

Rangs Motors 'Best Commercial Vehicle Dealer 2020-2021'

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Rangs Motors has recently won a "Best Commercial Vehicle Dealer 2020-2021" award in "Overseas Market" category for selling the highest number of buses.

The company has also earned an award for its in-house competence development process at an Annual Dealer Conference 2021 virtually hosted by VE Commercial Vehicles, a joint venture between the Volvo Group and Eicher Motors, said a press release.

Rangs Motors, a subsidiary of Rangs Group, is one of the many distributors of VE Commercial Vehicles whose products are sold in several markets around the world.

As an affiliate of the commercial vehicle company, Rangs Motors has sold the highest number of buses in Bangladesh compared to other dealers worldwide.

This is the second time Rangs Motors has won the award, preceded by its win in the same category in the previous year.

Sohana Rouf Chowdhury, managing director of Rangs Motors, received the award on behalf of the company.

"This is a glorious moment for the Rangs Motors family. This achievement is not only ours but of our esteemed customers as well. I am grateful to everyone for trusting us and I hope that this trust shall remain unwavering in the future as well," she said.

Executive Director Satyajit Saha, General Manager (marketing) Sonjoy Kumar Bala and others participated in the online event.



Al-Arafah Bank risk committee chairman reelected

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Al-Arafah Islami Bank has recently witnessed the reelection of its risk management committee chairman.

Badiur Rahman was elected unanimously at a 362nd meeting of the bank's board of directors, says a press release.

One of the founding directors, Rahman is one of the directors of AIBL Capital Market Services, Central Hospital, Human Resources Development Company, Millennium Information Solution and HURDCO International School.

US investors lean on blank-check firms for energy transition targets

REUTERS, New York

Former US oil investment bankers, portfolio managers and executives have formed over 20 listed blank-check companies to take renewable energy companies public, with more listings expected.

Investors are rushing to form these companies, known as Special Purpose Acquisition Companies (SPACs), as capital shifts from traditional oil and gas investments to low-carbon alternatives.

SPACs have been most active in the technology and healthcare industries, but the alternative energy space is heating up.

More than 412 SPAC IPOs raising \$121 billion have taken place so far in 2021, up from 247 raising \$83 billion total last year, said Jay Ritter, a professor at the University of Florida specializing in IPOs. Healthcare, financial technology and autonomous vehicles continue to be heavily represented, but alternative energy is gaining traction, the data shows.

"I would expect there would be more energy-related SPAC mergers," Ritter said.

According to Reuters interviews with eight advisors, at least 10 companies are looking to launch additional renewable SPACs, beyond the 20 that have already publicly filed.

By contrast, only about three exploration and

production SPACs are currently publicly filed with the SEC and none have launched in about 18 months, a sharp contrast with 2016 when oil prices crashed, and investors used SPACs to buy companies in a turnaround bet.

SPACs are publicly traded vehicles that raise capital with the explicit purpose of acquiring a private existing business and taking it public, sidestepping the traditional initial public offering (IPO) process.

Many of the renewable SPACs that are currently publicly filed with the SEC have raised about \$250 million or more. They are looking to buy privately-held companies that produce batteries for renewable energy storage, hydrogen storage solutions, carbon storage, and even some drilling for natural gas, a lower-carbon fossil fuel, according to SEC documents reviewed by Reuters.

For example, Peridot Acquisition Corp, a renewable SPAC, closed on its acquisition of Li-Cycle, a lithium-ion battery recycler, on Aug. 10. Peridot has formed a second SPAC aimed at acquiring additional renewable companies.

Other SPACs, such as GoGreen Investments Corp, are nearing deals with targets, the advisors said, speaking on a condition of anonymity as the talks are not public. Alternative energy SPACs that have publicly formed have come together under increasing pressure from investors who want to shift into renewables.

"Their limited partners are telling them that they don't want them to look into traditional energy," said Mike Blankenship, a partner in the Houston office of law firm Winston & Strawn.

"They are creating SPACs to get a percentage of these companies and then a board seat in these companies."

John Dowd, a former top energy portfolio manager for Fidelity, serves as chief executive for GoGreen Investment, a proposed \$250 million SPAC that filed its S-1 this summer, with plans to target a wide variety of "energy transition" companies from hydrogen storage to software solutions.



A new hydrogen fuel cell truck made by Hyundai is pictured at the Verkehrshaus Luzern (Swiss Museum of Transport) in Luzern, Switzerland.

