

Shrimp firms working to beef up compliance before GSP hearing

A panel has been assigned to draw action plan

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh is set to improve the working and labour standards in the shrimp and fish processing plants before attending the GSP hearing next month.

A tripartite body has been formed to make an action plan to address the issue so that Bangladesh can convince the officials of the USTR for continuation of the GSP (generalised system of preferences) facility for the country.

Bangladesh Frozen Food Exporters Association (BFFEA), Bangladesh Shrimp and Fish Foundation (BSFF) and American Centre for International Labour Solidarity chalked out an agreement last month to achieve desired standards at shrimp processing plants as per the ILO Core Labour Standard and Ban-

gladesh Labour Act 2006.

The three parties will develop a comprehensive work plan to implement and enforce the labour standards in the sector by March 15, said Syed Mahmudul Huq, chairman of BSFF.

Huq spoke at a meeting on the working conditions in frozen foods sector, co-organised by BFFEA, BSFF and Solidarity Centre, at BRAC Centre Inn in Dhaka yesterday.

In the action plan, the six-member team will identify the issues required to be read-dressed, prioritise the issues based on the workers' need and capacity of plants and recommend immediate, short and long-term action plans.

Meanwhile Bangladesh has improved the working conditions and labour standards sig-

nificantly at frozen food processing plants, said Ujjwal Bikash Dutta, secretary for fisheries and livestock.

The fisheries department has mandated it for the processing plants to comply with Bangladesh Labour Law 2006 before granting or renewal of operating licences, he said.

"Different government agencies inspect the processing plants regularly. We have got only nine incidents registered for violation of labour standards during 2007-12."

Shrimp and other fishes are being exported to over 30 countries, said Kazi Shahnewaz, president of BFFEA.

For shrimps, the US was once the major export destination, around 35 percent of the total, he said.

"But it has now come down to 15 percent as the US consumers are preferring low-priced shrimps like Vannamei produced in Thailand, Vietnam and India," said Shahnewaz.

He said most of the shrimp exporters are now providing all the necessary facilities, including issuance of appointment letters, ID card, complaint box, fixing working hours, and granting maternity leave for female workers.

Bangladesh is scheduled to attend the USTR hearing in continuation of the GSP in the US on March 28.

Recently, the USTR sent a letter to the commerce ministry asking it to elaborate the working conditions, child labour and safety issues in the shrimp sector and garment factories.

A high-powered delegation from the United States Trade Representatives (USTR) is likely to visit Bangladesh at the end of February to review the progress the country has made to retain the facility in the US market.

The three-member team, headed by Assistant US Trade Representative for South Asia Michael J Delaney, will come to Bangladesh on a three-day visit, said SM Istiak, a consultant of Bangladesh Economic Growth Programme Project under the commerce ministry.

The team will review the progress made on issues like labour rights, compliance, workers' health and safety in the RMG and shrimp sectors, he said.

The USTR team will visit a number of shrimp processing plants in Khulna, said Huq.



Delwar Hossain, deputy managing director of Apparel Gallery Ltd' (Ha-Meem Group), receives Environment Compliance Award from Commerce Minister GM Quader at a function in Dhaka yesterday. The award is given by Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association and South Asia Enterprise Development Facility.

Telenor worried over Grameen Bank row

FROM PAGE B1

But legal experts said, like all of the 54 organisations, Grameen Telecom has no legal link with Grameen Bank. As a result, the bank is not entitled to such dividends from GP.

The Grameen Bank Commission, in its report submitted to the finance ministry last week, also recommended that the licence of GP should be suspended immediately, as the mobile operator was not a party to the 1996 licence agreement.

If the licence is scrapped ultimately, it would give the government the control over GP through the takeover of Grameen Bank, said a lawyer.

Telenor, a group majority owned by the Norwegian government, said the Group is confident that GP has fulfilled all its obligations in the licence issued in 1996.

"With the support of Telenor Group, GP has had a successful development, and the company is today one of the most significant financial contributors to the Bangladesh government."

The Telenor statement also said the Group has not been a party in the ongoing review by the Grameen Bank Commission, as it relates to matters between the Bangladesh government and Grameen Bank.

