

Implications of GATT discussed at seminar

By Staff Correspondent

Economic pundits and professionals yesterday observed that different aspects of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) should be discussed in detail to make the country's common people aware of its implications for the Bangladesh economy.

They were addressing a seminar on "The GATT and Bangladesh" held at the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh (IEB) yesterday evening. The audience witnessed a lively debate on the possible ramifications of the world trade accord for this poor country.

Professor Mohammad Golam Mohiuddin, a teacher of the Mechanical Engineering Department of the BUET who presented the key-note paper, observed that the GATT would eventually worsen the country's economy.

Professor Mohiuddin argued that the GATT's proposed repeal of the United States' Multifiber Agreement would affect the country's garments exports to America; its proposed maximum ceiling of ten percent on agricultural subsidy would reduce our agricultural production and the liberalisation of laws relating to foreign investment would prevent our government from protecting national products.

Professor Mohiuddin termed the GATT's proposed imposition of patent rights, as well as royalty on any product, in case it was produced by using a chemical formula invented by a foreign company, as "most dangerous."

He pointed out that in the past, royalty was charged only if the commodity was produced by using the same production mechanism followed by the original company.

Professor Mohiuddin observed that the GATT would eventually turn our country into a market for foreign goods which, he felt, was contrary to our national development aspirations.

Debopriya Bhattacharya of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), however, did not find anything in the GATT which could aggravate the country's already acute economy.

Bhattacharya said, "Rather,

we should study the agreement seriously to find out the loopholes and exploit those with a view to strengthening our economy."

Dr Bhattacharya, referring to some research works on the issue, told the audience that the GATT would involve a trade of about 200 billion US dollars during the next ten years. Of this, 61 billion dollars worth of business would go to the European Union, 37 billion dollars of trade to the former Soviet Union, 36 billion to the United States, 27 billion to Japan, 4 billion to Canada, 2 billion each to Australia and New Zealand and only 16 billion dollars for the entire Third World countries.

"Bangladesh is a very insignificant player in the world trade game," Dr Bhattacharya told his audience and pointed out that the present contribution of Bangladesh to world trade is only 0.08 per cent. In such a situation, Bangladesh is left with no option but to develop a "response mechanism" to the international agreement by making a serious study of the new agreement.

Refuting Professor Mohiuddin's argument that the GATT's proposed 10 per cent ceiling on subsidy for agricultural production would affect the country's agro-production, Dr Bhattacharya pointed out that the present subsidy was less than 10 per cent.

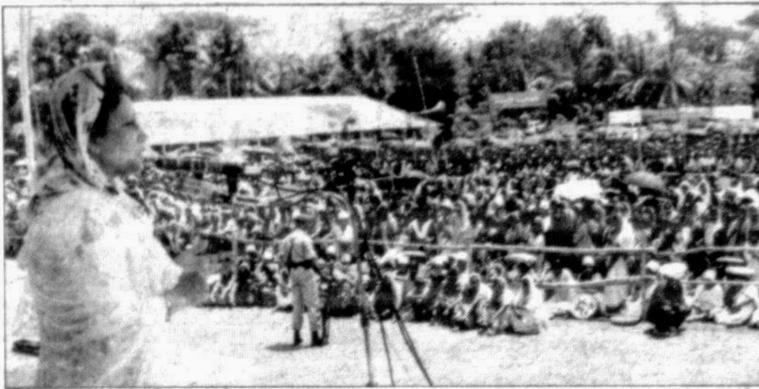
He, however, said the country, often deciding to pursue a free market economy, had to prepare itself for competing with many countries in the trading world.

Dr Atiur Rahman of the BIDS observed that the GATT would eventually destroy the Third World countries' political and economic sovereignty.

Begum Matia Chowdhury, MP of the Awami League, who happened to be present among the audience felt that the nation was on the verge of a head-on collision with the new world economic order.

"Otherwise, we will face extinction, like the dinosaurs," the AL legislator warned.