Govt signs 50m euro financing deal with AFD

FROM PAGE B1

Fatima Yasmin, secretary to Economic Relations Division, and Benoit Chassatte, AFD country director for Bangladesh, signed the loan agreement on behalf of the government and AFD respectively.

The credit line will be on-lent by the government to public non-banking financial institutions (NBFI) to finance investments in the fields of energy efficiency, production of renewable energies, and women's entrepreneurship.

The development comes amid Bangladesh's failure to achieve its target to raise the share of renewable energy in total power generation to 10 per cent by 2020 due to a lack of resources, technology and policies.

Currently, about 767 megawatts of electricity are generated from renewable sources, accounting for 3.3 per cent of the total electricity produced.

The Renewable Energy Policy 2008 had set a goal for renewable sources to account for 5 per cent of the electricity generated by 2015 and 10 per cent by 2020.

In the Eighth Five-Year Plan, the target was revised for the 10 per cent minimum to be attained by 2025.

"This loan will also help the country attain its sustainable development goals," Asif Ahmed Khan, a principal officer at Bangladesh Infrastructure Finance Fund, told The Daily Star.

Eligible clients can secure the loan through applications. The applicants'

creditworthiness would then be analysed in line with banking norms before funds are disbursed.

The interest rate for clients has not been fixed yet. However, it could be 6 per cent as it is set as a tentative figure, Khan said.

The producers of renewable solar, wind and hydro energy will be considered for the loans.

Entrepreneurships with 50 per cent female ownership will also be eligible, he added.

Bangladesh Infrastructure Finance Fund uses 10 per cent of its portfolio in green and sustainable finance, which is the highest among all NBFIs, according to Asif.

The amount of loans disbursed by Bangladesh Infrastructure Finance Fund at present stands at Tk 3,800 crore.

The AFD is a bilateral development agency implementing official development assistance on behalf of the government of France. It has been operating in Bangladesh since 2012.

It supports development projects for urban development and infrastructure (water and sanitation, public transports, urban services), power & green energy (energy efficiency, renewable power), corporate and social responsibility (enhancement of safety standards and environmental and social performance).

The agency provides concessional sovereign loans and mobilises grants under the regional blending facility of the European Union.

Now terry towel exporters seek easy conditions

FROM PAGE B1

Like the BGMEA, the BITLMEA too demanded that the government allow partial shipment facility through the land ports, including the one in Benapole.

Partial import of raw materials for manufacturing garments is now allowed only through the country's premier sea port of Chattogram.

Partial shipment refers to allowing importing and unloading a portion of a consignment ordered under letters of credit (LCs).

Businesspeople choose partial shipment mainly for timely use of raw materials and to reduce storage and warehousing costs of imported goods.

For instance, imagine an importer opening an LC for importing 100 tonnes of yarn but currently having a capacity to use 50 tonnes.

In that case, he opts for bringing over 50 tonnes for the time being and importing the remaining 50 tonnes later at his convenience.

However, in case of raw material imports not being made through Chattogram port, importers

do not have the scope for partial shipments.

So, the importers have to import the whole consignment at one go if those are not unloaded at Chattogram port.

The price of yarn made in Bangladesh for manufacturing terry towels is nearly 40 cents higher on every kilogramme (kg) compared to that in other countries like India and Pakistan, Sobel also said.

Monsoor Ahmed, chief executive officer of Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA), said his association was also getting ready to explain the factors responsible for the current price of yarn in the local markets.

"We have a plan to sit soon to talk with the stakeholders to discuss the yarn price issue," he said.

Bangladesh should not depend on one or two sources for importing cotton, yarn and fabrics as any disruption could hinder the sector's overall supply at any time without any prior notice, he said.

Such incidents occurred earlier in the case of cotton, he added.

He said allowing partial shipments through the land ports would not be wise as it would open up scopes for irregularities.

The government stopped partial shipments many years ago to prevent the irregularities, Ahmed told The Daily Star over the phone.

Last fiscal year, Bangladesh imported 8.2 million bales of cotton and 326,539 tonnes of yarn in 2020, according to data from the BTMA.

The country's spinners say they can supply 3,500 million kgs of yarn in a year.

Earlier, the BGMEA in a letter to the commerce minister on Sunday said the cost of production has increased by 30.10 per cent over the last eight years.