"We have not received any formal information related to the process, and are therefore not able to comment on its specific progress."

Headquartered in Norway, Telenor is among the largest international investors in Bangladesh. It has mobile operations in 12 countries, with 148 million

Govt, JICA sign loan deal today

FROM PAGE B1

Three companies -- two Japanese and one French -- have been short-listed for the design consultancy job and were asked to submit their technical and financial proposals. As per the revised target, the main construction works of the metro rail will begin in 2016 and complete in 2021.

The metro rail project, the country's second largest infrastructure project next to the \$2.9 billion Padma bridge project, became uncertain last year when the proposed rail route was modified for the second time following objections from the air force.

The route running across Bijoy Sarani was diverted towards Khamarbari, which irked JICA.

JICA, however, did not desert the project and waited for the government to finalise the route, find a place for a depot and form a company that will eventually operate the metro rail.

The metro rail, according to JICA's assessment, will operate every three minutes and carry 60,000

Muhith mulls Padma bridge proposal from Chinese firm

FROM PAGE B1

The Chinese ambassador said he does not know about the proposal, but will inquire about it and inform the Bangladesh government.

Li Jun, however, did not give any timeframe by which he would get back to the Bangladesh government.

Although the offer from the Chinese party was "good", it will be "difficult for the government to accept the proposal of a private firm", Muhith said.

Muhith will fly out to Washington on February 24 to meet with World Bank President Jim Yong Kim.

At the meeting set for February 27, Muhith will discuss the possibility of reallocating the \$1.2 billion

Another two new banks get final nod

FROM PAGE B1

Last year, most of the banks were facing a shortage of deposits and got engaged in unhealthy competition to get funds, offering interest rates up to 14 percent. Banks' investments also went down due to energy and infrastructure constraints.

Following the nationalisation of banks after the country's independence in 1971, the BB gave licences to private banks at first in 1983. The second set of such



Sabur Khan, president of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, meets GM Quader, commerce minister, at the minister's office in Dhaka yesterday.



Victor K Fung, ICC honorary chairman, and Mahbubur Rahman, president of ICC Bangladesh, meet Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the opposition of Myanmar, at the parliament of Myanmar during their recent visit to the country.

Poultry tech fair starts on Feb 28

STAR BUSINESSES REPORT

A three-day international fair on the poultry industry will kick off on February 28 to introduce modern technology in the local poultry industry.

"Thirty-three countries will showcase modern equipment and technology to the local growers," said Moshir Rahman, president of World's Poultry Science Association-Bangladesh Branch (WPSA-BB).

The fair is the biggest of its kind in Bangladesh. Rahman told reporters at the National Press Club in Dhaka, announcing the Eighth International Poultry Show and Seminar 2013.

WPSA-BB will organise the fair at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre, where 288 stalls will showcase poultry feed, hatchery, live production, poultry medicine, new equipment and technology to the viewers.

Experts and scientists from different sectors of the industry will present 54 papers to augment local growers' knowledge, Rahman said.

Over the last few years, the industry has faced some challenges such as risk of avian influenza, he said.

Rahman urged the government to adopt large-scale vaccination programmes and substantive disaster recovery programmes for the interest of poultry growers. He also urged the government to expand tax holiday facility for the sector till 2021.

High interest rates of bank loans impede the development of the sector, he said.

The foreign multinational companies are doing business with a 4 percent interest rate on bank loans, while Bangladeshi growers face 16-18 percent interest, Rahman said.

In the absence of a well-designed policy, the local growers' ventures are threatened by the six multinational companies operating in Bangladesh, he said.

"They are not forming joint ventures with us and some companies have no proper documents from the Board of Investment," he alleged.

Taiwan EasyCard: risks and rewards on one card

KATIA MOSKVITCH, BBC News

Beep, and a smart card gets you on a bus.

Beep, and the same card opens your office door. Beep, and you buy your coffee at a corner shop. Beep, you pay for parking, open the exit gate. Beep, check out a library book.

Beep. Beep. Beep. At school or university, the card becomes your ID.

As Taiwan's capital, Taipei, wakes and the sunlight strikes its skyscrapers, the members of one family make sure their wallets contain one important thing - EasyCard.

