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Qubee to launch faster internet

QUBEE™

ABDULLAH MAMUN

Qubee plans to set up equipment to launch faster internet services this year through the latest wireless broadband technology, known as LTE (long-term evolution).

The WiMax provider will start a trial run of the LTE services this year after upgrading its network, Chief Executive Officer Faisal Hyder said yesterday.

Qubee users will have to change their modems to get the LTE services, which will be faster than WiMax.

Qubee has so far invested Tk 700 crore, including Tk 230 crore for spectrum fees, since its start in 2008 as a brand of Augere Wireless Broadband Bangladesh, Hyder said.

Now it has more than 150,000 users that consume over 20 percent of the total bandwidth of 30 Mbps in Bangladesh, he said.

The telecom regulator in a meeting on September 15 gave Qubee the approval, and published an amendment to the licensing guideline on its website yesterday, allowing all WiMax operators to provide LTE services.

# Retailers' group publishes list of factories to inspect

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

A group of around 90 global retailers yesterday published a list of more than 1,500 garment factories across Bangladesh that they will inspect to ensure fire and building safety.

The 1,500 factories account for about a third of all garment units in the country's \$20 billion industry, and employ around two million workers, according to the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh.

The group represents global giants including Hennes & Mauritz AB, Inditex SA, PVH Corp, and Benetton SpA.

However, North American Alliance, another platform of 22 US-based retailers, is yet to come up with their list. They will inspect more than 500 factories. The government will survey the rest of the 5,000 factories in Bangladesh's garment sector.

The global retailers initiated the drive to inspect the factories that they use in Bangladesh after the Rana Plaza building collapse, which claimed more than 1,100 lives in April.

"These data points provide an unprecedented map of the Bangladesh apparel industry covered by the Accord," the accord's interim director Sean Ansett said in a statement.

"[They] are playing a key role in prioritising factories for safety inspections," The Wall Street Journal reported quoting Ansett.

The publication of the list reflects a

growing belief that the garment industry's chronic safety problems can only be fixed through a group effort, Ansett said.

Most factories take orders from multiple retailers. In recent months, retailers have found their calls for factories to fix their potential dangers are much more effective when they band together.

The list includes information, pertinent to assessing building safety, some of which has never previously been disclosed in the apparel industry, the IndustriALL Global Union, the initiator of the accord, said in the statement.

Key data points include factory name and address, the number of stories of each

structure, whether a building includes multiple apparel factories and whether it houses other types of businesses, the number of workers and Accord signatories.

Accord leaders note that additional data points will be disclosed as more information is gathered from signatories and that, with some companies that have joined recently still to disclose their lists, the total number of factories will grow, the statement added.

Many garment

orders in Bangladesh are illegally subcontracted to unauthorised factories, which are often not inspected for safety violations and workers' rights abuses.

Though many retailers have codes of conduct that prohibit unauthorised subcontracting, unions and workers' rights groups say many subtly condone it because it allows them to get their products on time.

*The 1,500 factories account for about a third of all garment units in the country's \$20 billion industry, and employ around two million workers, according to the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh*

# Bangladesh in for a fast ride to mid-income status

ADB country chief pledges continued support as the development partner marks its 40th year in Bangladesh tomorrow

MD FAZLUR RAHMAN

Bangladesh needs to grow rapidly through massive investment in infrastructure, skills development and trade logistics to become a middle income nation by 2021, the Asian Development Bank's country head said.

"Bangladesh needs to accelerate investment in diversifying the sources of growth and realising its economic growth aspiration," M Teresa Kho, country director of the Manila-based lender, told The Daily Star in Dhaka on Wednesday.

Her comments came as the bank celebrates its 40th year in Bangladesh tomorrow, basking in the glory of some of its stellar achievements, also being mindful of the challenges the country faces.

"In the past four decades, ADB has become a long-standing development partner of Bangladesh," said Kho.

"ADB has always stood by the country and its people -- whether during natural disasters as seen in 1991 and 1998 or global food price shock of 2008 or in the height of the recent global economic crisis."

ADB has always structured its activities in line with the needs of the country.

In the 1970s, the bank was involved in rehabilitation and infrastructure, following devastation of the Liberation War. Programmes in agriculture and rural investment dominated its activities in the following decade.

In the 1990s, the bank ventured into power and transport, along with industrial development and the financial sector. In 2000, the bank entered primary education and health and undertook investment in rural



M Teresa Kho

infrastructure.

By the mid-2000s, the bank made a foray into the financial and capital market reform process.

From June 1973 till the end of 2012, ADB provided 234 loans worth \$14.1 billion and 389 technical assistance projects to support project design and capacity enhancement worth \$221.7 million.

The bank's latest successes include implementation of the most successful solar home system in Bangladesh.

With an initial target of 50,000 solar home systems, IDCOL's (Infrastructure Development Company Ltd) programme installed more than two million by the end of March 2013.

ADB provided \$78 million to the programme, which financed the installation of 330,000 systems.

In another major development, an ADB-supported project helped bring

electricity from India -- the first-ever power trade in South Asia.

The bank lent \$100 million on concessional terms to finance the transmission lines and high-voltage direct current substation components under the project worth \$158.6 million.

Since Bangladesh joined ADB in 1973, the power sector has received 32 public sector loans and one private sector investment, totalling about \$2.9 billion, to improve the capacity and quality of power supply.

Although ADB could not get involved in the construction of the Padma Bridge project after the government pulled out of talks following much drama over a corruption allegation, the bank helped set up the existing largest bridge project in Bangladesh nearly two decades ago.