Presided over by IEB vice president M A K Azad, the seminar was also addressed by Aminur Rashid and Professor Rafiquddin Ahmed.



Prime Minister Begum Khaleida Zia addressing a mammoth public meeting at the B N college ground at Uzirpur in Barisal yesterday. — PID photo

BNPPP meets May 3

The BNP Parliamentary Party will meet on May 3 (Tuesday) at 5 pm to discuss the prevailing political situation of the country and matters relating to the coming 14th session of the Jatiya Sangsad, reports UNB.

Prime Minister and Leader of the House Begum Khaleida Zia will preside over the meeting at the Sangsad Bhaban, said Whip Mahbubul Alam Tara in a press release yesterday.

All Members of Parliament of the ruling party have been requested to attend the meeting in room No 932 of the West Block of the Sangsad Bhaban.

ALCWC meet today

An emergency meeting of the Awami League central working committee will be held at 6 pm today at 29 Minto Road, reports UNB.

Party chief Sheikh Hasina will preside over the meeting. Members of the central committee have been requested to attend.

CCCI concerned at hartal

CHITTAGONG, Apr 24: A meeting of the directors of Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) today expressed deep concern at the repeated call for hartals saying such unwanted practices had been destroying national economy by discouraging foreign as well as private investments in the country, reports BSS.

The meeting held at the chamber house at here Agrabad called upon political parties and trade unions to refrain from resorting to hartal and find out other means for registering protest against anything. We appeal to all sections of people to change the tactics of protest in the greater national interest, they said adding people have the right to call for observing hartals, but the national interest must not be ignored while doing so.

PM at Uzirpur rally

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tional power grid in Bhoila on April 26, and the opposition has called hartal on the day."

The Prime Minister sought cooperation of all in carrying forward government's development programmes as well as maintaining the continuity of the process of democracy.

"We want development, prosperity and peace. Let's come forward irrespective of party affiliation, religion and caste and creed to have a bright future," she said.

Referring to the parliamentary by-election in Magura, the Prime Minister said the opposition did nothing for the people of Magura in the last 22 years and that is why they voted for the BNP.

The BNP does not believe in the politics of rhetoric, it believes in the politics of development and production, she said. "The BNP politics is the politics of fulfilling its commitments."

Begum Zia said we all had fought unitedly for the independence of the country and now it was the responsibility of all to build up the nation.

Responding to a series of local demands and problems, Begum Zia said the raising of numerous demands by them proved that the past autocratic regime did nothing for socio-economic development in the district as well as other parts of the country.

Local demands include construction of roads and bridges, nationalisation of local college and upgrading thana health complex.

The Prime Minister assured them of looking into their

problems. Underconstruction roads and bridges will be completed soon and new roads and bridges will also be constructed in phases. Educational institutions will be provided with additional financial support, she said.

Referring to the problems and demands, Begum Zia said her government believes in balanced development of all parts of the country.

Presided by Abdur Rahman Malik, the meeting was also addressed by Post and Telecommunications Minister Tariqul Islam, State Minister for Education Principal Eunus Khan, parliament members Mosharrar Hossain Mengu, Shahidul Huq Jamal, Begum Selima Rahman and Mujibar Rahman Sarwar, central leader Jahiruddin Swapan, local leaders Abdur Rashid Khan, Sharfuddin Jhantu, Mustafizur Rahman Tuku, Ruhul Amin, Rafiqul Islam Mizan, Siddiqur Rahman, local UP Chairman Mostafa Kamal and Muktiyoddha Command Council Chairman Abdul Wadud.

Newsman dead

Aminul Islam, Joint News Editor of The Bangladesh Observer, died at the Holy Family Hospital here last night, reports BSS.

Islam left behind his wife, one son, two daughters and a host of colleagues and relations to mourn his death.

His first Namaz-e-Janaza will be held at the Observer premises at 11 am, the second at the Jatiya Press Club at 12 noon and the last at the Baitul Mokarram National Mosque after Zohr prayers today.

