

Lack of modern technology weakens Ctg card business

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Chittagong

Card producers in Chittagong are suffering from asymmetric competition from their counterparts in Dhaka, local businesses say.

Although Chittagong is the commercial capital, Dhaka is still the centre of all sorts of trade and commerce, said Dipak Dutta, owner of Ad Communication, a local advertising firm.

"Paper imported through Chittagong port goes to Dhaka first and then comes here, which makes it costlier here than in Dhaka," he said. "It increases our production cost."

"Also, their production cost is much lower and job quality much better than ours as they

have easy access to better technology," he added.

Chittagong's card makers said that quality of their product suffers from the lack of access to Heidelberg Speedmaster machines, which are prevalent in Dhaka but not in Chittagong.

Most complementary facilities like designing, plate making, printing, cutting, making film output, foil printing, dye-cutting and laminating are available in Chittagong now, but modern technology for printing is still a far cry for the businesses in the port city.

Businessmen allege that Dhaka-centric policies discourage free investment in Chittagong and the card-making industry.

The cost efficient Speedmaster machines can print four colours simultaneously and the products have a much nicer finish, compared to those of the older and slower AMO machines and COD machines available in Chittagong.

"As the businessmen of Dhaka can easily access modern technology, we lag behind in competition," said Abul Kalam Azad, president of GA Bhaban Traders' Welfare Association at Anderkilla.

Anderkilla is the hub of card production and printing business in the port city.

As big investors, the Dhaka-based card production houses can easily get bank loans, Azad said.

"We have to compete with the

Dhaka-based production houses on an uneven footing and lag behind as a result," said Iqbal Ahmed Chowdhury, general secretary of GA Bhaban Traders' Welfare Association, also owner of Ma Printers.

Clients prefer cards from Dhaka-based houses as they have established brands through intense marketing, he said.

Tahrin Akhter, a resident of Panchlaish area, bought invitation cards for her daughter's wedding from the Dhaka-based card maker Ideal Products.

Azad Products, Ideal Products and other Dhaka-based houses have successfully established their brands, she said.

"These houses have a wide variety of card designs which

you would not find in local houses," she said.

Cards have now become integral to many celebrations like weddings, birthdays, anniversaries, Friendship Day and Valentine's Day.

Md Shahed, manager of Mim Printers, said they sell each card for Tk 2.20 to Tk 20 while Ideal Products showroom officials said their card prices ranged from Tk 4 to Tk 50 apiece.

Mosleh Uddin Ahmed of 'Nabarun Products' was the pioneer of card production business in the port city starting in 1979 seconded by Islamabad Printers in 1985. Many such houses later emerged after the setting up of Master Products' in 1988.



ISLAMI BANK
Abu Nasser Muhammad Abdus Zaher, chairman of Islami Bank Bangladesh, hands a cheque for Tk 2 crore to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for the premier's relief and welfare fund at Prime Minister's Office in Dhaka recently.

UCB gets new MD

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Muhammed Ali yesterday joined United Commercial Bank (UCB) as its managing director and chief executive officer, the bank said in a statement.

Ali is a professional banker with more than 35 years of multi-dimensional experience in banking and other fields of management.

Prior to joining UCB, he also served Social Islami Bank and Shahjalal Islami Bank as managing director.

He started his career with Sonali Bank as a probationary officer in 1977. A post graduate in economics from Chittagong University, Ali also worked with



SIBL gets new MD

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Md Shafiqur Rahman took the post of managing director of Social Islami Bank (SIBL) yesterday, the bank said in a statement.

He joined SIBL as deputy managing director in 2010 and played key roles in investment risk management, retail and trade finance, RMG and textile and centralised trade processing.

Rahman is a commerce post graduate from Dhaka University and a diplomate associate of the Institute of Bankers, Bangladesh.

He started his career as a probationary officer in Sonali Bank in 1977 and also worked with Agrani



IDCOL
Ellen Goldstein, country director of World Bank, and Mahmood Malik, executive director of Infrastructure Development Company Ltd (IDCOL), attend a programme where the two organisations signed a deal recently. The World Bank will give a fund of \$128 million to finance six lakh solar home systems and other projects of IDCOL.



SAAD MUSA CITY CENTRE
Dan W. Mozena, US ambassador to Bangladesh, speaks at the inauguration of Saad Musa City Centre, a unit of Saad Musa Group, in Kuril of Badda in Dhaka yesterday. Mohamad Saiful Hassan, chief executive officer of the group, and Muhammad Mohsin, managing director, were also present.

Sharp fears for future as Japan TV makers bleed

REUTERS, Tokyo

Struggling Japanese TV maker Sharp Corp warned it might not be able to survive on its own, as it almost doubled its full-year net loss forecast to \$5.6 billion, and said it was considering alliances with other companies.

In a statement, the company said it booked massive second-quarter losses and is seeing "serious negative operating cash flow." "This raises serious doubts about (our ability) to continue as a going concern," it said, adding it was taking steps, from pay cuts and asset sales to voluntary redundancies, to generate cash flow.

