

Overseas trade wings sputter

Operations of 50pc offices almost come to a halt, thanks to staff dearth

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Operations of about 50 per cent commercial wings of Bangladesh missions abroad have almost come to a halt, as posts of trade officials remain vacant.

Official sources said 10 posts of trade officials, who include economic minister, commercial counselor and first secretary (commercial), have been lying vacant for about a year against 20 designated posts.

In London, Beijing, Brussels and Los Angeles, Washington and Moscow posts of commercial counselors are lying vacant. Posts of first secretary (commercial) are vacant in London, Kuala Lumpur and Ottawa while the post of economic minister in New York is also lying vacant.

Sources said the vacant posts

are not filled due to lack of cooperation from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). There is also an acute shortage of efficient officials in the Ministry of Commerce, resulting in delay of appointment, the sources added.

They said Bangladeshi envoys have made several requests for appointment of officials in the vacant posts. Bangladesh has 20 commercial wings.

A high-powered committee headed by the Commerce Minister Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury recently recommended names of commercial counselors for the commercial wings in Brussels and Beijing, but it was rejected by the PMO without assigning any reason, sources said.

The committee included Commerce Secretary Suhel Ahmad, Foreign Secretary

Shamsher Mobin Chowdhury and Establishment Secretary AB Chowdhury.

In November last year, the committee nominated two persons who secured highest score out of 44 applicants for Beijing and Brussels. The committee had sent its nominations to the PMO, which asked the commerce ministry to propose a total of three names for each mission.

As per the instruction, the commerce ministry again sent fresh proposals to the PMO at the end of December 2002, which were also rejected by the PMO in March this year, saying the candidates were not qualified.

The PMO also directed the commerce ministry to nominate fresh officials in place of previously short listed ones.

As per the fresh instructions the commerce ministry through newspaper advertisements sought applications for appointment of commercial counselors for missions in Brussels and Beijing. Previous applicants were barred from applying.

Talking to The Daily Star, one of the disgruntled applicant, who was short listed as per the recommendations of the high-powered committee, said it is a sheer injustice to bar previously qualified applicants from applying them again.

The delay in appointment of the key position in the commercial wings is hurting the country since 85 per cent export destinations of Bangladesh fall in the European Union (EU) and USA. Besides, early appointment is deemed important as the post-MFA (multi fibre arrangement) regime draws near.

Many fear situations in the trade wings will worsen in near future, as the tenures of commercial counselors in Canberra, Tehran and Moscow expired about a year back. The formalities of the new recruitment for the posts have not been completed yet, sources said.

"Any further delay in filling the posts may hit Bangladesh export hard," a top frozen food exporter said.

In the absence of adequate and qualified officials in the commercial wings in Brussels where the European Commission (EC) and the World Customs Organization headquarters are located, the Bangladesh mission there is failing to cope with the work pressure, sources said.



David J H Griffiths, CEO of HSBC, Murshid Kuli Khan, MD of Janata Bank, Mamun Rashid, CEO of Citibank NA Bangladesh, and M Taheruddin, acting chairman of Bangladesh Foreign Dealers' Association (BAFEDA), pose for a photograph at the inaugural session of the workshop on exchange rate management jointly organised by BAFEDA and Citibank NA in Dhaka yesterday.

SARS complacency may make economy vulnerable

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh's exports and foreign investment may run into trouble if the government feels complacent in its efforts to prevent outbreak of SARS, a high official of German embassy said yesterday.

Hermann Nicolai, deputy head of mission of Germany, said as it seems that the brunt period of the fatal virus is over, some countries may discontinue their efforts to tackle SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome), which already claims 660 lives worldwide.

"I had interactions with some local RMG exporters who termed SARS a boon as their orders ran high with buyers avoiding China, Vietnam, Hong Kong and other East Asian countries where the virus played havoc," he said at a seminar on 'SARS Virus: Awareness and Prevention'.

Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) and German Technical Co-operation (GTZ) organised the seminar at the chamber's auditorium in Dhaka to help

businessmen fend off the deadly virus.

He said though no SARS patient is yet to be spotted in Bangladesh, the government should leave no stone unturned to ward off the virus which has a total case of 8,800 worldwide so far.