Leaders of Chakma refugees due in CHT today

From Staff Correspondent
CHITTAGONG, Apr 24: A 17-member delegation of Chakma refugees, headed by Upendra Lal Chakma, chairman of the Refugee Welfare Association, is expected to arrive at Khagrachhari April 25 on a three-day visit, official sources said.

The delegation will see the condition of the Chakma refugees repatriated in February last under a negotiated agreement.

If the refugee leaders were satisfied with the rehabilitation measures taken by the government for the returnees, the next phase of repatriation may start shortly.

The delegation members will be received at Ramgarh by the chairman of the Refugee Rehabilitation Committee Kalparanjani Chakma, MP, and other officials.

The team will visit Ramgarh, Dighinala and Panchhari and hold discussions with the returnees, officials said.

Teachers' strike

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Action Liaison Committee of six teachers' associations of the private educational institutions and the Bangladesh Teachers' Association (BTA) — have been on an indefinite strike. The liaison committee began its work stoppage on April 18 to press home a 15-point charter of demands that includes benefits and facilities equal to those enjoyed by the government teachers while the BTA's strike started on April 16 demanding nationalisation of their institutions.

At least five associations of the secondary government school teachers have now threatened to go on an indefinite strike from April 30 unless their 10-point demands, including recognition of the assistant teachers as first class gazetted officers and the setting up of a separate directorate for secondary education, were accepted by April 29.

Besides, the government college teachers have also called a strike on May 9 to protest, what they called, delaying tactics of the government in filling the vacant posts of teachers in the nationalised colleges.

Meanwhile, the striking teachers staged demonstrations in the capital as well as in all the district headquarters yesterday. At a rally in front of the Central Shaheed Minar in the city yesterday morning the liaison committee leaders reiterated their resolve to continue the strike until their demands were met. Speakers blamed the Education Minister for "complicating the situation" and accused him of delivering 'false' and 'baseless' statements about the teachers' action programme and demands. They also demanded the Prime Minister intervene in the matter for solving their problems.

Tax lawyers

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suspended. The tax lawyers also held a protest rally in the NBR premises.

It was presided over by Alhaj Abdus Samad. The speakers at the rally demanded removal of the NBR chairman for his alleged misbehaviour with tax lawyers and urged the government to accept the demands immediately.

The rally was addressed by MA Salam Talukder, Syed Ahmed, Shamsur Rahman, Sohrab Uddin and Dewan Md Ibrahim.

RU hall Provost's office ransacked

From RU Correspondent

RAJSHAHI, Apr 24: Students of the Sher-e-Bangla Hall of the Rajshahi University, angered by the Provost's reported refusal to let two outsiders enter the hall premises, ransacked his office midnight Saturday.

Provost Dr Shah Alam submitted his resignation to the Vice Chancellor of the university to protest the attack.

N'ganj Uttara Bank guard shot accidentally

From Our Correspondent

NARAYANGANJ, Apr 24: A bullet accidentally fired out of a gun carried by a guard of the Uttara Bank, Narayanganj branch, left him seriously injured at around 11 am today.

Witnesses said, Idris Ali, 30, sustained bullet wound in his throat while on duty in the bank all of a sudden.

The officials of the bank immediately took the guard to the Narayanganj hospital. He was later taken to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital in critical condition.

The police suspects it might have been an attempt to commit suicide.

A case has been filed in the Narayanganj thana.

The Midnight File

Hata becomes PM today

TOKYO, Apr 24: Foreign Minister Tsutomu Hata was to become Japan's new prime minister Monday, starting out already behind in his work. Hosokawa and his cabinet were to formally resign Monday morning, clearing the way for Parliament's formal vote approving Hata, 58, who is head of the coalition's second-largest party and has been a member of Parliament since 1969, reports AP.

