

Position paper submitted to retain GSP facility: minister

UNB, Sangsad Bhaban

.....

Bangladesh has already submitted its position paper to the US authorities to retain duty-free benefits under the generalised system of preferences (GSP), Foreign Minister Dipu Moni said yesterday.

"We're hopeful that the GSP facility for Bangladesh will continue in the US market," she told the House while responding to a scripted question from AKM Maidul Islam (Kurigram-3).

The minister said the government is trying its best to retain the GSP for Bangladeshi products and expand its coverage area.

She said Bangladesh in its position paper described the steps taken for the workers' welfare and the plans that will be taken, including the women

empowerment issue.

The Bangladesh embassy in the US is also upholding the country's position among the US congress members and departments concerned, Dipu Moni said.

Taking a swipe at the opposition leader, she mentioned that BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia in her Washington Times article demanded withdrawal of the GSP facility for Bangladesh.

"There might be differences of opinion with the government...but people will want a reply from her why she had taken such suicidal initiatives that went against the country's interest," Dipu Moni told the House.

In the second week of January, the US Trade Representative (USTR) office sought public comments from the stakeholders by January 31 on the possible withdrawal, suspension or limitation

of Bangladesh's duty-free benefits under the GSP.

It said that based on the most recent available information, including updated reports from the AFL-CIO, the GSP subcommittee believes that the lack of progress by the government of Bangladesh in addressing worker rights issues in the country warrants consideration of possible withdrawal, suspension, or limitation of Bangladesh's trade benefits under GSP.

Earlier at a press briefing, Dipu Moni said the matter depends on bilateral discussions though only 0.54 percent of Bangladesh's total exports of \$4.87 billion to the US now enjoy duty-free status under the GSP.

The government is working for the improvement of labour standards and ensuring the quality of

the products that go to the global market, especially readymade garments.

The GSP programme grants duty-free treatment to designated eligible articles that are imported from designated beneficiary developing countries.

Once granted, GSP benefits may be withdrawn, suspended, or limited by the US president with respect to any article or with respect to any country.

Bangladesh is a designated beneficiary developing country under the GSP programme, as well as a least-developed beneficiary developing country.

In 2011, the US imports from Bangladesh under GSP totalled \$26.3 million. Among the leading GSP imports from Bangladesh were tobacco products, sports equipment, china kitchenware, and plastic articles.

Emirates Airlines sees 2012-13 income up 18-20pc

AFP, Dubai

.....

Dubai's Emirates Airlines said Sunday its year to March 2013 income is seen rising by 18 to 20 percent, as the emirate officially opened the world's first concourse dedicated to Airbus A380 superjumbos.

The Middle East's biggest carrier expects to see "an 18 to 20 percent" income rise this year, Emirates president Tim Clark told reporters.

For the first six months of the current fiscal year its net profit jumped by 104 percent to 1.7 billion dirhams (\$464 million) from 836 million dirhams in the corresponding period of the previous year.

In the year to March 2012, Emirates had posted a net profit of 1.5 billion dirhams, down from 5.4 billion dirhams in the



Chairman of Innotel Zahidur Rahman and Managing Director Mashiur Rahman attend a programme to celebrate the boutique hotel's first anniversary in Dhaka on Saturday.

Crop insurance in the offing

FROM PAGE B1

Such disasters sometimes force them to get entangled in the vicious cycle of credit," she said.

The prime minister also urged the private insurers to think about measures to bring the agriculture sector under insurance coverage, according to state-run news agency BSS and independent UNB.

To make the agriculture sector more productive and to help the farmers recover from the losses of natural disasters, new measures have to be taken both by the public and private sector insurers, she said.

The prime minister also said the government has given due importance to the development and modernisation of the insurance sector.

She hoped the participants from 22 countries at the event would devise a perfect and realistic model of insurance for the third world countries.

She also assured that her government would consider the recommendations of the international seminar.