Reminding that Germany is the second largest export market for Bangladeshi products with exports worth 822 million euro in 2002, he said the export volume may drastically fall if SARS is detected here.

"Even a rumour could cause irreparable damage to the country's exports," he warned.

He said Bangladeshi exporters should maintain utmost hygiene to keep the killer virus at bay.

He advised the government to follow measures taken by China and Hong Kong, the worst affected of the epidemic.

China and Hong Kong have got required logistic support to successfully handle the virus but Bangladesh lacks preparedness measures.

Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry President Yussuf Abdullah Harun said the virus is a reminder for local exporters to get prepared to face any unusual situation.

He urged businessmen to remain alert about adverse impact of SARS on exports advising them to set up disaster management cell.

Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry President Matur Rahman urged the government to set up screening device and quarantine enclosure in all ports to stop the virus enters Bangladesh.

Prof Dr Sirajul Haque, senior consultant at the Department of Neurology and Internal Medicine of BIRDEM, Dr Peter Albrich, president of Bangladesh-German Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Kanak Ranjan Talukdar, director of Institute of Disease Control, and Kazi HM Akram of World Health Organisation also spoke at the seminar.

Dhaka-Ctg Phuket bus service for air passengers

Phuket Air, a Thai private sector airline, is to start a Dhaka-Chittagong bus service for its air passengers travelling from the capital, says a press release.

According to the press release issued by the airline yesterday, the couch service between Phuket Air Dhaka office at Banani and Shah Amanat International Airport in Chittagong will be available on Sundays and Thursdays.

Phuket Air coach will start from Dhaka for Chittagong at 8am and from Chittagong, it will start for Dhaka at 16:45 hours.

GlaxoSmithKline area director in Dhaka



V Thyagi, senior vice-president and area director, GlaxoSmithKline Asia Pacific and Chairman of GlaxoSmithKline Bangladesh Limited, arrived in Bangladesh yesterday on a two-day visit, says a press release.

GlaxoSmithKline is a leading global research-based pharmaceutical, vaccines and healthcare company.

Thyagi will attend the annual general meeting (AGM) of GlaxoSmithKline Bangladesh scheduled to be held in Chittagong today. He will also have discussion on the current business and future prospects of the company in Bangladesh.

This is his first visit to Bangladesh after taking over as area director.

Workshop on corporate strategy of AB Bank held

SEDF (SouthAsia Enterprise Development Facility) and ICRA Advisory Services jointly organised a 2-day workshop on corporate strategy for the top executives of Arab Bangladesh Bank Ltd in Dhaka recently, says a press release.

Managing Director of AB Bank Ltd Abu Haniff Khan inaugurated the workshop. It was also addressed by M A Awal, advisor of AB Bank Ltd, and M P Radhakrishnan, former chairman of State Bank of India.

The prime objective of the workshop is to identify strengths and weaknesses in the existing system of the bank.

The workshop also aimed to strategize AB Bank's present focus on SMEs to get momentum in this potential sector.

Dr Zia U Ahmed, senior consultant SEDF, MP Radhakrishnan and Rohit Kumar of ICRA Advisory Services, facilitated the workshop.



M Haider Uzzaman, managing director of Nora Travels, GSA of Phuket Airlines, inaugurates a Dhaka-Chittagong Phuket Air bus service for the airline's passengers traveling from the capital.

Fight against graft to boost investment: Swedish envoy

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Fight against corruption will contribute to an investment-friendly atmosphere, Swedish Ambassador in Dhaka Borje Mattsson said yesterday.

"When Bangladesh is being listed as most corrupt country by a reputed NGO, there is all probability of repercussions on invest here irrespective of the fact whether the accusation is factually correct or not," he added.

Building image is an important factor for Bangladesh. The perception of the people who intend to do business outside their home country is what matters, the Swedish ambassador said while speaking as guest of honour at the monthly luncheon meeting of Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) at Sonargaon Hotel in Dhaka.

"People abroad are fed more news about floods and deteriorating law and order than news on positive developments in Bangladesh," the ambassador said.

He said Bangladesh has not been able to attract foreign direct

investment (FDI) on any significant scale. The government must make sure that the business-environment is conducive to investments and production, he felt.