However, prices of clothing items declined by 3.7 per cent last year mainly as a part of the fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic, it said.

Freight charges went up from anywhere between 100 per cent and 300 per cent during the pandemic. Over the last one and a half years, the local garment exporters have incurred losses catering to work orders, it added.

Fazli losing lustre

FROM PAGE B1

At the time, there were big Fazli and Ashwina mango orchards in the areas.

Besides, Fazli has been grown in Rajshahi, especially in Bagha and Chargeth upazilas, for a long time now.

Md Salahuddin, a farmer in Bagha, said he had 25 Fazli mango trees but eventually added other varieties to his orchard, such as Amrapali and Bari Aam-4, a hybrid variety.

"The demand and price of Fazli are much lower than that of Amrapali."

This year, Amrapali was being sold at Tk 1,600 per maund [one maund is 37 kilograms], while Fazli fetched Tk 600 per maund, he said.

"Once, most mango orchards were of Fazli, but the farmers are now compelled to cultivate other varieties," Salahuddin added.

Kabir Hossain, an agriculturist and former director of the horticulture wing of the Department of the Agricultural Extension (DAE), said the production of Fazli mangoes was declining due to

various diseases that plagued the crop and variety degeneration.

So, farmers are cultivating more productive and relatively tastier varieties of mango instead.

"Last year, I saw mango trees of Bari Aam-4 and other varieties being planted in the orchards of Fazli, especially in Chapainawabganj's Shibganj upazila, which is called the capital of mango. It was just a variety replacement," Hossain added.

This year, the DAE expects that 25 lakh tonnes of mangoes will be produced in Bangladesh, the world's seventh-largest mango-producing country. Last season, 24.68 lakh tonnes of mangoes were grown on 1.9 lakh hectares of land.

Alongside Rajshahi and Chapainawabganj, mango is cultivated commercially in at least 30 districts.

There are around 100 varieties of mango in the country.

Of them, Amrapali accounts for 28 per cent of the total production, followed by Himsagar, or Khirsapati, 20 per cent,

Fazli 10 per cent, Ashwina 15 per cent, Langra 5 per cent, Laxmanbhog 5 per cent, Gopalbhog 3 per cent, and Guti 10 per cent, according to a primary estimate of BARI's Uddin.

Around seven lakh tonnes of Amrapali, five lakh tonnes of Himsagar, and 2.5 lakh tonnes of Fazli mangoes were produced this year.

The demand for Amrapali abroad is similarly high as the variety makes up 60-70 per cent of Bangladesh's mango exports. Exporters shipped 791 tonnes of mango in fiscal 2020-21.

Uddin went on to say that there is a way to bring back the pride of Fazli.

"A product called dried mango slice can be made from Fazli.

There is a huge demand in the UK for this product, which is usually priced around Tk 1,200-1,300 per kg. It can only be made from the Fazli and BARI Aam-4 varieties," he said.

"If we make that kind of product, the demand for Fazli will increase tremendously."

New plants stuck in pandemic

FROM PAGE B1

"Our foreign technicians could not come to Bangladesh to help start the production," he said.

Tk Group invested Tk 150 crore to establish the factories. Bank finance accounts for around 60 per cent of the total cost.

"We got six months in the grace period for the loan. The grace period is already over, and we are paying the instalment," Taslim said. The group spends around Tk 15 lakh per month on the factories.

At the biggest economic zone in Bangladesh, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Shilpa Nagar at Mirsarai, Chattogram, three factories are facing the heat of the pandemic, according to officials of the Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority.

One of the factories, Nippon-McDonald Steel, has targeted to commence the commercial production of galvanised and

prefabricated steel sheets in September. The equipment has been brought from Japan and China. "But we are not sure if we could go into production in the stipulated time," said McDonald Steel Managing Director Sarwar Kamal.

Nippon-McDonald invested about Tk 100 crore for the joint venture to capture the growing market of steel plates in Bangladesh.

Mostafa Kamal, chairman and managing director of MGI, said his company had invested around \$600 million to set up five factories to make PVC, noodles and biscuits.

Of the investment, \$350 million came as loans from foreign sources.

"The pandemic is causing a delay to the production at the factories. But we are repaying loans," said the entrepreneur.

Kamal, however, said MGI would begin running the factories as soon as it got the gas connection.

