

5,200 tonnes of jute seeds to be imported from India

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The government has given go-ahead for the import of around 5,200 tonnes of jute seeds from India this season.

The National Seed Board took the decision in a meeting yesterday chaired by Agriculture Secretary Wahida Akhtar.

The board also settled on annual demand for jute seeds to be 6,369 tonnes this season, the agriculture ministry said in a press release.

The annual demand has been fixed considering the farmers' annual demand for seeds of jute and jute crops this year.

Of the total demand, Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation will supply 1,300 tonnes of seeds, and 5,200 tonnes of seeds would be imported from India, it said.

In 2023-24 fiscal year, a target has been set to cultivate jute on about 7.64 lakh hectares of land.

In the last season, 4,166 tonnes of jute seeds were imported against a demand for 5,000 tonnes.

IDCOL to finance 300MW solar projects by 2025

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Infrastructure Development Company Limited (IDCOL) has set a target to finance rooftop solar power system projects of a total generation capacity of 300 megawatts by 2025 in line with a government vision, said IDCOL Executive Director Alamgir Morshed recently.

The government aims to generate 4,200 megawatts of electricity from renewable energy sources by 2030.

Morshed was addressing a workshop styled "Installation of rooftop industrial solar system" organised by the IDCOL and Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) at Radisson Blu Chattogram Bay View on Tuesday, said a press release.

The cost of generating electricity from rooftop solar power systems is cheaper than that of grid tariff for which financing such projects makes financial sense, he said.

The IDCOL not only provides low-cost financing but also technical support, quality equipment purchases and capacity building, he said.

CCCI President Mahbubul Alam, among others, was present.



Md Sohail Rana harvests wheat from 51 decimals of land (100 decimals equal 1 acre) he had cultivated in Rajbari's Baliakandi upazila investing Tk 10,000. He hopes to take home 14 maunds to 15 maunds (one maund equals around 37 kilogrammes) of wheat this year. Each maund was selling for Tk 1,400 to Tk 1,500 in local markets. The photo was taken at Charfaridpur village yesterday. PHOTO: SUZIT KUMAR DAS

Leather goods makers seek environmental clearance quickly

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Leather goods manufacturers based in the capital's Hazaribagh have urged the government to simplify the process of issuing environmental clearance certificates so that they can tap export opportunities easily.

They made the plea at a discussion on the prospects of the leather product cluster in Hazaribagh and the task ahead, organised by the SME Foundation at the Parjatan Bhaban in Agargaon yesterday.

Tania Wahab, an entrepreneur of the cluster and managing partner of Karigar, said leather goods and footwear are the most promising industry in Bangladesh after garments.

"So, the sector should be given more priority."

She said several entrepreneurs have been supplying products to big bands of Bangladesh for many years. Many are exporting in small volumes as well.

Wahab, also the president of the Leathercraft Association, a platform representing leather goods makers, recalled when she started business in Hazaribagh 18 years ago, landowners were not encouraged to rent out to a showroom to sell leather products.

"Now, the situation has changed."

At the discussion, a number

of entrepreneurs said the Department of Environment (DoE) took a long time in issuing the environment clearance certificate. As a result, they could not tap the export opportunities.

Syed Nasim Manzur, managing director of Apex Footwear Limited, and president of the Leathergoods and Footwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association of Bangladesh, questioned how would Bangladesh survive in the competition with other countries if the lead time can't be reduced?

"The Hazaribagh cluster can play a big role if the lead time can be shortened. This is because many people have gained skills by working in the cluster for a long time," he said.

Mirza Nurul Gani Shovon, president of the National Association of Small and Cottage Industries of Bangladesh, said entrepreneurs in the cluster are facing various obstacles when it comes to foreign trade.

"These problems must be resolved."

According to Mafizur Rahman, managing director of the SME Foundation, the cluster has the ability to meet the demand of the domestic market as well as earn a huge amount of foreign exchanges.

He said if the government and the SME Foundation took

coordinated initiatives for the development of the cluster, the growth of the zone would be accelerated.

"Then, this will play an important role in bringing about socio-economic change in the area."

Abdul Hamid, director general of the DoE, said the government is trying to make it easier to obtain environmental clearance for factories in the cluster.

"The government also plans to allocate space to leather goods manufacturers besides the Savar Tannery Industrial Estate."

Hazaribagh has transformed itself into a leather products manufacturing hub from a tannery zone in a span of six years since rawhides processors were shifted to Savar, logging an annual trade of Tk 60 crore.

More than 400 shops and showrooms have been set up in different places in the area, including around the Institute of Leather Engineering and Technology, Hazaribagh Bazar and Dhanmondi 15.

They produce products such as leather belts, wallets, shoes, parts and official bags for both local and export markets.

The number of factories, big and small, in Hazaribagh would be about 1,200, employing 55,000 to 60,000 people, according to the SME Foundation.

Apparel exhibition in Dhaka on March 16

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

A conference and exhibition on sustainable clothing production will be held in Dhaka on March 16.

About 20 exhibitors are expected to present green production technologies at the Sustainable Apparel Forum (SAF), according to a press release.

The fourth edition of the SAF will focus on several agendas, including circularity, carbon emission reductions and climate action and shifting to renewable energy.

Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi, LGRD Minister Md Tazul Islam, State Minister for Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Nasrul Hamid, State Minister for ICT Zunaid Ahmed Palak, Dhaka North City Corporation Mayor Md Atiqul Islam and many other distinguished guests will be present at the event.

The event will include a range of plenaries, seminars, green growth exhibitions and informal networking opportunities. More than 60 renowned speakers will speak at the exhibition.

In the press release, Mostafiz Uddin, the organiser of the SAF, said at every major fashion brand, the conversation is the same right now. "It is how we can reduce our carbon emissions to meet net zero targets."

Ethics in the unethical world

MAHTAB UDDIN AHMED

There was once a young and talented woman who got a job at a corporate giant. Her dedication and sincerity impressed everyone, and she seemed to have a brilliant start until her employer voiced his expectations. He warned that he expected her to work long hours and do anything to get the job done, even if it meant bending the rules.

Soon it dawned on her that her boss's ethics didn't quite align with hers. With each passing day, the ethical compromises weighed heavier on her until she decided to quit.

Walking out stronger from experience, she decided to start her own company, and within a short time, her business came to be known as one of the most ethical in the industry. Then one day, she came across her former employer, who wanted to know the secret of her success. She replied, "I followed your advice. I worked long hours and did whatever it took to get the job done. The only difference is, I did it ethically." Ethics ensure the long-term sustainability of a nation and an organisation.

Last week, I had a very interesting chat over dinner with some friends, including an old colleague-cum-mentor, sharing experiences on ethics and the malpractices that go around in the corporate world under the veneer of ethics.

Present at the table was a former CEO who shared his fate of getting framed and fired by a compliance team after daring to oppose his Group CEO's views. Another recalled how a company had fired a CEO in the name of ethics only to replace him with someone fired by another company.

These stories are all too familiar to those of us who belong to the corporate world, although they may not surface in open discussions.

While we pride ourselves on our progress in almost every sphere of life, we often overlook how ethical standards around us are fast-depleting. Honest police officers struggle to do their job ethically in fear of receiving calls from higherups, honest customs officers often get posted to a non-important station, migrant travellers are often deprived of fair treatment at the airport, the rich know the art of evading taxes at the cost of the poor, and the list can go on.

From my experience, a government organisation had intentionally or "unintentionally" lost my file with them, so a hefty sum could be collected to regularise it. When I protested against paying, the officer suggested going to court.

Generally, we only complain about the ethical standards of government officials and political leaders etc. Ethical malpractices are also prevalent in sophisticated local and multinational companies to various degrees. The common factor in all these cases is that the more power you have, the more likely you will emerge as the winner, while the losers are commonly those at the bottom of the pyramid of the company or the country.

The question is, where do we turn to when we are victims of injustice or oppression? To courts? Delays in our legal system have often proved that justice delayed is justice denied. Even the geo-political scenario is no different as Bangladesh hesitates to fight for justice with big players like India, China or the US.

Living ethically in an unethical world can be challenging and requires an uncompromising personal commitment to integrity, personal courage and setting an example for others. Those who are looking for success by compromising on ethics must bear in mind that there is something known as karma or natural justice that does not spare anyone. Living ethically is a journey, not a destination.

The author is founder and managing director of BuildCon Consultancies Ltd

Prime mover sales down over 62%

JAGARAN CHAKMA

Sales of prime movers, which are the front part of semi-trailer type trucks, fell over 62 per cent year-on-year in 2022 in Bangladesh amid a fall in imports and surge in their prices alongside that of fuel.

According to distributors, sales came down to 300 units in 2022 whereas annual sales averaged at around 800 units for the last five to seven years.

Bangladesh imports most of its prime movers from India, the UK and China.

They can have engine capacities of around 5,660cc and pull loads of some 40 to 45 tonnes, including heavy machinery, import and export containers and goods meant for mega projects.

According to market insiders, there are 7,850 prime movers in the country.

"The sales trend of prime movers along with heavy-duty trucks is one of the parameters to understand the economic situation of a country," said Abdul Matlub Ahmad, chairman of Nitol Niloy Group, the local distributor of India's Tata Motors.

The demand for prime movers and trailers increases when export and import activities run in full swing as businesses need logistics support to move goods between ports and factories.

Overall imports stood at \$5.03 billion in February whereas it was \$8.13 billion during the same month in 2021, as per data from the National Board of Revenue.

According to Ahmad, an increase in the import of raw materials and goods is considered positive for the economy and indicates an increase in industrial production.

Besides, it also gives rise to the possibility of an increase in export earnings, he said.

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PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN

Extending Ukraine grain deal complicated

Russia says

AFP, Moscow

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Thursday that extending a deal that allowed grain exports from Ukraine to resume was becoming "complicated" as he claimed it was not being properly implemented.

Russia's military intervention last February saw Ukraine's Black Sea ports blocked by warships until a deal last summer allowed for the safe passage of exports of critical grain supplies.

The UN and Turkey-brokered deal will automatically renew on March 18 unless Moscow or Kyiv object.

But Lavrov said clauses in the agreement that provide for Russian grain and fertiliser exports were not being upheld.