

Businessmen want rich world to stop farm subsidies

DCCI-UNCTAD meet pushes 21 proposals for Cancun WTO talks

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Local business community yesterday urged rich nations to stop subsidies in their agriculture sector and also demanded flexible rules of origins to help the poor compete in global market.

They also demanded special and differential treatment for LDCs exports to rich countries. They called for withdrawing tariff and non-tariff barriers to LDC exports.

The businessmen placed 21 recommendations at a meeting titled 'Business for Cancun' held in Dhaka. The recommendations came to coincide with the LDC ministerial meeting being held in the capital.

The Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) and International Trade Centre UNCTAD/WTO (ITC) jointly organised the meeting at Sonargaon Hotel.

Former commerce secretary Sayed Alamgir Farouk Chowdhury chaired the first session titled 'Market access in industrial products: textile and clothing'. John Clarke, DG (trade), European Commission (EC), presented a paper at the session.

Speakers at the session underscored the need for backward and forward linkage industry to cope



PHOTO: DCCI

International Chamber of Commerce-Bangladesh President Mahabubur Rahman (L-4) addresses a meeting titled 'Business for Cancun' at a hotel in Dhaka yesterday. Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry President Matiur Rahamn (L-3), Apex Group Chairman Sayed Manzur Elahi (L-2), X Jiang (extreme left), consultant of International Trade Centre, Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry President Yussuf Abdullah Harun (R-4), Bangladesh Textile Mills Association Chairman MA Awal (R-2), Bangladesh Agro-Food Processors' Association President Maj Gen (ret) Amjad Khan Chowdhury (extreme right) and Second Secretary of the European Commission Anne Marchel (R-3) were also present.

with increased completion.

They urged the rich countries to open export market to least developed countries.

The second session was on 'Negotiation in agriculture'. Maj Gen (ret) Amjad Khan Chowdhury, president of Bangladesh Agro-Food Processors' Association, chaired the session. P Gallagher, consultant

of ITC, presented a key paper on the topic.

Speakers at the session said due to high subsidy in agriculture sector by rich countries farm products from poor countries cannot compete in international market.

They urged the LDC leaderships to raise the subsidy issue at WTO summit to be held in September this

year.

International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), Bangladesh President Mahabubur Rahman conducted the third session titled 'Road to Cancun and business advocacy'. Silencer Mapuranga, senior business advisory service officer of ITC, presented a paper.

Participants at the session, urged LDC leaderships to improve negotiation capacity at the WTO meetings to preserve trade interest of poor nations.

They said Cancun summit would be crucial for LDCs and they must dispose of the pending issues like drug patent and agro-subsidy.

Non-tariff barriers in all aspects should be withdrawn and the matter should be effectively dealt with at the negotiations in Cancun, they said.

The businessmen said the database of WTO issues and information on the various WTO developments should be included in the technical assistance programme.

DCCI President Matiur Rahman, ITC Consultant X Jiang, Second Secretary of the EC Anne Marchel, Bangladesh Textile Mills Association Chairman MA Awal participated at the meeting.

Rounding up the sessions, on behalf of business community Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry President Yussuf Abdullah Harun placed 21 recommendations before LDCs for discussion at the WTO round to be held in Mexico in September this year.

Sugar merchants seek ban on private sector import

National sugar policy demanded

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh Wholesale Sugar Merchant Association (BWSMA) urged the government to ban sugar import in private sector permanently and initiate a national sugar policy as early as possible.

"Some dishonest businessmen are importing sugar through under-invoicing in connivance with dishonest customs officials. On the other hand, huge amount of sugar is entering the country through smuggling. As result, locally produced sugar remains unsold," said Shamsul Haque Badal, secretary of Bangladesh Wholesale Sugar Merchant Association, at a press conference held at the National

Press Club in Dhaka yesterday.

The local demand for sugar is 5 lakh metric tons yearly. For this, the production target for local 15 sugar mills was more or less 2 lakh metric tons per year. The remaining 3 lakh metric tons are imported. But because of the opportunity of free sugar import, 4 lakh 90 thousand metric tones were imported by the private importers within the first week of March of this year. Price of sugar went down in the local market because of the huge amount of import compared to local demand, he observed.

