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star BUSINESS

DHAKA SUNDAY JANUARY 24, 2016

Plastics makers demand Tk 20cr for training centre

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Plastic goods makers yesterday sought an additional Tk 20 crore in funds from the government to make the planned Bangladesh Institute of Plastic Engineering and Technology a full-fledged training centre and educational academy.

The government has already allocated Tk 10 crore to set up the institute, and Bangladesh Plastic Goods Manufacturers and Exporters Association or BPGMEA bought about 98 decimals of land in Keraniganj to establish the centre, which will conduct research on product development and create skilled manpower for the sector.

"Construction has already started but we need another Tk 20 crore to expand the institute into a full-fledged academy and turn it into a university," said Md Jashim Uddin, president of BPGMEA. He placed the demand while addressing the closing ceremony of the 11th International Plastic Fair in Dhaka.

The four-day event along with the International Plastic Summit, 25th Asia Plastics Forum and 16th Asean Federation of Plastic Industries Conference took place at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre on January 20-23.

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Govt to start full-fledged e-purchase by Dec

MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL ISLAM

The government is working to roll out a full-fledged e-procurement system by December, which is four years ahead of schedule.

The latest move was inspired by the success of a pilot project, which took off in 2011 with just four ministries. It is running without any glitch.

As of yesterday, 42,332 tenders were floated and 25,130 were awarded through the e-procurement system.

The government is determined to fully implement e-procurement by December 16 this year, said Md Shahid Ullah Khandaker, secretary of the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division. "We are on track."

At present, the e-procurement system is

running in 110 organisations under 30 ministries for projects under Tk 50 crore each.

The current system does not allow for electronic bidding for projects larger than Tk 50 crore each, and cannot include more than 120 organisations.

A tender for the updated software has been floated already, and should be awarded within the next two months, Khandaker said.

The new software will not have a limit on the number of organisations, and will be equipped to handle work orders of all sizes, he said.

Currently, 200-300 tenders are floated every workday, and the number will be upwards of 500 when the system is fully implemented.

Dohatec New Media, a local software firm, developed the electronic procurement system

for the government in 2011, and it is also building a similar system for Bhutan.

As of yesterday, the local government ministry floated 26,484 tenders and awarded 14,759 electronically, according to the Central Procurement Technical Unit website.

The road transport and bridges ministry has awarded 4,897 tenders, the water resources ministry 3,078, and the Rural Electrification Board 2,163.

The education ministry and the housing and public works have given 122 and 67 respectively through the system.

The agriculture ministry has not awarded any tender electronically, though it floated some 68, and 17 other ministries that set up the e-GP system have not used it yet, senior officials said.

Apparel exports to US remain buoyant

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

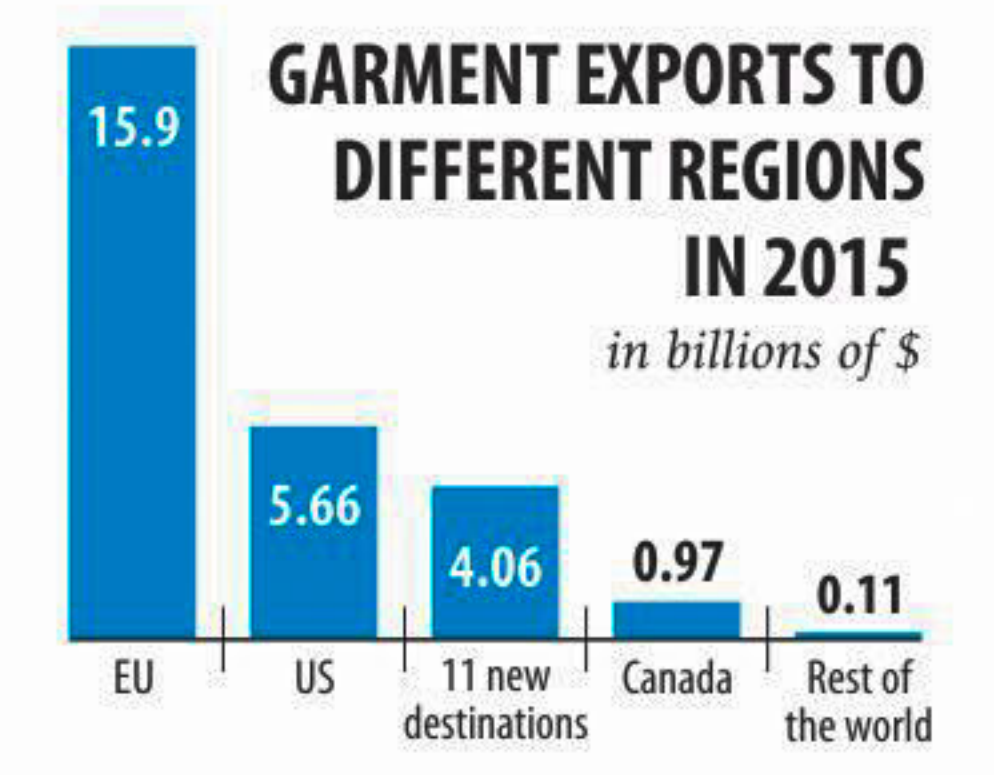
The US continues to be the single largest export destination for Bangladesh's garment items, accounting for 21.28 percent of the shipments in 2015.

