

DCCI gets new president, vice-presidents

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Fazle RM Hasan has been elected president of the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) for the next one year, according to unofficial results of the election held yesterday.

AM Mobasher and MA Hurayra have been elected vice-presidents.

In the second phase of the election yesterday, 24 directors including eight newly elected directors elected them as new leaders of the chamber.

Earlier in the first phase of the election on Sunday, the Somomona Panel bagged six director posts.

Khondker A Salam (502 votes), AMH Rahman (493 votes), Sabur Khan (469 votes) and Shehad A Khan (468 votes) were elected directors from general group while Abdus Salam (121 votes) and Manjur Ahmed (101 votes) were elected directors from association group.

Earlier, Hossain Khaled, former vice-president, and Absar Karim Chowdhury, incumbent vice-president of DCCI, were elected directors unopposed from trade and town group respectively before the election.

A total of 42 votes from general group and 11 votes from association group were cancelled. This year total number of voters was 1,301, of which 1053 voters belong to the general group and 248 to association group. A total of 851 votes were cast - 661 from general group and 190 from association group.

The election board will announce final result formally at the annual general meeting of the chamber on December 20. The incumbent president is expected to hand over the charge to new president on December 25, sources said.

Pragoti, Ifad Autos, Ashok Leyland sign agreement

Pragoti Industries Limited, Ifad Autos Limited and Ashok Leyland of India signed a long term agreement in Dhaka on Sunday.

Under the deal, Pragoti, an enterprise of Bangladesh Steel and Engineering Corporation, will purchase 300 Ashok Leyland truck chassis in CKD condition for the period of two years. Ashok Leyland has also agreed to assist Pragoti in assembling the trucks at Pragoti plant in Chittagong.

SK Bal, managing director of Pragoti Industries, Iftekhar Ahmed Tipu, managing director of Ifad Autos Limited, sole distributor of Ashok Leyland vehicles in Bangladesh, and AD Chowdhury of Ashok Leyland, signed the agreement on behalf of their organisations, says a press release.

New MD of Kafco

Peter May has been appointed managing director of Kamaphul Fertiliser Company Limited (Kafco).

May will replace Richard Arnold, who will be leaving in January 2004 after three and a half years of service as MD of the company, says a press release.

A British citizen, May was the principal consultant (Chemicals, Energy and Life Sciences) for KPMG in London. He also held senior management responsibilities with Shell in Japan, Singapore and the UK.

Japan, Mexico unlikely to strike FTA by year-end

AFP, Tokyo

Japan and Mexico are likely to miss their goal of working out a free trade agreement (FTA) by the end of the year as they remain wide apart on farm produce, a Japanese official said Monday.

The two countries failed to strike a deal in their FTA talks at the level of vice ministers in Mexico City Sunday, according to an official in charge of international relations at the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

"We have agreed to meet again in a few weeks but since the Mexican side will have a Christmas vacation, it will be difficult to hold another meeting by the end of the year," Ikuro Toyoda said.

The two countries remain divided over Japanese tariffs on Mexican pork and orange juice after failing to conclude their year-long FTA talks ahead of the visit to Tokyo by Mexican President Vicente Fox in mid-October.

Best deal for LDCs at WTO

Khosru for more capacity building

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

As Bangladesh holds key role in World Trade Organisation (WTO) negotiations, both government and private sector should increase capacity building to strike best deal for least developed countries (LDCs), Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury said yesterday.

"Being leader of the LDC group Bangladesh has a responsibility to preserve interests of poor countries at the world trade talks. So both public and private sectors need to be prepared to deal with the complex issues of multilateral trading system," the minister said.

The commerce minister was addressing the inaugural function of a workshop on 'WTO Negotiations for Bangladesh' organised by Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) in collaboration with University of Paris at the

institute's auditorium in Dhaka.

He said though the Cancun talks ended in failure, LDCs showed their capacity through unity. "Amid pressure from US and other rich countries, LDCs did not budge from their stance. LDCs got their morale boosted and Bangladesh also exhibited leadership skill at the conference," he said.

Mentioning government initiatives on capacity building like newly formed foreign trade institute, advisory committee and WTO cell at commerce ministry, he said the private sector is lagging behind on their own skill development efforts.