We can be self-sufficient in sugar production. For that, we need a national sugar policy. The govern-

ment has not declared a sugar policy yet, although there are drug policy, salt policy and jute policy. The BWSMA urged the industries minister to submit a bill seeking declaring a national sugar policy in the next session of the parliament, he added.

Some importers are controlling the sugar market arbitrarily by forming a syndicate. So, the authority of importing sugar should be given to the Bangladesh Sugar and Food Industry Corporation shortly, he also added.

Among others, Abul Hashem, secretary, Sher Mohammad, organising secretary, and other members of the BWSMA were also present at the conference.

Motor show extends on tremendous response

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Amid immense response from visitors, Bangladesh International Motor Show has been extended by another two days.

According to earlier plan, the five-day show was to conclude yesterday.

Announcing the extension at the fair venue yesterday, Chairman of Bangladesh Automobiles Distributors Association (BADA), the organiser of the first ever such show, M Salahuddin said they extended the exhibition amid requests from people from different parts of the country.

Under the new schedule, the fair will now conclude tomorrow. The fair will remain open from 10:00am to 9:00pm today and tomorrow, he said.

The fair organised by Bangladesh Automobiles Distributors Association began last Wednesday at China-Bangladesh Friendship Conference Centre in Dhaka.

Meanwhile, on the fifth day, the car carnival continued to witness huge crowd. Despite scorching heat, people from all ages gathered at the fair venue to see the latest cars of world's leading manufacturers.

They were inquiring the exhibitors about price, durability and other features of cars.

Salahuddin said about 10,000 to 12,000 people are visiting the fair a day on an average. On Friday, the fair witnessed the highest number of visitors with about 15,000 people.

Distributors are getting a good number of bookings and spot orders at the fair. Multimode Transport Consultant Ltd, distributor of Malaysian Proton, leads with 337 bookings. A One Motors Ltd has so far got five orders for Volvo S80 and four for Volvo S40. A&A Autos Ltd, distributor of Italian Fiat and Alfa Romeo, has sold four Alfa Romeo, each worth Tk 22 lakh, and also sold two FIAT Siena each worth Tk 7.5 lakh.

Nitol Motors Ltd sold two Tata Safari and Meghna Automobiles Ltd sold one Kia Pregio microbus worth 10.9 lakh. Rancon Motors Ltd is exhibiting the most expensive car in the fair. The customised value of its Mercedes Benz C Class is 62 lakh. An official of Rancon Motors said they are seeing interest from prospective customers.

Rangs Ltd is exhibiting Mitsubishi Galant, Mitsubishi Pajero Sport and Mitsubishi Lancer and also Bolero from Mahindra. Many of the Mitsubishi brands are sold out at the fair.

Amfico Motors Ltd (distributor of Hyundai), Ifad Autos Ltd (Ashok Leyland), Navana Ltd (Toyota and Hino), Uttara Motors Ltd (Maruti-

Suzuki, Swaraj-Mazda and Isuzu) are also getting orders and bookings for their new brands.

BADA chairman also said the raffle draw on entry coupons will be held on June 10 at a press conference. The first prize is a 1300CC brand new car, 2nd prize a 800CC taxicab, 3rd prize an air conditioner, 4th prize a 12-CFT refrigerator and 5th prize a Pentium-4 personal computer.

Besides, 6th prize is an IPS, 7th prize a colour television set, 8th prize a microwave oven, 9th prize a DVD player, 10th prize a camera and special prizes are 10 mobile phones.



PHOTO: RANGS MOTORS

Visitors inquire about salient features of Bolero jeep of Mahindra and Mahindra at Rangs Motors Ltd pavilion in the first Bangladesh International Motor Show being held at the China-Bangladesh Friendship Conference Centre.

11 LDC ministers vow common stand at WTO

UNB, Dhaka

Trade ministers from 11 least developed countries yesterday met Commerce Minister Amir Khorru Mahmud Chowdhury to register their strong commitment to a common stand for the Cancun meet of WTO.

Market access alone will not help unless market share of LDCs increases substantially, they said while meeting Bangladesh commerce minister on the sidelines of the Dhaka meet of LDC trade ministers.

Besides, they felt that LDCs must explore opportunities for having more trade and investment among themselves. LDCs must gain something collectively from the Cancun meet and remain alert against any conflict of interest that can hamper their unity.

