

Leather service centre opens

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh Leather Service Centre (BLSC) was inaugurated at Bangladesh College of Leather Technology in Dhaka.

Commerce Minister Altaf Hossain Choudhury formally inaugurated the centre. Speaking at the opening function, the minister urged leather and leather goods entrepreneurs to diversify their products.

Chaired by Export Promotion Bureau Vice-chairman Mir Shahabuddin Mohammad, the function was also attended by Commerce Ministry Adviser Barkatullah Bulu, Naser Rahman MP, and Md Nasir Uddin Ahmed Pintu MP.

Italian Ambassador to Bangladesh Pietro Ballero, Bangladesh Tanners Association President Harun Chowdhury and International Trade Centre UNCTAD/WTO representative Giovanni Padaglio were also present.

Students of leather technology and leather entrepreneurs will get testing facility, certification and technical facilities from the centre. The government of Italy funded \$1.8 million to set up the centre.

55 vie for 27 directors of BKMEA

BDNEWS, Dhaka

Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturer and Exporter Association (BKMEA) election scheduled for April 8 will be a direct clash between the 'Knit Oikya Parishad' and the 'Sammilita Knit Forum'.

BKMEA sources said a total of 55 members from two panels, including one independent candidate, are contesting for 27 director posts.

The elected directors will elect a president and three vice presidents.

The withdrawal of the candidature was March 16.

Mohammed Hatem is leading 'Sammilita Knit forum' panel incumbent President of the association Fazlul Haque is leading 'Knit Oikya Parishad' panel.

New Singer Plus store in Dinajpur

Singer has expanded its sales network by opening a new Singer Plus store at New Town in Dinajpur on Tuesday.

Chairman and Managing Director of Singer Bangladesh Limited Mahubul Jamil formally inaugurated the new store, says a press release.

Among others, Marketing Director Sajidur Rahman Khan was present.

Singer Bangladesh Limited is committed to offering quality products through its exclusive chain of retail stores across the country. In addition to its diversified product range, Singer is now offering products of world famous brands from Singer Plus stores.

Cellphone firms seek stable regulatory environment

GSM Asia Pacific confce ends; Banglalink's Mehboob Chy new chairman

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

GSM Asia Pacific conference ended in Dhaka yesterday stressing the need for a supportive regulatory regime for mobile phone operators.

"The operators were of the view that regulation must be supportive and stressed the need for creating a stable regulatory environment for investment and growth," Simon Zhang, outgoing chairman of GSM Asia Pacific (GSMAP) region, told a press briefing after the closing of the two-day international conference.

The operators also alerted the regulators to make sure that the consumers benefit from mobile telecommunications, he said, adding it is important that conditions of operations should not be

changed on day to day basis as it hurts the operators.

GSM operators in the Asia Pacific, fastest growing mobile telecommunications market in the world, are rapidly bridging the digital divide in the region, Simon Zhang added.

He said the operators are also contributing significantly to the economy of every country with investments and creation of employment and business in the emerging markets.

Around 111 delegates including 60 representatives from different operators participated in the conference. Operators and companies marketing different technologies presented 21 papers, sharing best practice experiences of various

operators to what new technologies can be offered for the betterment of the services.

The conference elected Mehboob Chowdhury, outgoing deputy chairman of the region and also chief commercial officer of Banglalink new chairman of GSMAP for the 2006-07 term. Anoja Obeyesekere of Dialog GSM Sri Lanka was elected new deputy chairman of the region.

Simon Zhang said the 3G roaming issues were presented in the conference and there is a need to simplify the products and services for the customers.

The conference discussed issues like quality improvement of the networks and how international

messaging can be made easier for the operators.

Ricardo Tavares, senior vice-president of GSMA, said the Asia Pacific region is now the centre of the action, with 3G being deployed in the developed markets and GSM connecting the unconnected in the developing markets in a speed the operators never imagined.

Speaking at the briefing, newly elected Chairman Mehboob Chowdhury said GSM Association is taking a look into the regulation issue, adding the operators should be consulted before taking any new step in the sector.

Next GSM AP conference will be held in Singapore.



(From left) Anoja Obeyesekere, new deputy chairman of GSM Asia Pacific (GSMAP), Simon Zhang, outgoing chairman of GSMAP, and Mehboob Chowdhury, new chairman of GSMAP, are seen at the 24th GSMAP conference that ended at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel yesterday.

BB monitoring profit repatriation by foreign companies: Governor

BDNEWS, Dhaka

Bangladesh Bank (BB) Governor Salehuddin Ahmed yesterday said the BB has started monitoring profit repatriation by foreign companies, particularly cellphone operators, to contain volatility in the foreign exchange market.

"They borrow money from the banks and remit the profit abroad," Ahmed said at an interaction meeting with the Economic Reporters' Forum (ERF) on "Floating exchange rate management: How does it work for Bangladesh" at the National Press Club.

"I am concerned about their frequent bank borrowings," he said.

Recently, Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman also said some mobile phone operators, relatively with small investments, are remitting huge amount of money from the country.

ERF President Zakaria Kazal presided the function, which was also addressed by BB Deputy Governor Allah Malik Kazemi.