Sharp has been in talks for months with Hon Hai Precision Industry Co Ltd about the Taiwan-based group becoming its biggest shareholder. Sharp said on Thursday it expected an agreement on that before a March deadline, but added it was considering other alliances as well.

"Perhaps it will not fail within this year, but I don't think Sharp has a viable business in the next 3-5 years," said Tetsuro Ii, CEO of Commons Asset Management in Tokyo. "The company hasn't got much time left and they need to cut off businesses that they can, conserve cash and ... produce something that's really competitive."

Sharp CEO Takashi Okuda told reporters: "We have lots of great technology and we want to tap that asset to revive and make money, but I can't say we are now a company with that vitality."

Bigger Japanese rival Sony Corp, which blazed a trail in the early 1980s with its Walkman portable music players, made a small operating profit in July-September, helped by the sale of a non-core chemicals business, and kept its forecast for a full-year profit of \$1.63 billion.

But the maker of Bravia TVs, Vaio laptops and PlayStation game consoles said it expects to sell fewer of its handheld PSP and Vita consoles this year -- 10 million -- than it previously estimated. It also cut forecasts for sales of its TV sets to 14.5 million and compact digital cameras to 16 million but kept its PlayStation home console sales estimate at 16 million, and maintained its forecast to sell 34 million smartphones.

The grim tale from brands that led a consumer electronics boom from the 1970s came a day after Panasonic Corp said it will lose almost \$10 billion this business year as it writes down goodwill and assets and prepares for more restructuring.

The maker of Viera brand TVs also skipped its dividend for the first time in more than six decades and cut its full-year TV sales forecast by more than a quarter to 9 million sets. Panasonic shares slumped by nearly a fifth on Thursday, wiping \$3 billion off its market value.

By March, the three companies -- all under new leadership after racking up combined losses of \$20 billion last year -- expect to have axed close to 60,000 jobs and are selling assets and closing facilities.

Tanners oppose rawhide export plan

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Tanners and finished leather exporters yesterday urged the government to disallow rawhide export to save the local industry.

The call came after a day when the commerce minister announced a plan to allow rawhide export to prevent the item's smuggling and for proper valuation.

Rawhide prices were 20 percent lower this Eid-ul-Azha than the last Eid, as tanners still have unsold hide of last year with their processing capacity already stretched out, sector leaders said.

"We are frustrated and worried at the government plan to allow rawhide exports," said Belal Hossain, chairman of Bangladesh Finished Leather, Leather Goods and Footwear Exporters' Association, at a press briefing at its office in the capital.

There would be a disaster in the

leather sector if the government gives green light to such exports, he said.

"We provide around 75 percent demand for rawhide of the tanneries through purchasing the item locally, and the rest is imported from other countries," said Hossain.

"In this context, how could the government plan to allow rawhide export?"

He said the price of a cowhide -- Tk 300-Tk 500 -- this year is lower than the previous year due to a drop in demand on international markets emanating from a persistent debt crisis in Europe.

Seasonal traders are manipulating the rawhide market, said Rezaul Karim Ansari, former chairman of the association.

He stressed the need for stopping the business of seasonal traders to bring discipline in the market.

Shamsul Huda, president of Bangladesh Tanners Association, was also present.

Pharma to get boost in new export policy

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The draft proposed providing utility services to export-oriented industries on a priority basis.

Export of petroleum products, which now needs clearance from the energy and mineral resources division to go through, could be done without the green signal from the division under the new policy.

The number of thrust sectors, too, has been reconfigured; plastic wares, furniture, terry towel and tourism were added to the list to bring the total number of thrust sectors to 10 from 8.

The list of special development sector,

i.e. sectors with high potential, was reviewed in the proposed policy as well, with many sectors from the current list asking to be taken off, said the official.

The list as per the new policy would form of sectors producing: light engineering, jute, electric and electronics, weaving, frozen fish, printing and packaging, rubber, cosmetics and toiletries, ceramics and unpolished diamond jewellery.

The official added that the new policy was put together with a view to increase the use of modern technology.



NCC BANK
Fakhru Islam Chowdhury, head of marketing and branches division of NCC Bank, and Md Asiful Karim, acting managing director of Hajj Finance Company, exchange documents after signing a deal in Dhaka recently. Clients of Hajj Finance can deposit their savings and loans at any branch of the bank.



BB
Lee Yun-young, South Korean ambassador to Bangladesh, meets Atiur Rahman, governor of Bangladesh Bank, in Dhaka yesterday. They discussed trade, economy and other issues of Bangladesh and South Korea.

Doors open for sugar refiners to make millions

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"We are preparing to export to Europe and SAARC countries to reap the duty benefit that Bangladesh gets as a least-developed country," said Biswajit Saha, general manager of City Group of Industries, which runs one of the world's biggest sugar refineries.

Asif Iqbal, executive director of Meghna Group of Industries, said the company has received queries from sugar buyers in Singapore and other South-east Asian countries.

"We also exploring the option to export to Europe," said Iqbal.

The commerce ministry will send the proposal to