Rally against Dalai Lama

NEW DELHI, Apr 24: Displaying rare anger against Tibetans and their spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, scores of Indians on Sunday demanded that Tibetan exiles leave a mountainside town where they have lived for three decades. The anti-Tibetan passions erupted after a local young man was stabbed to death allegedly by a Tibetan during a fight on Thursday in the town of Dharamsala, the Indian Express newspaper reported, reports AP.

Serbs blow up Gorazde water treatment plant

ZAGREB, Apr 24: Serb forces torched houses and blew up Gorazde's water treatment plant today in a scorched-earth withdrawal from around the Bosnian Muslim enclave, a senior UN official said, reports Reuter.

UN special envoy Yasushi Akashi said Serb troops had withdrawn from a three-km zone around the UN-designated safe area to avoid NATO air strikes but had burned down houses and destroyed the town's water plant on the way.

"Serb forces are moving out of (Gorazde's vicinity) step by step but we are concerned that they are doing so by burning houses along the way," Akashi, civilian chief of the UN protection force, said at Unprofor headquarters in Croatia.

"They also blew up the water treatment plant of Gorazde (within the three-km zone)," Akashi told a news conference. He said the wanton destruction violated the spirit of the withdrawal and "I intend to raise the matter with (Serb leader) Dr Radovan Karadzic in very strong terms."

The Bosnian government army, for its part had fired a mortar into Gorazde's ammunition factory, continued skirmishes with the Serbs this morning and Unprofor had to

intervene swiftly to prevent further escalation, he said. AP adds: UN troops began evacuating the wounded and consolidating a truce Sunday in Gorazde.

Bosnian government radio reported two people killed and 15 wounded by Serb sniper fire during the day.

Sajal in police remand

By Staff Correspondent

Gazi Kamrul Islam Sajal, who was arrested in the city Saturday in connection with the murders of two Dhaka University students last year, was taken into remand by detective police (DB) for three days of interrogation yesterday.

Sajal, 28, a member of AL-backed Bangladesh Chhatra League, who was picked up by the DB from the Dhania Amin Market under Demra thana, was produced before the chief metropolitan magistrate yesterday.

Accused of several crimes, Sajal was being sought by police for the murders of Mirza Ghalib and Liton, two DU students who were gunned down in broad daylight on the campus.

DSE: Yangon

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panies to be enlisted with the DSE, we must be sure about the credibility of the foreign companies coming into our stock market. We will have to conduct some thorough studies on the financial management of such deals."

Myanmar does not have any stock market and the company, which wants to go public, has no other option but to float shares in a third country. It wants exposure in the Far Eastern countries and has specifically shown an interest in the DSE.

Meanwhile, in another development, the authorities are planning to establish a link between the capital markets of Bombay and Dhaka by floating shares in these markets simultaneously.

Blast kills 9 in Johannesburg

JOHANNESBURG, Apr 24: Nine people were killed and 92 others were wounded in a powerful bomb blast in the centre of Johannesburg today, police said, reports Reuter.

The blast, on the last day of official campaigning for South Africa's first all-race elections this week, rocked an area near offices of the radical Pan Africanist Congress and the African National Congress.

Police spokesman Alta Stapelberg told Reuters seven people were killed at the scene and two died later of their injuries.

Dialogue

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statement on the other were not consistent; rather, they were contradictory.

Some ruling party leaders asserting that Salam Talukder's statement was a perfect analysis of the policies of the major Opposition parties, should, however, not have been issued at a time when the government need the Opposition's presence in Parliament.

Another top BNP leader, however, supported the statement, saying the Opposition must be kept under pressure, especially before any dialogue.

The BNP leader observed that a dialogue could be fruitful only if the government succeeded in pushing the Opposition into a corner from where it, too, was compelled to strive for an honourable negotiation.

The standing committee of the BNP, the party's highest policy-making body, is likely to meet very soon to discuss possible methods to face the present political crisis, insiders said.

According to sources, the standing committee meeting might even discuss the Opposition demand for polls under an interim administration.