The Bangladesh Foreign Trade Institute will spearhead the capacity building efforts both for public and private sector people, he said. Besides, the Ministry of Commerce will introduce an internship programme for students and private sector people to help them

enrich their knowledge on global trade negotiations, he added.

French Ambassador to Bangladesh Michel Lummaux said apart from giving training to two Bangladeshi diplomats in France every year, his country is also keen to be associated with Bangladesh's pursuit to develop highly skilled trade negotiators.

Some 25 government and private sector officials of various disciplines are taking part in the four-day workshop. The workshop aims at giving officials a clear conception of WTO regime and show them techniques and strategies how to pursue the country's interests in global trade forums efficiently.

BISS Chairman Mufleh R Osmany, its Director General Major General Md Abdul Mubeen and WTO affairs expert from University of Paris Selim El Sayegh also spoke at the inaugural session.

Call money rate dips to 2pc

BSS, Dhaka

The call money rate nose-dived to 2 per cent yesterday as most banks had sufficient funds to meet the depositors due to thin credit outflow, fund managers said.

The inter-bank money rate touched its all-time low as some banks are facing difficulties with huge idle funds. Banks are not taking risks to invest their funds and this piled up a huge amount of investable funds, central bank sources said.

Earlier, the call money rate fell to its record low at 2.50 per cent this year.

In most dealers, the call money rate ranged between 2.50 per cent and 3.50 per cent, fund managers of leading commercial banks said.

Dollar gains against taka

BSS, Dhaka

The US dollar gained against Bangladesh taka in inter-bank trade yesterday, ahead of a national holiday due to rising demand from importers who found the US unit bounced up against the majors after the Saddam's capture by the US troops.

The dollar rose to its intra-day high at Tk 58.4850 from its earlier one at Tk 58.4500 on Sunday as some banks had short-fall in dollar to meet increased demand from importers, dealers of leading commercial banks said.

But in most deals, they said the dollar traded between Tk 58.4450 and Tk 58.4550 higher than yesterday's range between Tk 58.450 and Tk 58.4450.

Demand for the US currency was increased as most international markets resumed their operations after two-day weekend holiday. Importers bought dollar against local currency to pay their payments ahead of another holiday tomorrow, dealer of a leading commercial bank said.

HSBC opens service centre at Gulshan

The Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC) has opened its 4th customer service centre at Gulshan in Dhaka.

Former advisor to the caretaker government Abdul Mueyed Chowdhury inaugurated the centre yesterday, says a press release.

Apart from availing ATM, Easy Pay, Phone Banking and Website facilities of the bank, customers can also consult a customer service officer about loan products and other services of the bank.

Asia's IT industry to expand 11pc in 2004

AFP, Singapore

Asia's information technology industry outside of Japan will expand by 11 percent to 88 billion US dollars next year as it begins a new growth cycle, a leading market research house said Monday.

China, India and South Korea will be the main drivers of the growth with consumer demand for digital gadgets in the home and office expected to boom across the region, IDC Asia-Pacific said.

The increasing number of Internet users will also fuel the growth, with 205 million people expected to be on line across the Asia-Pacific next year, up 22 percent from 2003.

IDC managing director Piyush Singh said the global economic optimism in the late stages of this year had built a strong platform for IT growth in Asia.

"Key to our outlook is the positive economic news that has been emerging on several fronts and the fact that investment budgets for 2004 have been set in this relatively optimistic environment," Singh said in a report outlining next year's forecasts.

"The region's two largest developing economies, China and India, are charging forward on the economic front and driving overall regional IT market recovery."

The IDC report said the IT market in China would grow by 18 percent next year to be worth 29.4 billion dollars.

The Asian industry, excluding Japan, will expand to 88 billion dollars, meaning China's share of the market will be 35 percent.



Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury speaks at a workshop on 'WTO Negotiations for Bangladesh' organised by Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) in collaboration with University of Paris at the institute's auditorium in Dhaka yesterday. French Ambassador in Dhaka Michel Lummaux is also seen.

US aid for Bangladesh economy to continue

American envoy tells Ctg business leaders

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The United States will continue providing assistance for Bangladesh's economy, American Ambassador in Dhaka Harry K Thomas has said.

The US envoy gave the assurance while exchanging views with Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) directors and local businessmen at Chittagong Club yesterday.