Finance Minister AMA Muhith, Insurance Development and Regulatory Authority Chairman M Shefaqe Ahmed, Federation of Afro-Asian Insurers and Reinsurers' Secretary General Hammam Badar and Bangladesh Insurance Association President Sheikh Kabir Hossain also spoke.

Market high on optimism

FROM PAGE B1

"Record amount of foreign currency reserve coupled with central bank's commitment to increase private sector credit growth is a positive indication for the market," LankaBangla Securities said.

A total of 1.14 lakh trades were executed, with 10.68 crore shares and mutual fund units changing hands on the Dhaka bourse. Of the 275 issues that traded on the DSE floor, 214 advanced, 41 declined and 20 remained unchanged.

Among the major sectors, non-bank financial institutions was the biggest gainer, advancing 2.01 percent, followed by power 1.11 percent and pharma 0.81 percent.

Banks rose 0.32 percent, while telecoms lost 0.81 percent. United Airways was the most-traded stock of the day, with its turnover of 1.33 crore shares worth Tk 31.48 crore.

Beximco and Summit Purbanchol Power Company were the next popular stocks, with the latter being the biggest gainer of the day as well, posting a 10.29 percent rise. Gemini See Food was the worst loser, slumping 8.74 percent.

CSCX, the selective categories index of Chittagong Stock Exchange, closed the day at 8,448.65 points, surging 108.18 points, or 1.29 percent.

The port city bourse traded 1.36 crore shares and mutual fund units, with a turnover of Tk 49.36 crore.

IP rights regulator up for full automation

FROM PAGE B1

"The database is the first step towards automation," said AFM Mahbubul Ahsan, deputy registrar (trade-mark) of the department.

Through the automation, the paper-based records on registered trademarks, patents and industrial designs will be digitised and made accessible online, Ahsan said. The system will make it easier to search current registrations, submit design details and obtain registration, he said.

"The protection of intellectual property is vital for growth of industries and businesses," said Masrur Reaz, programme manager of IFC.

Currently, businesses have to wait at least two years to get IP registration from the DPDT and the duration would come down to three to six months

Tazreen victims yet to be compensated

FROM PAGE B1

"We are waiting on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, as the cheques would be handed over by her. As soon as she gives us a timeslot, we will organise the event." The BGMEA president then went on to reassure that all will be compensated.

"Some victims' DNA could not be verified yet, but by all means we will identify them. Everyone will get the compensation."



Md Badi Akhter, acting country director of Oxfam, and Kamal S Quadir, chief executive officer of bKash Ltd, exchange documents after signing a deal recently to transfer cash to 3,371 households at Fulchhari upazila in Gaibandha.



M Shah Nowaz Ali, chairman of Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank, speaks at a business activity review meeting in Rajshahi yesterday. Md Mofazzal Husain, managing director, was also present.

Sony faces challenge with new PlayStation

AFP, San Francisco

.....

When Sony pulls back the curtain on the next-generation PlayStation videogame console, the world will see how much the Japanese consumer electronics titan has been paying attention.

Sony could double-down on hardware to power even more realistic graphics and rich game play than the impressive specifications of PlayStation 3 consoles nearing the end of a life cycle started in 2006.

Or, Sony may step toward a vision outlined by chief executive Kazuo Hirai by introducing an improved console as part of an ecosystem that weaves the company's film, music, games and electronics together with the trend toward getting home entertainment online.

"Sony needs a living room experience," Forrester Research analyst James McQuivey said while discussing expectations that a PlayStation 4 will be showcased at an event being hosted by Sony on February 20 in New York City.

US tax rules sour life for Americans abroad: expats

AFP, Geneva

.....

Scott Schmith is a patriot and a US military veteran but he is no longer a US citizen: Sick of complex tax rules making his life in Switzerland miserable he recently handed back his passport.