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# Tk 100cr for garment factory upgrade

Japan funds safety standards in Bangladesh



Shiro Sadoshima, Japanese ambassador to Bangladesh; Atiur Rahman, governor of Bangladesh Bank; Atiqul Islam, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, attend the signing of an agreement to create a Tk 100 crore fund to promote safety in the apparel sector, at the Westin hotel yesterday.

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The central bank has created a fund of Tk 100 crore with the assistance of Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to improve safety standards in the apparel sector.

Factory owners will receive the loan from commercial banks at a maximum of 10 percent interest for rebuilding and relocating of factories and purchase of equipment.

The commercial banks should keep the interest rate low, Atiur Rahman, governor of Bangladesh Bank, said at a programme at the Westin Hotel in Dhaka.

JICA, Bangladesh Bank, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association and the housing and public works ministry signed a deal. The borrowers will have to repay the

loan in 15 years with a grace period of two years, Bangladesh Bank said in a statement.

JICA agreed to give the fund following the Rana Plaza tragedy, under its ongoing project worth Tk 400 crore for the development of small and medium enterprises, launched in May 2011.

A technical team of JICA and engineers of the housing and public ministry will inspect the factories of loan seekers and estimate the costs, before the banks sanction the funds, said Anisuzzaman Chowdhury, senior programme officer of JICA.

The highest limit of the individual loan is Tk 10 crore, according to the banking regulator.

Bangladesh should adopt Japanese retrofitting technology to ensure worker safety, said Khondaker Showkat Hossain, housing and public works secretary.

Retrofitting is the process of modifying something after it has been manufactured. For buildings, it means making changes to the systems inside the building or even the structure itself at some point after its initial construction and occupation.

Japan wants to be more involved with Bangladesh, said Shiro Sadoshima, Japanese ambassador. "We want cooperation from the public and private sectors."

Bangladesh is seriously working to address the workplace safety and rights of workers in the apparel industry, said Atiqul Islam, president of BGMEA.

Bangladesh should work seriously to maintain its sustainable economic growth, said Hiroyuki Tomita, JICA Bangladesh Office's senior representative.

The public and private sector should work together to achieve the highest economic growth, Tomita said.

# Companies slow to sign up for e-TINs

SOHEL PARVEZ

Companies remain slow in registering online for taxpayer identification numbers, even though three months have passed since the National Board of Revenue launched the process.

So far 3,182 companies have re-registered online to get e-TINs, and some 1,614 companies have received fresh TINs online till date, a senior official of the NBR said yesterday.

NBR plans to ask its field offices to take steps to expedite the e-TIN re-registration of existing tax-paying companies by December, said Khandokar Khurshid Kamal, first secretary for income tax at the NBR.

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# Govt moves to strengthen TCB

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The cabinet yesterday decided to strengthen Trading Corporation of Bangladesh to enable the state-run entity to intervene in the market when the prices of basic commodities go too high.

The cabinet committee also agreed to allow the TCB to maintain a larger stock of goods to help offset any supply crisis in the domestic market.

"The TCB will also export some commodities on a limited scale," Cabinet Secretary Musharraf Hossain Bhuiyan told journalists after the regular meeting of the committee at the secretariat in Dhaka.

The TCB can hardly intervene in any crisis due to a poor stock.

The committee also decided to increase the number of directors at the board of the TCB to five from two now, the secretary said. Its authorised capital has been raised to Tk 1,000 crore from Tk 5 crore.

In the meeting, the cabinet committee

turned down the proposal of the Textile and Garment Industry Board Act-2013 and sent it for further review.

The committee also agreed to increase the number of export trophies awarded to outstanding exporters, to 32 from 25, as the services sector will be included in the list this year.

The committee approved a proposal of the housing and public works ministry to curb the authority of the local government bodies in giving approval to designs of multi-storied building as they do not have adequate capacity.

For the construction of high-rise buildings outside RAJUK, CDA, KDA and RDA, the local governments like municipalities and upazila parishads will not be able to approve any project. The ministry will create a mechanism in this regard soon, Bhuiyan said.

The government has also given the final approval to the brick construction and brick kilns establishment (amendment) law.

# Akij Food brings in German technology to produce juice

GAZI TOWHID AHMED

A growing demand for natural products has become a key driver behind the rise of high-tech systems in juice producing and packaging in Bangladesh.

Akij Food and Beverage Ltd, a concern of Akij Group, is using an aseptic juice packaging and filling system to meet this growing demand for preservative- and germ-free juice.

The company is the first in Bangladesh and the second in Asia to bring this technology from Germany, said Punya Bardhan Barua, executive director of Akij Food and Beverage.

In aseptic processing, a germ-free product is packaged in sterile containers in a way that maintains high quality.

"When we produce something, air

gets into it. And air contains various microorganisms." This makes the product risky for consumption, he added.

"We are producing the Frutika brand mango juice using the aseptic technology and its quality does not deteriorate due to the germ-free process," he said.

It is produced through a vacuum filling system in which the entry of even less than one percent air will stop the entire production process and all the juice bottles in the production line will be drained out, said Abdul Maleque Khan, manager of the juice and mango project of Akij Food and Beverage.

"Frutika juice does not contain any preservative and artificial colour, which helps maintain the pure fruit

taste in the juice," he claimed.

Ahammad Ali Hasan, the company's brand manager, said the juice industry is grabbing a significant portion of the market for carbonated drinks by producing a raft of products that are mild and digestible.

"Our factory is open to all and we want to show our consumers how we ensure the best quality."

The company also gives high priority to how it collects mango and pulp. Pulping is done at the Chapainawabganj factory where mangoes are collected from the best mango gardens of the Rajshahi region, Hasan said.

"We wash the bottles separately to eliminate germs."

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