

Daewoo chief in Dhaka

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Tae Yong Lee, chief executive officer (CEO) and president of Daewoo International Corporation, Korea, arrived in Dhaka last night on a three-day business trip.

During his visit, Lee would meet cabinet members and local businessmen to explore further investment opportunity in Bangladesh, the company officials in Dhaka said.

Currently, Daewoo has \$40 million investment in Bangladesh.

Coke bottling plant opens in Comilla

A bottling plant of Coca-Cola Limited was inaugurated at Alekharchar in Comilla recently, says a press release.

James Adams, president of Coca-Cola (SEWAD), formally inaugurated the plant, which has a production capacity of 300 cans and 200 pet bottles per minute.

To mark the inauguration, Coca-Cola organised a meeting with its local authorised processing company Abdul Monem Limited at the new plant.

James Adams, Ajit Jain, regional manager of Fareast Limited (Asia), and Ajoy Mitra, country manager of Fareast Limited (Asia) of Coca-Cola, took part in the meeting where Mannan Monem, managing director, ASM Mainuddin Monem, director - Finance and Administration, ASM Mohiuddin Monem, director - Operations, and other high officials were present from Abdul Monem Limited.

Five-day DCCI course ends

A five-day training course on "How to Develop a Distribution Network for Marketing Products" organised by the DCCI Business Institute (DBI) on the institute premises concluded on Wednesday, says a press release.

Director of The Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) Nesar Maksud Khan distributed certificates among the participants.

A total of 22 participants from different business organisations attended the training course.

Deputy Secretary (Training) Hasa Nur Rahman Chowdhury acted as course coordinator.

S'pore takes new measures against SARS

Singapore, already regarded among the leaders in the fight against SARS, may now be demonstrating how to embark on the next stage of managing the issue -- by not only fighting the disease itself but also fighting the fear of SARS, says a press release.

The island nation has won praise -- the latest from US President George Bush -- for the way it has responded to the SARS outbreak and has put tough measures in place to contain the disease.

Temperature checks through thermal imaging scanners at airports and sea ports, rigorous prevention measures in hotels and other tourism venues including restaurants and shopping centres, daily temperature checks for a wide cross-section of the community and extensive public education on precautionary measures have all been part of national efforts in Singapore.

The US-based Centres for Disease Control (CDC) recently lifted its advisory against unnecessary travel to Singapore.

France sees signs of global recovery

AFP, Paris

The elements are in place for a rebound in the global economy, French Finance Minister Francis Mer said Monday, insisting that public gloom surrounding near-term prospects is not justified.

Interviewed by the French radio station France Inter, Mer said central banks in Europe and the United States could still act to spur growth by lowering interest rates.

"It is clear that the situation is delicate," he acknowledged. But he stressed that "the generalized gloom is not justified by the facts."

"The facts are operating in our favor -- the price of money is very low, oil prices are very low, inflation is down all over the world and prospects for companies to get out of debt are strong."

"Thus all the conditions are in place and there is nothing left to do but to decide to get down to business. Perception creates reality and therefore it is absolutely necessary to re-establish this climate of confidence."

Economy still in tatters

MCCI reviews January-March quarter

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The economy continues to remain in recession in the third quarter of the current fiscal due to adverse weather condition, taking toll on agriculture, said Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI).

The much-expected recovery in the manufacturing sector did not take place, the MCCI made the observations in a review of economic situation for January-March 2003.

"Annualised GDP growth in third quarter could be similar to what was experienced in last fiscal's 4.4 per cent or slightly higher than that but below the ADB or Bangladesh Bank's forecast of 5.2 per cent," the review said.

It however said the overall growth of the economy in the third quarter could be marginally higher

than that of previous two quarters of the current fiscal one per cent in first and 1.2 per cent in second quarters.

For maintaining macroeconomic stability, government continued to pursue restrictive monetary-fiscal policies, the chamber said, adding that the growth rate of domestic credit declined though the banking sector had surplus liquidity.

The quantum indices of manufacturing, mining and electricity depicted some growth but they all remained considerably below the respective indices of the previous years. Within the manufacturing sector, the largest sub-sector, comprising jute, cotton, apparel and leather depicted negative growth, it added.