"It was a pretty big decision and there was a bit of anxiety," said the 50-year-old photographer who served in the 1990-91 Gulf war and has been living in Switzerland since 1993.

But once he received his Swiss passport and handed back his US one last September, "it was like a load of weight off my shoulders."

Schmith is one of a growing number of American expats who are opting to give up their citizenship rather than deal with the increasing difficulties imposed on them by US tax authorities, observers say.

John, a 60-year-old business strategy specialist who asked that his last name not be used, told AFP he had decided to give up his US passport after losing sleep for years over the intricate tax filing requirements Washington places on all US citizens, regardless of where they live in the world and where they make their money.

When the United States recently began pushing through regulations aimed at fighting offshore tax evasion, the implica-

tions for him -- a "squeaky-clean" law-abiding citizen -- became too overwhelming, he said.

"I just got more and more anxious about my ability to protect myself and my family from the administrative overhead of the US government," said John, who has been based in Switzerland since 2002.

Six European countries, including Switzerland, have recently agreed to comply with the 2010 US Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA), requiring banks to report all holdings by their US clients to the Internal Revenue Service.

"Offshore tax evasion costs the US jobs and billions of dollars each year, and it puts an unfair burden on the average American taxpayer to make up the difference," Senator Max Baucus, who chairs the Senate Finance Committee and sponsored the legislation, told the New York Times last year to explain why FATCA was needed.

Jackie Bugnion, a Geneva-based tax expert working for the American Citizens Abroad lobby group, however told AFP that while the aim in theory is to "go after the wealthy resident in the United States who is hiding money overseas," only a small minority of those affected fall into that category.

An estimated four to seven

million Americans live outside the country, ranging from US military personnel, diplomats and others on temporary assignments, to so-called "accidental" Americans who happened to be born in the United States to foreign parents and dual citizens who may have lived most or all of their lives abroad.

According to observers, most of these people don't owe any taxes to the United States, but they still have to go through the process of filing complex IRS returns each year.

"Over the past 10 years, I have paid more to tax preparers than I have in tax," John said, insisting his decision to give up his US passport had nothing to do with the amount of tax he was being asked to pay, but rather the filing burden and fear of penalties if he messed up.

The United States is the only country in the world besides Eritrea that taxes based on citizenship rather than on residence or the source of revenue, Bugnion said.

This also means that anyone who happens to have a US passport falls under the new FATCA rules, regardless of their background or fortune.

Fearing the workload of ensuring compliance with FATCA and especially the consequences if they slip up, "banks have been

actively eliminating American clients," Bugnion said, lamenting that Americans often "can no longer get mortgages, and are being told their bank don't want their business."

While this is happening all over the world, Americans are especially feeling the heat in Switzerland -- the main target of a US campaign to track down institutions and individual bankers who help US clients open secret accounts overseas.

"Switzerland is the canary in the coalmine on this issue," Bugnion said.

Switzerland's largest bank UBS, for instance sent out letters to all its American clients late last year telling them to prove compliance with US tax rules or to take their business elsewhere.

That letter came as a shock to many, Bugnion said, adding that she had been receiving desperate calls from people who had spent their entire careers abroad and had never realised before they were supposed to file US tax returns.

"Suddenly they realise their entire life's savings could be at risk," she said.

In addition to making it difficult for Americans to simply open bank accounts abroad, the US tax rules also trip up US citizens' attempts to do business in other countries, observers say.



Commercial Bank of Ceylon Managing Director Ravi Dias speaks at the opening of the bank's Gulshan booth as a full-fledged branch in the capital recently.



Managing Director of Square Toiletries Ltd Anjan Chowdhury speaks at the two-day annual sales and distributor conference for 2013 at Hotel Sea-Palace in Cox's Bazar on Friday.



Programme Head of BRAC Enterprises Nazra Mahjabeen Sabet receives a special prize in premier pavilion category at the 18th Dhaka International Trade Fair 2013 from Commerce Minister GM Quader in the capital recently.