He also hoped Bangladesh and US will sign Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA).

"It is not desirable for the US that Bangladesh be deprived of GSP facilities that might hinder duty-free access of Bangladeshi goods to the US market," said the ambassador.

He laid emphasis on stable investment atmosphere in Bangladesh saying the country will not face shortage of foreign investment if investment friendly atmosphere is ensured.

Thomas lauded Bangladesh's support to the US participation in activities for establishing peace in different countries, commitment for the eradication of terrorism and role in exterminating child labour.

He reiterated his country's appreciation and goodwill to the continued efforts of Bangladesh for poverty alleviation and social development.

The US ambassador assured the local businessmen of his continued personal endeavour for encouraging US investors in investing in Bangladesh.

Earlier, CCCI President Amir Humayun Mahmud Chowdhury thanked the US government for the cancellation of its immigration department's registration system imposed recently on the citizens of 24 Muslim countries including Bangladesh.

Referring to the United States Trade Development Agreement (USTDA) that provides special facilities to 72 sub-Saharan and Caribbean countries, CCCI president said it put Bangladesh garments in an uneven competition in the US market.

CCCI Senior Vice-president Ershad Ullah and Vice-president Monzoor-Ul-Amin Chowdhury, Second Secretary (Political) of the US Embassy in Dhaka Stephen Wilger were also present.

Tap potential of farm product exports

US expert urges govt

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh should explore the potential export markets of agricultural products as the country has no better option in hand but to develop agriculture, a US expert said.

Chad Russell, United States' agricultural counselor for Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka made the comment speaking at the opening session of a three-day review meeting on the research programme in natural sciences under the collaborative efforts of Bangladesh and the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) held in Dhaka yesterday.

Citing examples, Russell said Bangladesh has potential for exporting tropical mangos and long-stem roses to the US and European markets respectively.

Russell, stationed at the US embassy in New Delhi, urged Bangladeshi academics, researchers and scientists to prepare project papers seeking more studies on agricultural produces, which he thought, have tremendous export potentials.

He, however, cautioned about long-term economic losses due to lost image of exporting countries failing to maintain food safety standard. He cited the examples of Chilean grapes losing the US market due to presence of pesticide residues and Guatemalan strawberries for non-compliance with pre-shipment hygienic procedures.

Dr Carol Kramer-LeBlanc, director of the Research and Scientific Exchanges Division of the Foreign Agricultural Service of the US Department of Agriculture (FAS-USDA) and Dr James R Stevenson, programme leader of the International Cooperation and Development of FAS-USDA also spoke at the inaugural function of the review meeting. US Political Counselor in Bangladesh, Dundas McCalough, was also present.

A large number of Bangladeshi researchers and academics from different universities including Dhaka University and Bangladesh Agricultural University along with their US counterparts will present progress and findings of researches on as many as 10 areas over the

next two days and then take up new project proposals for research.

The studies cover a wide range of areas, including improvement of lentil through genetic transformation, salt tolerant rice, genetic improvement of jute and drought resistant potato.

On the first day of the three-day meeting, Dr RH Sarker, Dr Zeba Islam Seraj, Dr M Sultan Hussain and Dr Haseena Khan of Dhaka University and Dr KM Nasiruddin of Bangladesh Agricultural University made separate presentations.

Earlier, in her opening remarks, Dr Carol Kramer-LeBlanc hoped that first such review of US-Bangladesh collaborative research on natural sciences would give the Bangladeshi scientists an opportunity to make presentations of their research findings.

"Our aim should be improving peoples' standard of living through development of agriculture in an economically viable, environmentally sustainable and socially acceptable manner," said Dr Carol.

Two local firms to market Quintum VoIP solutions

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Quintum Technologies, Inc., a leading manufacturer of voice over internet protocol (VoIP) solutions, has authorised two local companies as its partners to sell the company's products in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh Online Ltd (BOL) and Global Access Ltd (GAL) have been made the partners of the Quintum in the wake of recent government announcement to legalise the VoIP.

Stephen P Lenci, regional sales manager of Quintum, announced

the authorisation at a function at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel yesterday.

Lenci made a multimedia presentation on Quintum VoIP products at the function organised by Quintum Technologies, Micro United Network and Internet Service Provider Association.