The chamber said services sector, which is intrinsically linked to growth in agriculture and manu-

facturing may not have registered satisfactory growth. This is all the more so because service sector activities were burdened with significant increases in various utility prices earlier in the year.

Strength and competitiveness of the economy is important. Current account convertibility alone cannot help attract more remittances, stimulate exports and provide protection to local industries, it added.

MCCI said the bank interest rate continues to remain high and significant amount of money was withdrawn from the rural sector in the course of FY2002 and the first half of FY2003.

"Inflation, as measured by the consumer price index (CPI), rose 4.14 per cent in February 2003 from 1.91 per cent in February 2001. This increase was largely the result of higher food prices."

Despite buoyant growth of tax revenue, public spending up to December 2002 also declined by 28 per cent compared to the same period last year, though ADP spending increased by 12 per cent in July-December 2002 compared to the same period previous year, it stated.

"The manufacturing sector continued to face problems of loss of production due to power outage. The total loss of production in third quarter amounted to Tk 539 crore compared to Tk 572.4 crore in second and Tk 521.6 crore in first quarters."

Small businessmen are feeling insecure once again due to spate of activities of hoodlums and other anti-social elements. They complain against collection of tolls by different groups causing helplessness and deep frustration, MCCI added.

Free access to Canada remains untapped

Visiting delegation suggests joint ventures

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Bangladesh is yet to take full advantage of the duty-free access to Canada, although the country got the facility nearly a year ago, said a visiting Canadian business leader yesterday.

Bangladeshi businesses should intensify joint ventures with their Canadian counterparts to reap maximum benefits from the duty-free access, said Greg MacDonald, leader of Canadian business delegation.

The joint ventures will not only help increase Bangladesh's exports to Canada but also to its neighbour US, he added.

Addressing a meeting with members of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) in Dhaka, he said there are many areas where Canada and Bangladeshi entrepreneurs can try joint ventures.

MacDonald, who is also presi-

dent of Wentworth International Services, said if joint venture efforts see success after utilising the duty-free Canadian grant, the US may be persuaded to offer the same to Bangladesh.

As Canada and US have very similar markets, he said, it is highly likely that the Bangladeshi products will be able to enter US market, he went on.

When quota systems will be abolished from January 1, 2005, Bangladeshi garment industry may encounter a heavy blow in the competitive market, he warned and said joint venture partnerships may subdue the shock.

Lamenting limited Canadian investment, he said bureaucratic mazes are discouraging entrepreneurs to invest in Bangladesh.

He said IT, telecommunication, RMG, leather, transportation, machinery, engineering and food sectors have good prospect for joint venture investments.

FBCCI President Yussuf

Abdullah Harun said though Canada has RMG market of four billion US dollars, Bangladeshi RMG exports earned a meagre \$100 million in 2001-2002 from Canada.

Bangladeshi RMG sector could see a boom if it can best use the duty-free access status, he said. He urged local investors to earn confidence of foreigners to go for joint venture investments.

South Asia Enterprise Development Facilities (SEDF) and Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters Association (CMEA) sponsored the visit of the business delegation.

Anton De Wilde, senior programme manager of SEDF, Ronald Beriet, representative of Trade Facilitation Office of Canada, and Anil Sinha, general manager of SEDF, are other members of the delegation.

Local businessmen, FBCCI directors also attended the meeting.

Wills Intech to launch IT edn programme in July

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With an aim to expand information technology education all over Bangladesh, Wills Intech Limited, a sister concern of Wills Group, is going to launch its computer education programme in July.

At the onset, the programme will be introduced in forty-five districts, said Ahmed A Zahid, CEO of the company, at a press briefing at the National Press Club yesterday.

Since computer literate personnel are in high demand and supply of properly trained personnel is inadequate, Wills Intech is giving priority to promoting computer education at the upazilla level, said Syed Badrul Alam, chairman of Wills Group.

Wills Intech recently signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Cosmopoint Institute

of Technology, one of Malaysia's leading IT and multimedia training institutes.

Under the deal, Wills Intech will run Cosmopoint's Certificate and Diploma programmes in information technology, multimedia applications, computer graphic design and e-secretaryship through its partners in Bangladesh.

The young talents of remote areas will get a chance to take up the fundamental course at the computer centres of Wills Intech which are known as regional channel partners (RCP). The course fee has not yet been fixed, said Zahid.