BB T-bill auction held

UNB, Dhaka

The 247th auction of the 28-day, 91-day, 182-day, 364-day, 2-year and 5-year treasury bills were held here yesterday.

Tk 138.00 crore, Tk 40.00 crore, Tk 6.00 crore, Tk 15.00 crore, Tk 3.50 crore and Tk 108.50 crore in total of Tk 305.00 crore were offered respectively for the 28-day, 91-day, 182-day, 364-day, 2-year and 5-year bills.

Of these, Tk 138.00 crore, Tk 40.00 crore, Tk 6.00 crore, Tk 10.00 crore, Tk 3.50 crore and Tk 107.50 crore in total of Tk 305.00 crore of 28-day, 91-day, 182-day, 364-day, 2-year and 5-year bills accepted respectively.

The range of implicit yields was 7.75-7.85 percent, 8.95 per cent, 9.30-9.35 percent, 10.02 percent, 10.85 percent and 11.40-11.42 per cent per annum, said a Bangladesh Bank press release.

It may be mentioned here that the bills worth of Tk 184.50 crore will be retired in the current week and net issuance would amount to Tk



PHOTO: CITIBANK NA

Rabiul Hossain, chairman of Bangladesh Foreign Exchange Dealers' Association (BAFEDA) and managing director of Sonali Bank, Bashar M Tareq, country treasurer of Citibank NA, Shariful Moslem Khan, DGM of Sonali Bank, and Mamun Rashid, chief executive officer of Citibank NA Bangladesh, are seen at the inauguration of online global foreign exchange order book system at Citibank NA Bangladesh on Saturday.

Citibank opens online global forex order book

An automated online global foreign exchange order book system has been inaugurated in Citibank NA Bangladesh, says a press release.

The system will enable the bank's corporate and inter-bank customers to deal in foreign exchange rates that may not have traded during the Bangladesh time zone but at other global time zones, whenever it strikes the expected rate.

The system was inaugurated by Rabiul Hossain, chairman of Bangladesh Foreign Exchange Dealers' Association (BAFEDA) and managing director of Sonali Bank, at Citibank dealing room in Dhaka Saturday.

Mamun Rashid, chief executive officer of Citibank NA, Shariful Moslem Khan, DGM of Sonali Bank, and Bashar M Tareq, country treasurer of Citibank NA, were

Shanti Himkesh hair oil launched

Marico Bangladesh Ltd has launched 'Shanti Himkesh Tel', a hair oil of the Parachute family, in Bangladesh.

To mark the launch of the product, a press conference was held in Dhaka recently, says a press release.

Country Manager of Marico Bangladesh Ltd Samir Srivastav, Brand Managers Gaurav Lavania and Nazeeba Chowdhury, Sales Manager Arup Ganguly and Managing Director of Kallol Distributors Ltd Golam Mustafa were present along with other officials of Marico Bangladesh Ltd.

Officials of Marico Bangladesh Ltd expressed the hope that 'Shanti Himkesh Tel' would win immense popularity among the local consumers.

For the convenience of consumers, 'Shanti Himkesh Tel' now comes in three sizes with prices at 200 ml for Tk 70, 100 ml for Tk 40 and 50 ml for Tk 20 only.

Amin Mohammad Group becomes corporate client of Aktel

Amin Mohammad Group has become a corporate client of Aktel.

An agreement to this effect was signed between the two organisations in Dhaka recently, says a press release.

Yussli Yusoff, general manager Marketing of Aktel, and M Saiful Islam, deputy managing director of Amin Mohammad Group, signed the accord.

Md Anis Farooq, head of Sales of Aktel, Zakir Hossain Tutul, executive director, Syed Telayat Hossain, director (Land) of Amin Mohammad Group, and other officials of Aktel and Amin Mohammad Group were also present at the signing ceremony.

Anwar seeks WTO support for LDC capacity building

UNB, Dhaka

Agriculture Minister MK Anwar has urged the World Trade Organization (WTO) to ensure the rights of LDCs in their capacity building and market access to the developed nations.

He said developed countries had promised in the Uruguay Round and subsequent WTO Ministerial declaration to provide the LDCs with technical assistance and duty-free market access as compensatory measures to face the challenges of integration of their economies with the global economy.