Nitoy Niloy Group's two projects -- a passenger car assembling plant in Pabna and a tyre manufacturing factory in Kishoreganj -- have been delayed.

"Although it is unavoidable, the investment has been hampered severely, and it has slowed economic growth," said Abdul Matlub Ahmad, chairman of the group.

Taslim says if foreign experts come to Bangladesh to provide instructions to local technicians to start commercial production, it will allow entrepreneurs to begin the operation of the factories.

Besides, the government might cut the interest rate on loans for the time being to ease pressures stemming from the obligation to pay bank instalments, he said.

Salehuddin Ahmed, a former governor of Bangladesh Bank, said banks might defer instalment payments for a certain period to give relief to investors.

New mango varieties gaining ground

FROM PAGE B1

Last season, 24.68 lakh tonnes of mangoes were produced on 1.9 lakh hectares of land.

Bari Aam-4, another hybrid of a variety of M3896, a colourful and tasty variety from Florida of the US, and local variety Ashwina, was released in 2003, Sorof Uddin said.

Also developed by the Bari, the high-yielding hybrid is now being cultivated on 4,000 to 5,000 hectares of land. Though it contributes only 1 per cent to the national mango output, its demand is high as it is a late variety.

Besides, last year, two more mango hybrids -- Bari Aam-13 and Bari Aam-17 -- developed by the Bari -- have not started providing yields yet.

With these, a total of 17 mango varieties have been developed by the research organisation.

Bangladesh Agricultural University has developed 25 varieties of mango.

Many of the new varieties are in the primary stage of cultivation.

Meanwhile, Banana Mango, a grafted variety imported from Thailand, is being produced by a handful of farmers.

The demand for this variety is high, but only around 5 tonnes were produced. Besides,

some other imported colourful varieties, including Miyazaki from Japan and Red Palmer from the US, are also being cultivated by a few farmers.

Sorof Uddin said there was a growing demand for hybrid mangoes as they were better in terms of quality and quantity and more attractive.

"So, the cultivation of these mangoes is spreading quickly," he said.

Currently, Bari Aam-4 is being sold at Tk 8,000 per maund (one maund equals around 37 kilograms), but other varieties have been sold for Tk 1,000 to Tk 1,400 per maund during the peak season.

Both Ashwina and Bari Aam-4 are still in the market. Ashwina is now being sold at Tk 1,600 per maund.

Usually, Bari Aam-4 hits the markets from the last week of July and remains available till August. Bari Aam-13 will take more than three to four years before they become available in the market.

It usually takes a long time to introduce new varieties as research takes five to six years to be completed.

For example, Bari Aam-4 took 17 years to 18

years to reach this stage and grow in popularity throughout the country, Sorof Uddin said.

"Most of the hybrid mangoes are late-season varieties, so they have higher market value. Since there is no shortage of mangoes in the peak season, the research is mainly done for late and off-season mango production."

Shahidul Islam, a mango grower in Chapainawabganj sadar, said farmers were now replacing the old varieties of mangoes such as Fazli and Ashwina with Bari Aam-3, Bari Aam-4 and some other varieties as the latter were more productive and had higher demand.

Kabir Hossain, a former director of the horticulture wing of the DAE, said Bari Aam-4 and some other varieties were now being planted in the orchards of Fazli and Ashwina in the Rajshahi region as their demand was very high.

DAE Director General Md Asadullah said there were some high yielding hybrid varieties of mango, including Bari Aam-4, which had a lot of potentials.

"We are working on various projects to expand the cultivation of these fruits so that the farmers can benefit."



Mr. Iftekharul Islam, Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors of Uttara Bank Limited inaugurated the newly constructed Bank-building in Narayanganj City and the new premises of Narayanganj Branch & Narayanganj Zonal Office thereon through video conference from Bank's Head Office on 16-08-2021. Director of the Bank Col. Engr. M.S. Kamal (Rtd) & Managing Director & CEO Mr. Mohammed Rabiul Hossain were present with him. Managing Director paid his tribute to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman along with Bangamata Sheikh Fazilatunnessa Mujib and the other martyrs of the brutal incident of 15th August-1975. Deputy Managing Directors of the Bank Mr. Maksudul Hasan, Mr. Md. Abul Hashem, Mr. Md. Ashraf-uz-Zaman & Zonal Head (Narayanganj Zone) Mr. Md. Mahbubur Rahman and local dignitaries were also connected with this ceremony.