Ananya Raihan, executive director of Development Research Network, presented the keynote

paper. The BB governor also said the floating exchange rate, introduced in May 2003, is relevant and favours the policy matrix undertaken by the government.

He said Bangladesh requires comfortable reserve of dollars to pay for its imports of goods and services, besides making payments for the incrementally rising oil import bills.

He said in addition to rising import bills, indiscriminate remittances of money might also create pressure on the foreign exchange market, which at present takes a critical turn.

The central bank may intervene when it is necessary to ensure stability and avoid inflationary pressure, although scope for intervention is limited under a floating exchange rate regime, he said.

"Without developing the real and productive sectors, increased export-import is not enough to contain the rising inflationary trend," Ahmed said.

Deputy Governor Allah Malik Kazemi said floating exchange rate is a standard practice and not a

prescription of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Kutubuddin Ahmed, former president of BGMEA, said a stable foreign currency market is essential for economic development in any country.

Oil prices rally

AFP, London

World oil prices rose on Wednesday following news that US crude stockpiles fell unexpectedly last week, dealers said.

New York's main contract, light sweet crude for delivery in May, rose by 30 cents to 62.07 dollars per barrel in electronic deals before the market's official opening.

In London, the price of Brent North Sea crude for May delivery gained 58 cents to 62.08 dollars per barrel in electronic trade.

The US Department of Energy (DoE) had said on Wednesday that crude oil inventories slipped by 1.3 million barrels last week to total 338.6 million.



Visitors gather at a stall in the first-ever pottery trade fair that began at Bashundhara Exhibition Centre in Dhaka yesterday.

First-ever pottery trade fair kicks off

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The first-ever pottery trade fair began at Bashundhara Exhibition Centre in Dhaka yesterday with a view to creating business opportunities for rural potters.

Deputy Minister for Land M Ruhul Quddus Talukdar Dulu formally inaugurated the four-day exhibition styled "First National Pottery Trade Fair-2006" jointly organised by Practical Action and International Institute of Technology and Management (IITM).

Former president of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry Abdul Awal Mintoo, Country Director of Practical Action-Bangladesh Veena Khaleque and Chairman of IITM M Ataur Rahman also attended the function as special guests.

Some 22 firms are showcasing a wide range of earthenware including showpiece, hanging, flower tub, flower vase, penholder, photo frame, table lamp, fancy mug, jars, ashtray and gift item at 26 stalls in the exhibition.

Speaking at the function, the deputy minister urged the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to offer financial support through micro-credit to potters.

He also hoped, "The fair will create an opportunity for the rural potters."

Veena Khaleque said pottery sector needs policy support.

BRB Cables is the sponsor of the event while The Daily Star and ATN Bangla are the media partners.

EU to offer 500m euros to LatAm water projects

XINHUA, Mexico City

The European Union (EU) has agreed to offer 500 million euros in aid for Latin American water projects, Spanish Minister of Environment Cristina Narbona said Wednesday.

The final amount to be disbursed under an agreement signed by the EU would depend on plans presented by each country in the region in the coming months, Narbona told a press conference on the sidelines of the fourth World Water Forum held in Mexico City.

She noted the EU would strictly carry out the agreement, demanding detailed plans and full attention from the Latin American countries.

Another 500 million euros had also been earmarked for water projects in Asian, Caribbean and Pacific nations, Narbona added.

WTO TRADE TALKS

Lamy for concessions from big powers

AFP, Brussels

The European Union, the United States and big developing countries must make concessions in global trade liberalisation talks, which are at a critical juncture, WTO Director General Pascal Lamy said Thursday.

"The success or failure of the round (of negotiations) will be decided in the 40 days before the end of April," Lamy told the European Parliament's international trade committee.

WTO negotiators are struggling to give fresh impetus to the Doha round of talks in the World Trade Organisation (WTO), launched in the Qatari capital in 2001 with the aim of boosting development in the world's poorest nations.

The clock is ticking towards an April 30 deadline for negotiators to resolve their differences over tariffs on agricultural products and industrial goods.

Lamy said that progress was possible only if the United States, the European Union and the so-called G20 group of emerging trade powers agreed to make compromises on issues dear to them.

"The US must move on domestic farm support, the EU must move on agriculture tariffs and the G20 must move on industrial tariffs," he said.

Although each side had already made some concessions, "the sum of the three offers is not enough," he said.

Protectionism clouds EU economic summit

AFP, Brussels

EU leaders gather for an economic summit Thursday aimed at giving a shot in the arm to Europe's long-flagging economy, but resurgent protectionism will cast a long shadow over the talks.

Plans to forge a joint energy strategy for the 25-nation European Union will also be high on the agenda of the two-day gathering in Brussels.

While the United States and Japan are enjoying an economic resurgence, much of Europe is still struggling to stimulate growth, with latest figures for last year putting economic expansion in the eurozone at a paltry 1.3 percent.

EU leaders hope to use the Brussels summit to galvanize efforts to push through reforms such as flexible jobs rules and ever-greater cross-border competition.

"We need to create more job opportunities, particularly for young people trying to enter the market," said European Commission chief Jose Manuel Barroso on the eve of the summit.

But europhiles, already depressed by last year's French and Dutch rejections of the EU's first-ever constitution, now lament that the bloc is drifting towards greater protectionism in national economic policy-making.