After completion of the fundamental course, they will get the chance to complete diploma course in Wills Intech's district level centres directed by their strategic channel partners (SCP) for a period of nine months. Course fee for diploma course will be in the

range of Tk 20,000 to Tk 26,000.

In the third phase, students will get a period of three months at the Centre of Excellence, which has been recently opened in Dhaka, said Zahid. This centre will directly control all its IT education centres.

After completion of the third phase, the institution will provide support for higher education to interested students at Cosmopoint Institute of IT in Kuala Lumpur. Under the agreement signed with Cosmopoint, Wills Intech will be able to send a maximum of two thousand students to Cosmopoint for higher education every year.

The CEO also said Wills Intech will provide training to all their RCP and SCP trainers of upazilla and district levels on teaching methodology.

Meghna Life earns Tk 45cr premium

Meghna Life Insurance Co Ltd earned Tk 45 crore as premium in the year 2002, says a press release.

This income is 45 per cent more than that of the previous year.

This was declared at the development conference of the company held at its head office in Dhaka recently.

Nizam Uddin Ahmed, chairman of Meghna Life Insurance Co Ltd and Karnaphuli Insurance Company, was the chief guest at the meeting while Managing Director of the company Mujib-ud-Daula presided over it.

Director Nasir Uddin Ahmed, Director Colonel (Retd) Shamsuddin Ahmed, Adviser M A Mojid and DMD Sultan Khan were present as special guests at the meeting.

ED Khurshed Alam, Md Sadequr Rahman, Serajul Islam, Md Sohrab Hossain, Md Mohidur Rahman Khan, Md Abdur Razzaque also spoke at the meeting.

Indian firm seals pact with Yahoo for consulting services

AFP, Bangalore

India's fourth largest software exporter, Satyam, said Monday it has signed a pact with Internet giant Yahoo to provide it with consulting and professional services.

Satyam Computer Services Ltd. said its consultants would work with Yahoo to implement e-business solutions for telecommunications, manufacturing and financial services.

As part of the deal Satyam and Yahoo would also engage in "co-marketing activities" in the enterprise solutions segment.

"We can offer our clients a comprehensive and standards-based portal and collaboration platform that connects their enterprise systems to support new and efficient business initiatives," said G.B. Prabhat, Satyam's director, Consulting and Enterprise Solutions.

Satyam development centres in India, the United States, Europe, Japan and Singapore serve 260 global companies, including 60 Fortune 500 corporations.

Asia's online gaming market a huge money spinner

AFP, Singapore

Asia's online gaming market is worth more than 500 million dollars, making it a promising money spinner for industry players such as Internet service providers and database software vendors, a report released Monday said.

"Online gaming utilizes a pay-per-use business model, pointing to the huge revenues generated by the service providers," said Chin Jun-Fwu, software research analyst at International Data Corp. (IDC).

"Game merchandisers are also cashing in on the popularity of game characters," Chin said, adding that there was even talk of building theme parks based on Internet games in North Asia.



Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) President Yussuf Abdullah Harun makes a point at a meeting between FBCCI and the visiting Canadian trade delegation yesterday in Dhaka. Greg MacDonald, leader of the business team, is also seen.

Cooking business ideas from kitchen

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Running out of ideas for new entrepreneurship? Why don't you look inside your own kitchen?

You can start a new entrepreneurial venture with local foods such as traditional dishes -- pitha, items with regional specialties, sweetmeats, snacks, pickles, herbal products, and food items of flour.

In bid to promote such local food products and develop women entrepreneurship, the Federation of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) has come up with this idea.

Recently, the FBCCI Women Entrepreneurship Cell organised a daylong traditional food festival. Some 62 women entrepreneurs from nine districts and 10 organisations took part in the festival. A total of 30 mouthwatering traditional food items including traditional dishes -- pitha, sweetmeats, snacks, pickles, and herbal products.

Explaining the objective of the food festival, FBCCI Director of Masuda Rashid Chowdhury said, "Our aim is to promote popular local foods at home and abroad."

Nowadays fast food items are

increasingly outselling the traditional ones. But Bangladesh has a rich tradition and traditional food item is a part of it.

"If proper support is ensured, the local food industry can emerge as an export-oriented sector. And for this, we must encourage women to do business as they are used to making food items at home", she added.