"But the commitments have not yet been fulfilled," he said in a meeting with visiting Deputy Director General of WTO Kipkorir Aly Azad Rana at his office yesterday.

MK Anwar said the globalisation is creating problems alongside opportunities for the weaker economies. "The WTO rules and

conditionalities of market access suit the developed countries, not the LDCs," he observed.

He said stronger economies have achieved a standard in labour environment and other non-trade issues and they are raising the issues of our export. He said these non-tariff barriers to trade coupled with subsidy issue create major concern to the LDCs.

Appreciating the minister for his remarks, the WTO DDG said WTO is facing this problem. "LDCs have not much technical know-how and expertise to comply with the set standards and improve supply capacity," he said adding that WTO is trying to provide support to the LDCs through an integrated framework for improving their overall trade capacities.

The minister said Bangladesh has improved a lot in socioeconomic indicators. "We have a large domestic market. We are implementing

various steps to face the challenges in textiles sector after 2004," he said.

But non-tariff barriers and quota system are the real obstacles to our trade expansion, he pointed out and said developed countries by giving subsidy and protection to non-agriculture sectors achieved competitiveness.

"Now they are applying the same policy to develop their agriculture sector. But we have not given the scope," MK Anwar regretted.

He requested the WTO executive to increase contact among LDCs, including Bangladesh.

The WTO DDG appreciated Bangladesh's excellent negotiating skill and role in the WTO negotiations as a leader of LDCs and said WTO would continue to encourage Bangladesh to expedite its efforts.

Dollar fall contrary to US policy: Bush

REUTERS, Krakow, Poland

President George W Bush said the "devalued" level of the dollar on global markets runs contrary to US policy in favour of a strong dollar, according to an interview transcript released Saturday.

Bush was interviewed by Russia's RTR TV on Thursday. The transcript was released by the White House on Saturday as Bush headed to St. Petersburg.

Asked about US dollar policy, Bush replied: "The policy of my administration is for there to be a strong US dollar."



PHOTO: UNITREND LTD

Yussli Yusoff, general manager of marketing of Aktel, and M Saiful Islam, deputy managing director of Amin Mohammad Group, exchange documents after signing an agreement in Dhaka recently. Under the accord, Amin Mohammad Group becomes a corporate client of Aktel.

SIA, GP, SilkAir launch special travel package

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Singapore Airlines (SIA), GrameenPhone Ltd and SilkAir jointly launched a special promotional travel package yesterday.

Under this offer, 'Summer Celebration', passengers can travel to 17 destinations of the world at attractive prices, including Singapore and Bangkok at 323 US dollars, Phuket at 343 US dollars, Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney at 685 US dollars,

Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Frankfurt, London, Paris and Rome at 753 US dollars and New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco at 881 US dollars.

This was announced by SIA General Manager for Bangladesh Terence Wong at a press conference in Dhaka. GrameenPhone Ltd Additional General Manager (Marketing) Intekhab Mahmud was also present.

Tickets sale for this promotion began yesterday and it will continue

till June 15. But the tickets will remain valid till August 31.

According to Wong, travelers are out of risk from being affected by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) disease as the country has recently been removed from the list of SARS affected countries by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

At present, SIA operates flights to 50 cities around the world, via Singapore, from Dhaka and Chittagong.

IMF welcomes floating exchange rate regime

UNB, Dhaka

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has welcomed Bangladesh's latest introduction of market-pegged exchange rate regime.

"The IMF welcomes the move by Bangladesh Bank to set exchange rates for its transactions with authorised dealers no longer in reference to a pre-announced bands as of May 31," the IMF said in a press release yesterday.

Domestic economic conditions are very favourable for this move and Bangladesh Bank has made careful technical preparations, added the press release signed by IMF Resident Representative Marjin Verhoeven.

It said, "the move to a more flexible exchange rate regime will protect competitiveness and enhance resilience to shocks."

The introduction of floating exchange rate also brings

Bangladesh in line with currency arrangements already adopted by the other major countries in the region, such as India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, the IMF said.

It assured that future support under the World Bank's Development Support Credit and the IMF's Poverty Reduction and Growth Facilities would add considerable financial safeguards and bolster confidence in the exchange system.