"We really can't go about without it, all our life depends on it," says Wenney Tsai, as she prepares breakfast for her husband, Jerry Huang, and children, Chelsea and Jonathan.

Taiwan introduced its smart card - equipped with radio frequency identification (RFID) tag - in 2002, following the examples of Hong Kong, Japan and Singapore.

The card was first used on buses and Taipei's Tube, the MRT.

Then it expanded to cover high-speed rail, which connects the capital with the south of the island, and some taxis. You can also use it at hospitals, shops, to rent a bicycle and even on domestic flights.

Today, EasyCard is one of the world's most multifunctional smart cards. Other cities are now considering equipping their citizens with something similar.

So, what should they know about its benefits - and potential pitfalls?

Even hospitals in Taipei accept the card - but some people worry about security and privacy issues

Convenience and safety

"Good-bye, Chelsea." Ms Tsai drops off her 11-year-old daughter at a primary school in central Taipei.

The little girl quickly disappears, but moments later her mother's mobile phone beeps.

"Your daughter is safely at school," reads a text message sent to Mrs Tsai.

As soon as Chelsea touches her EasyCard to a sensor at the entrance to the school, her mother receives a message.

Most schools in Taiwan's capital use the RFID technology, both to track students' attendance and to "reassure parents that their children are safe", says Chelsea's father.

"Chelsea can also buy something if she wants to - we put 200 New Taiwan dollars [(\$NT) (£4; \$7)] on her card."

Hundreds of shops around Taiwan, and especially supermarket chains 7-Eleven and Family Mart, are equipped with the EasyCard payment system.

The technology reduces the amount of cash in the till, which discourages robbers, according to Family Mart.

Security and privacy
So how does it feel - being able to control so many aspects of your life with just one card?

"It's convenient - this way we don't have such a fat wallet," says Mr Huang.

He even has his credit card integrated with the EasyCard. Now, he says, he can go way above the usual spending limit of the smart card, fixed at \$NT10,000 (£214; \$336).

If he were to lose it, he would immediately call his bank - which in turn should notify EasyCard.

Call for law on right to food

FROM PAGE B1

He, however, opposed providing ration to high officials in military, police and forces.

"Soldiers and constables can get ration. But the government has to take a decision that it will not give ration to the high ranking officials," said Akash.

He also suggested cash transfer instead of food transfer to cut pilferage and corruption under the social safety schemes.

"But cash transfer may create excess demand and push up prices. Considering this, the government should also continue market operation," Akash said.

Mohsin Ali, coordinator of Governance Coalition, said social safety net schemes lack monitoring by authorities.

Besides, no evaluation of the economic condition of the beneficiaries is done before moving on to the next programmes, he said.



Amit Raturi, country manager for Whirlpool India, attends a Whirlpool Dealer Meet Bangladesh at a local hotel in Dhaka on Saturday. SAM Hossain, chairman of Victor Electronics, local distributor of Whirlpool, was also present.

Microsoft switches Hotmail accounts to Outlook.com

AFP, New York

Microsoft said Tuesday it had begun switching Hotmail accounts to Outlook.com as it officially launches its revamped email service.

"Starting today, Microsoft will begin to upgrade every Hotmail user to Outlook.com," the company said in a statement. "The upgrade is seamless and instant for Hotmail customers; everything including their @hotmail.com email address, password, contacts, etc., will stay the same."

Microsoft said last year it was overhauling its email service as it adapts for mobile users and social media.

The number of active accounts on Outlook.com grew to 60 million in just six months during its preview period, Microsoft said, adding it lets users connect to Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter.

Outlook.com is also "designed to make it easy to send hundreds of photos and videos in a single message," it said.

Launched in 1996, Hotmail was among the first Web-based email services.

Regulator approves Tk 100cr mutual fund

FROM PAGE B1

Presently, 41 listed closed-end mutual funds trade on the stock market.

At yesterday's meeting, the BSEC allowed the stock dealers and brokers to keep provisioning against unrealised losses from December 2012 to December 2103 in five quarters at 20 percent each.

The regulator also decided to give the same facility to the merchant bankers for the unrealised share credit that they provided to their clients. A notice