Lenci said the government should take steps to implement the decision as early as possible.

While making his presentation, he said products like Tenor VoIP switch or gateway are used for cheaper long distance voice com-

munication. "Our low cost products are used in many countries like the US, Singapore and Saudi Arabia."

The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission is expected to issue licenses to a number of private companies in the coming months. VoIP technology enables operators to drastically reduce the cost of calls, especially across longer distance.

The government legalised the VoIP on November 10.

Anwar seeks WB support for study on agriculture

UNB, Dhaka

Agriculture Minister MK Anwar has sought support from the World Bank for a major study on agriculture to provide a future roadmap for the sector, closely linked to poverty alleviation and rural development.

The request came during a meeting with a World Bank team led by Sector Director Constance Bernard at the minister's office yesterday.

Anwar told the team that the government wanted to raise its seed supply to growers at least to 20 percent of the requirement from about 5 percent at present and ensure irrigation facilities to all

arable lands for increased cropping intensity.

"We also want to give a fresh fillip to our research organizations as we are now spending only a nominal amount for the purpose," he said, elaborating the policy framework of the government on agriculture.

Emphasizing on a mechanism to ensure fair price of farm products to the growers, the Agriculture Minister said the developed world gives farm subsidy to the tune of US\$ 330 billion per year, but the countries like Bangladesh have no such scope.

The World Bank team assured the minister of a comprehensive study on the future of agriculture in

Bangladesh comprising other stakeholders, including FAO and WFP. They also agreed that agriculture should be the mainstay for poverty alleviation.

Anwar appreciated the Bank's latest focus on non-farm activities in Bangladesh, but said non-farm activities have little scope for expansion without gearing up the farm activities.

"In Bangladesh, non-farm activities should be the forward and backward linkages of farm activities," he said, requesting the multilateral agency for a close look into the future of agriculture in the country.



PHOTO: PRAGOTI INDUSTRIES

Officials of Pragoti Industries Limited, Ashok Leyland of India and Ifad Autos Limited, sole distributor of Ashok Leyland vehicles in Bangladesh, pose for a photograph at an agreement signing ceremony held in Dhaka on Sunday. Under the deal, Pragoti, an enterprise of Bangladesh Steel and Engineering Corporation, will purchase 300 Ashok Leyland truck chassis.

Malnutrition retards productivity

Speakers observe at seminar

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Speakers at a seminar in Dhaka yesterday underscored the need for fortification of processed foods to remove malnutrition, which reduces people's productivity and thus hinders the growth of gross domestic product of Bangladesh.

The government should undertake programmes on fortification of processed foods to remove deficiencies of vitamin A, iron and iodine, they said at the seminar titled Fortification of Processed Foods: The Way to Healthier Diet.

International Life Sciences and Institute (ILSI) South Asia Bangladesh Committee, ILSI-India, ILSI Human Nutrition Institute, Washington, Canada-based NGO Micronutrient Initiative and World Food Programme (WFP) jointly organised the conference.

Speaking at the seminar Food Minister Abdullah Al Noman said vitamin A, iron and iodine deficiencies cause physical weaknesses, which ultimately retard mental and intellectual development of younger generation.

He urged the scientists to find ways of fortifying rice, staple food of people in Bangladesh, with the three key ingredients -- iron, iodine and vitamin A. However, the government and WFP have taken steps towards *ata* (flour) fortification.

Studies show about 700 children die each year from malnutrition related diseases. According to a United Nations report, the average height of Bangladesh youths decreased by 10cm in less than 50 years time due to the same reason.

The food minister said more than 30,000 children become blind every year due to deficiency of vitamin A while tens of thousands of people specially women and

children suffer from anaemia due to deficiency of iron.

ILSI Bangladesh Chairman Kazi M Badruddoza, President Abdul Awal Mintoo, ILSI India President GM Tewari and Micronutrient Initiative Regional Coordinator Thomas Schaezel also spoke at the inauguration session.

The ILSI Bangladesh chairman said iron, iodine and vitamin A can be delivered through wheat, flour and bakery products, milk and milk products, salt, edible oils, sugar and tea.

Presenting the keynote paper ILSI-India Chairman Panandikar said fortification of processed foods is a cost-effective and practical approach in the elimination of micronutrient malnutrition.