposals to him.

The Securities and Exchange Commission is responsible for market monitoring and surveillance and the commission should do its duties properly, they said.

The stockmarket is passing troubled times with a continued declining trend in the wake of January's market crash.

The benchmark index of Dhaka Stock Exchange dropped over 200 points, while the key index of the Chittagong Stock Exchange went down around 400 points yesterday.

The two bourses in their budget proposals also urged the government to keep scope for investment of untaxed or undisclosed money in the stockmarket for the next fiscal year, as the money-whitening scope ends this fiscal year.

Investment of untaxed money should be allowed at least for the next fiscal year to keep the money flow into the market, now facing a liquidity crisis, the bourses leaders said.

The opportunity will also help keep the stockmarket vibrant through bringing back confidence among the investors, they said.

DSE President Shakil Rizvi and CSE president Fakhor Uddin Ali Ahmed led their teams while submitting their budget proposals to the finance minister at his secretariat office.

"If the government gives another chance to invest black money in the stockmarket, the market will get credit support in a volatile period," Rizvi said.

However, Muhith has recently told reporters in Sylhet that the government would not give any further opportunity of whitening black money.

A market expert however opposed the bourses' proposals on market monitoring and money whitening saying that the markets would then inflate further beyond their fundamentals.

"The stock exchanges cannot demand who will or will not monitor the markets," said Mirza Azizul Islam, a former finance adviser.

Islam, also the former chairman of the SEC, opposed giving another chance to whiten black money through the capital market. "It will seem unfair to the honest taxpayers," he said.

The DSE and CSE leaders also suggested the government does not impose any tax on capital gains made by individual investors.

The stock exchanges authorities further proposed that the government drops the plan of making tax identification number (TIN) compulsory for BO (beneficiary owners) accounts.

Mirza Azizul Islam said the TIN should not be made mandatory for BO accounts, as it will be very difficult to collect TIN for all investors.

Minister sad at 'digital Bangladesh' pace

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The ICT minister himself has vented frustration over the poor pace in materialising the government's 'Digital Bangladesh' vision.

"Whom should I blame (for this)?" State Minister for ICT Yeafesh Osman said while responding to the allegations of some experts that no drastic changes came out of the government's 'digital Bangladesh' drive.

The minister was speaking at a discussion styled "Towards a digital Bangladesh: roundtable on upcoming budget 2011-2012" in Dhaka on Saturday.

The speakers at the roundtable alleged that the government did not take any major step in the last two or three years to uphold the information and communication technology (ICT) sector.

They said the government is yet to decide on who will monitor the implementation of the digital Bangladesh vision.

They said the telecoms ministry, ICT ministry and the Access to Information (A2I) project of the Prime Minister's Office are responsible to materialise the vision. But they are not supervised by any entity, which is creating problems, the speakers said.

There is no coordination between the government's ministries and other initiatives, they alleged, saying that some of the government's regulators consider the businessmen as 'thieves'. This attitude discourages the people of the sector, the speakers said.

They said there is no sign of digitalisation in the government's

efforts. The ICT sector got no planning in the last two years. Only e-book cannot digitise the entire education sector, they added.

The state minister also echoed the views of the speakers and said the public sector lacks initiatives for their development through ICT.

He, however, asked the sector leaders to have patience. "We are all trying to move forward."

Moderator of the roundtable Mustafa Zabbar, president of Bangladesh Computer Samity (BCS), said: "The government plans to provide third generation (3G) mobile services through state-owned operator Teletalk. If it is true then the future is very bad for us."

Internet service providers' representative Sumon Ahmed Sabir said, making available 2 Megabits of bandwidth in Khulna would cost Tk 35,000, which goes against the government's vision of reaching internet to the rural people.

The main problem of the sector is infrastructure, he said, adding that 40 percent tax on import of telecom equipment made the business tough.

Fahim Mashrur Chowdhury, vice president of Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS), demanded industry specific budget. He said there is no specific guideline for taxation for software export.

Lawmaker Akram Hossain Chowdhury said a strong ministry is needed to implement the digital Bangladesh vision.

Bangladesh ICT Journalist Forum organised the programme at Bangladesh Computer Council office in Agargaon.



PIONEER INSURANCE
QAQM Serajul Islam, managing director of Pioneer Insurance Company Ltd, attends the branch conference 2011 of the company at Dhaka Regency Hotel & Resort in the capital recently.



ANVIL
Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister GM Quader attends the launch of Anvil Splash, the first project of Anvil Property Management, in Cox's Bazar on Saturday. Anvil Property's Managing Director Mohammad Delwar Hossain Chowdhury was also present.