Meanwhile, political analysts feel that a formal dialogue between the major parties might help resolve the present impasse, paving the way for the Opposition's return to Parliament.

Indian troops

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aimed at protecting the Customs office at Burimari from erosion by Dharala river. WDB renewed work on the project today under heavy guard by BDR jawans at about 11 am without any resistance from Indian side.

Later, in the evening, Indian army started mobilising in the area creating panic among inhabitants in border villages.

A flag meeting between BDR and BSF was held on Saturday to discuss the issue but it ended without any decision.

Gas charge raised

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The Asian Development Bank (ADB)-assisted Third Natural Gas Project has been launched to achieve the goal, although the government has little scope to stop the wastage of gas.

He said that proper meters for estimating the gas consumption through individual burners could not yet be introduced, because of strong arguments both for and against the move.

If the meters are introduced, the company would need additional manpower for meter-reading and the country would need to spend huge foreign currency for importing those from abroad, he said, adding that even in that case nobody can assure that the meter-reading would not be manipulated.

"A large section of people in Dhaka have been keeping their burners lighted round the clock to save a single matchstick, although most of them are educated and are expected to be conscious," regretted an official of the Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company. He, however, informed this correspondent that the company, anyway, has set up meters in certain areas on an experimental basis as per the suggestion of the ADB. An appropriate mechanism can be evolved only after completion of all the experiments and studies, he said.

Another official at the Energy Ministry said the government move to separate the transmission and distribution system through formation of the Gas Transmission Company (GTC) would improve the situation.

Observers believe the price hike of gas would have far-reaching impacts on other sectors, including the booming industrial sector, and affect the low-income groups seriously by increasing the cost of living.

Some consumers said, regretting that the government did not even consider it necessary to inform the public of the decision through a notification before its implementation.

Police team leaves

A delegation of Bangladesh Police left Dhaka yesterday for former Yugoslavia to work as police monitor under the United Nations peace-keeping forces there, reports BSS.

A top-level official of the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources, while talking to The Daily Star, said the government has been trying to improve the gas transmission and distribution system by removing the technical flaws and evolving an improved mechanism.

Hasina

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non-functional due to indifferent attitude of the Leader of the House, Hasina alleged.

She said that avoiding Parliament sessions, Begum Zia remain busy in touring the country by helicopter burning fuel worth crores of taka in tax-payers' money to propagate false campaign against the opposition.

Hasina defended hartals as a democratic and non-violent means of protesting misrule and said the government was campaigning against it to mislead the people.

She urged the people to express their 'no-confidence' in the BNP rule again on April 26 by foiling all conspiracy and misleading propaganda. "The Awami League is not suffering from any political bankruptcy that it will have to remain silent in the face of corruption, misrule, nepotism, vote-dacoty and terrorism of the government," Hasina said.

She said political stability is a pre-requisite for investment and development but this cannot be expected from the BNP government. "The people and the country must be protected at any cost from the hands of the BNP."

The opposition leader admitted that hartals caused miseries to the people but said, "We are forced to call hartals for the ultimate wellbeing of the vast multitude of people."

Accusing the ruling party of resorting to repressive measures against independent newspapers for objective reporting, Hasina said the government was using advertisement as an weapon to control the newspapers.

Awami League leaders Zillur Rahman, Amir Hossain Amu, Tofael Ahmed MP, Mayor Mohammad Hanif and Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya also addressed the meeting. Reaz Uddin Ahmed of city Awami League presided.

Star quiz

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Rezwan Mahmud stays with his uncle at Siddheswari while his family lives in Gopalganj.

The names of eight lucky prize winners of the second quiz were announced yesterday through a lucky draw, conducted by Ralf van Lotringen of Philips, the Netherlands and Azimur Rahman, who presided over the function. Hasan Ali of Rupnagar, Mirpur and Habib Sadat of Gulshan won the second and the third prizes respectively.

Speaking on the occasion, Hanif lauded the roles of both the sponsors and organisers of the competition which, he said, would inspire sports enthusiasts across the country.