A participant of the festival, Fatema Badsha who came from Chittagong, said, "I am very glad to take part in the festival. I think more such programmes should be organised."

Another women entrepreneur of Dhaka, Asma Siddiqi, said, "Since usually we have to cook foods at home, we can earn money by cooking food if there is adequate support for business".

Only a decade ago, chanchur was a roadside snack. But some entrepreneurs took initiative to go for mechanised production of the item and brought it to market brand name. As a result, now everyone knows 'Bombay Sweets' chanchur.

Like Bombay Sweets chanchur, Bangladeshi business community can take an initiative to market home-made traditional food items.

Oil price rises on supply concerns

AFP, London

Oil prices rose in early trade here on Monday with dealers worried about a potential tightening of the market as gasoline demand increases in the United States and Iraqi oil production remains negligible.

The price of benchmark benchmark Brent North Sea crude oil for July delivery edged up 24 cents from Friday's closing price to 26.34 dollars in early deals here.

New York's reference light sweet crude contract for June delivery rose 25 cents to 29.39 dollars a barrel in out-of-hours electronic trading.

Oil demand is set to increase as the approach of summer in the United States heralds the beginning of the so-called "driving season", which traditionally begins with the Memorial Day weekend at the end of this week.

At the same time, the country's crude inventories are 12 per cent lower than this time last year, according to the latest US Department of Energy figures released last week.

Additionally, Iraq appears not yet ready to export large amounts of oil again following the end of the war to unseat Saddam Hussein, and oil industry cartel OPEC is considering more production cuts.



Nizam Uddin Ahmed, chairman of Meghna Life Insurance Co Ltd, speaks at a conference of the company at its head office in Dhaka recently. Director Colonel (Retd) Shamsuddin Ahmed, Director Nasir Uddin Ahmed, Managing Director Mujib-ud-Daula and Adviser MA Mojid were also present.

India aims to regenerate confidence in economy

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Finance Minister Jaswant Singh has said his major goals for the current financial year are to regenerate confidence in the economy and reform the taxation system.

In an interview published in the Indian Express Monday, Singh said India had the potential to achieve explosive growth and become a developed country by 2020.

When asked what he thought he would be able to achieve in office in the financial year ending March 2004, Singh said: "I think reform of the tax system, I think regenerating a sense of confidence about India and the economy."

The past few years have seen the eruption of a number of scandals in the stock market and banking and financial sectors, severely denting the confidence of small investors.

Tax reforms, including plans to introduce a new uniform sales tax to create a common market and remove all exemptions on savings and other incomes to plug tax leakages, have not been implemented due to political opposition.

India's economy grew an estimated 4.4 per cent in the financial year ended March, slowed down a severe drought in the second half.

Last month, central bank chief Bimal Jalan said India's economic growth was likely to be around 6.0 per cent in the year to March 2004.

Singh said India could be a developed country by 2020, but added this was not "because of what we (the government) are doing, it's the creativity of India."

India had weathered the uncertainties fuelled by the recent US-led war on Iraq and the see-saw movement of global oil prices, the minister said.

New Delhi had also repaid a loan worth three billion dollars to the World Bank ahead of time without upsetting the money markets and foreign exchange reserves had crossed the 76 billion mark.

"These are signs of great fundamental strengths. We are close to what I call criticality," he said.

Singh, who took over as finance minister about a year ago, said India needed to change its mindset that it was a poor country.

"For a very long time we continued to emphasize that we were poor, this brought about a poverty of spirit..."

"We must stop talking India down, find faults yes but don't talk India down," the minister said.

When asked what were the policies that had impoverished India, Singh said government policy had been structured to "keep a curb on the creative genius of India."

"We have gone through a period in which if enterprises enhanced their production they would be fined."

Another factor was India's bureaucracy which, though effective and efficient, was extremely centralised and control-oriented, Singh said.

"With our characteristic expertise, we so compounded the administrative system that now one of the most impossible tasks is to untangle the many webs. It's not just red tape, I think it's all colours," Singh said.

A third factor was the concentration of political and money power in the hands of the same few people, Singh said.



Zahid Hossain Chowdhury, managing director of The Trust Bank Limited, presides over a seminar on money laundering organised by the bank's Agrabad Branch in Chittagong on Sunday.