"There is a room for more private investment activities from responsible authorities. To stay in the race for FDIs, Bangladesh have to develop competitiveness for its products further."

Simple, transparent rules and regulations, an efficient bureaucracy, developed infrastructure, and a good law and order situation are the factors that matter a lot, he said.

Mattsson said Bangladesh garment manufacturers have established themselves firmly as reliable suppliers to the Swedish market. "So I am personally not so worried about the post 2005 scenario even though Bangladesh will have to face stiffer competition from other countries."

Trade volume increased by more than 700 per cent during nineties. Trade relations in the future should be broader based and not dependent on just one

sector, he said.

In 2002, exports from Bangladesh to Sweden amounted to about US\$125 to US\$150 million while exports from Sweden amounted to about \$40 million. Almost all exports from Bangladesh to Sweden consist of readymade garments, he added.

There are a number of state-of-the-art industries in Bangladesh that are virtually unknown to Swedish businessmen, he said, adding that ceramic and pharmaceutical sectors made a deep impression on him. There are also other sectors like leather and IT and software that carry promises for the future, the envoy mentioned.

In his speech, FICCI President Wali Bhuiyan said the emerging external atmosphere is bound to have impact on the weaker economies.

In view of globalisation and steep decline in the flow of official development assistance (ODA), countries like Bangladesh need enhanced FDI for achieving their development objectives, he added.

Workshop on exchange rate management held

Bangladesh Foreign Exchange Dealers' Association (BAFEDA) and Citibank NA jointly organised a workshop on 'Exchange Rate Management' in Dhaka yesterday, says a press release.

Officials from the central bank, senior executives from commercial banks, inter-bank foreign exchange and money market dealers of BAFEDA member banks, and resource persons of BIBM attended the session.

M Taheruddin, acting chairman of BAFEDA, inaugurated the workshop.

Among others, Murshid Kuli Khan, managing director of Janata Bank, David JH Griffiths, CEO of HSBC, and Mamun Rashid, CEO of Citibank NA, also spoke in the workshop.

Bashar M Tareq, country treasurer of Citibank NA, facilitated the workshop. Resource discussants were KM Sattar, managing director of Eastern Bank Limited, Shariful Moslem Khan, DGM of Sonali Bank, Sheikh Md Maroof, director and head of Treasury of American Express Bank, and AHM Kamal treasurer of Credit Agricole Indosuez.

Shrimp foundation launched

BSS, Dhaka

The Bangladesh Shrimp Foundation was formally launched at a function in the city recently.

Syed Mahmudul Haque, chairman of the foundation, announced its formation.

The foundation has been formed with a view to promoting a nation-wide dialogue among hundreds of NGOs, entrepreneurs, and human rights activists assisting people working in the shrimp industry.

Abdul Baten and Bishutos Das, former ATDP consultants, were selected as deputy executive director and MIS/Research Center coordinator of the foundation.

Seminar on 'cleaner production'

SRG Bangladesh Limited organised a seminar on "Cleaner Production and Energy Efficiency" on Saturday at Bangladesh Institute of Administration & Management in Dhaka recently, says a press release.

Minister for Environment and Forests Shahjahan Siraj was the chief guest while State Minister for Liberation War Affairs M Reazul Karim was the special guest at the seminar.

This seminar was the initial step of a UN project titled "Greenhouse Gas Emission Reduction from Industry in Asia and the Pacific (GERIAP)" financed by Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA).

The participating countries in GERIAP are Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Mongolia, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam.

Experts from home and abroad, representatives from industries, academics, scientists and government officials were also participated in the seminar.



AKM Firoz Alam, general manager (Human Resources) of GlaxoSmithKline Bangladesh Limited (GSK), and Farhad Alam, AVP (Corporate Sales) of Pacific Bangladesh Telecom Limited (PBT), exchange documents after signing an agreement in Dhaka. Under the deal, GSK will avail itself of exclusive services from CityCell Digital.



MA Mannan, chairman and managing director of Butterfly Marketing Ltd, speaks at the annual conference of LG-Butterfly Microwave Oven Cooking Club held on Saturday in Dhaka. Director (Finance) Syed Assaduzzaman and Director (Marketing) Mustafizur Rahman Shazid were present.