A beaming Rubayat Mahmud, a BUET student who lives in Mirpur, received the coveted 21-inch Philips colour TV from the mayor.

The lucky winners of the first quiz included a brother and sister pair. Latiful Mannan Chowdhury of Banani won a stereo set for the third prize while his sister Nahreen Mamerukh won a set of four dozen Philips electric bulbs — one of the five consolation prizes.

A S Mahmud, Chairman of Transcom Electronics Ltd., sponsors of the quiz competition, also addressed the gathering.

Azimur Rahman, Chairman of Mediaword Ltd., the holding company of The Daily Star, presenting a vote of thanks, said The Daily Star should continue such programmes to promote sports in the country.

Mahfuz Anam, Editor of The Daily Star, and Ralf van Lotringen also spoke at the function.

The winners of the five consolation prizes are: Abdul-Khaleed Muhammad of Ulan, Rampura in Dhaka, Sharful Alam of Madhubagh, Dhaka, Mashfiq M Hassan of Banani, Md Abdur Razzak of Zahurul Huq Hall, Dhaka University and Manataz Khanam of Azampur, Uttara, Dhaka.

As many as 12,592 entries reached The Daily Star office by the April 23 deadline, of which 2,997 are found to be all-correct.



Chief of Army Staff Lt. Gen M Noor Uddin Khan receiving Indian Chief of Army Staff Gen Bipin Chandra Joshi, who arrived on a six-day goodwill visit, at the Zia International Airport yesterday. — ISPR photo

Indian army chief Gen Joshi in city

Indian Chief of Army Staff Gen Bipin Chandra Joshi arrived in Dhaka yesterday on a six-day goodwill visit to Bangladesh, reports UNB.

Joshi is accompanied by his wife Manjula Joshi and a five-member delegation.

Chief of Army Staff Lt General Muhammad Noor Uddin Khan, Begum Sophia Khan and other senior army officers received the distinguished guests at the airport.

Indian High Commissioner in Bangladesh K Raghunath and other officials of the mission were present.

General Joshi later visited the army headquarters and called on General Noor Uddin Khan there. They discussed matters of mutual interest.

On arrival at the Dhaka Cantonment, the Indian army chief placed a floral wreath at the Shikha Anirban (the eternal flame) paying homage to the members of the Bangladesh Armed Forces martyred during the War of Liberation in 1971.

2nd batch returns from Rwanda

The second batch of the Bangladesh Armed Forces personnel from Rwanda arrives here last night while another batch is awaiting airlift in Kenyan capital of Nairobi, reports UNB.

Meanwhile, all members of the Bangladesh military contingent in Rwanda reached Nairobi following the UN Security Council decision to withdraw the peace-keeping forces from Rwanda.

The first batch returned home on April 20 last.

GF blames govt for making JS ineffective

By Staff Correspondent

Central leaders of the Gano Forum yesterday said the political situation of the country has become complicated and embarrassing at the failure of the government in making Parliament effective and keeping the Election Commission neutral.

At a presidium meeting of the Forum chaired by acting chairman Advocate Zahurul Islam, the leaders also criticised the role of the opposition in strengthening the parliamentary democracy.

The meeting was addressed by Maj Gen (Retd) Khalilur Rahman, Matur Rahman, Ziaul Huq, Saifuddin Ahmed Manik, Pankaj Bhattacharya and Shamsuddoha MP.

BTV news to be aired thru' cable TV, MMDS

A high level meeting yesterday decided, in principle, to take necessary steps to broadcast eight o'clock and 10 o'clock news of Bangladesh Television through all cable TV network and Multi-Media Distribution System (MMDS), reports BSS.

Presided over by Information Minister Nazmul Huda, the meeting, held to regularise the functioning cable TV network, underlined the need for organising the MMDS and cable TV network so that they could be represented by a body.

The meeting also decided to bring MMDS and cable TV network under registration system.