The shipments to the American market fetched \$5.66 billion of the sector's \$26.6 billion export earnings last year, according to data from the Export Promotion Bureau. Garment exports to the US rose 13 percent year-on-year in 2015.

The European Union, the trade bloc of 28 nations, accounted for 59.73 percent of the shipments last year, raking in \$15.9 billion.

Country-wise in the EU, garment exports to Germany brought in \$4.36 billion, the UK \$3.32 billion, Spain \$1.73 billion, France \$1.63 billion, and Italy \$1.24 billion, among others.

Apparel export growth to non-traditional



markets was also noticeable in 2015.

The share of non-traditional markets in the garment sector's export earnings now stands at 15.29 percent, which was only 7 percent in 2009.

In 2015, garment products worth \$4.07 billion were sent to the non-traditional

markets. Exports to Australia have also grown significantly, 32.09 percent year-on-year.

Faruque Hassan, vice-president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said the second half of 2015 was good for the sector.

Although 2015 started on a dismal note, an 8.21 percent export growth was registered in the end, he said, adding that the devaluation of the euro negatively impacted earnings.

A few East European countries such as Bulgaria, Czech Republic and Malta are looking promising.

"In fact, exploring the non-traditional markets and enhancing exports are strategically important for us to ensure sustainable growth of the industry," he added.

In 2015, Bangladesh's export receipts stood at \$32.39 billion.

Telcos find new identity in India's mobile banking

REJAUL KARIM BYRON, from Delhi

India is set to launch payments banks, a mobile banking system largely dominated by telecom companies that can reach out to the unbanked rural poor in the quickest possible time.

The payments banks will be allowed to collect deposits (initially up to Rs 1 lakh per individual), offer internet banking, facilitate money transfer and sell insurance and mutual funds.

While mobile banking is already offered by India's universal banks, services by payments banks are slated to start later this year. Five mobile phone operators are among the 11 companies that have won approval in principle to launch the service.

"Payments banks will be a game changer for financial inclusion in India," Pawan Bakhshi, senior programme officer for financial service

for the poor at Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in India, told The Daily Star. "Besides providing deep reach and access, the payments banks will provide relevant products and services to their customers and are also likely to introduce innovative business models."

With this banking service, Indian mobile users will be able to conduct transactions anytime from anywhere. They will be able to withdraw money from cash-out points across the country. They will be able to save money, and even earn interest on their savings. Those without cell phones will be able to enjoy the service from the nearest banking agents.

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has taken the initiative to bring the unbanked population into the formal banking system as part of its financial inclusion effort. In November 2014, RBI finalised its policy for the service.

The companies that received approval formed consortiums with several banks and retail shops. Consortium ownership was kept open-ended, which encouraged big telecom companies to invest. The payments banks will have to start their services within 18 months. The deadline will end in February 2017.

Bakhshi believes that RBI will allow payments banks to bring in greater innovations that would benefit the poor and the unbanked. "Banking needs adequate funding to be able to reach out to people, build trust, create a credible brand, get the right technologies in place, and ensure access through a wide agent network."

It has been known that Kotak Mahindra Bank has a 20 percent share in the subsidiary company of Airtel, which got a payments bank licence.

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Yunus, Jaitley talk microcredit, social business in Davos

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Nobel laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus and India's Finance Minister Arun Jaitley talked about microcredit and social business on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos.

The founder of Grameen Bank was invited by Jaitley to a one-to-one meeting on Thursday, according to a statement from Yunus Centre in Dhaka.

The two held a 40-minute meeting and the minister discussed with

Yunus the programmes being implemented through Micro Units Development & Refinance Agency Ltd (Mudra) of India.

India has recently established the agency to provide small and medium-size loans to entrepreneurs through micro-finance institutions.

Prof Yunus thanked the minister for taking the decision to give banking licences to microcredit organisations.

"This is the most appropriate step to take financial services to the poorest," Yunus said in the statement.

He also praised the new corporate social responsibility law of India, which makes it mandatory for businesses to set aside 2 percent of their profits for CSR activities.

Yunus urged the Indian finance minister to include social business in the list of activities that can be funded by the CSR money.

The minister elaborated on the government programme that aims to encourage unemployed youths to become entrepreneurs.

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