

DHAKA THURSDAY, JULY 30, 1998

2nd SAARC trade fair from Sept 8 in Colombo

The second SAARC trade fair will be held in Colombo from September 8 to 15, a press release of FBCCI said in Dhaka yesterday, reports BSS.

Sri Lankan President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga is expected to inaugurate the eight-day fair, organised by the Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Sri Lanka in association with the Sri Lankan Ministry of Internal and International Commerce and Food coinciding the silver jubilee of Sri Lankan independence.

More than 150 foreign exhibitors and over 200 local exhibitors, who are expected to take part in the fair, will attract a large number of visitors from SAARC countries and from other parts of the world.

SAARC groups Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Some of the products and services will be exhibited at the fair include apparel and textiles, handloom including house furnishing and silk products, tea, spices and essential oils, rubber and rubber products, milk and milk products, fresh fruits and vegetables, poultry and meat products, processed foods and beverages, medical herbs, floriculture, gems and jewelry, footwear and leather products, gift and home products, ceramic, handicrafts and barks, soft toys, wooden products, furniture, computers and computer services, electrical and light engineering products, printing and packaging materials chamber and trade associations.

The main objective of the fair is to project image of SAARC member countries through the full range of their respective economic activities to develop economic cooperation and to promote intra-regional trade, investment and tourism among them the press release said, adding that this is a platform for regional investment, joint ventures and technology transfer.

Each SAARC member country will have a separate pavilion in the fair.

DCCI course on effective selling skill ends

Star Business Report

A 5-day training course on 'effective selling skill' ended at DCCI training centre in the city recently.

Organised by the Human Resource Development Programme of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the objective of the course was to provide functional knowledge of selling skill to the participants. The DCCI President, R Maksud Khan, distributed certificates among the 31 participants who attended the course from different private enterprises.

At the certificate awarding ceremony, amongst others, M H Rahman, Coordinating Director, Human Resource & Training (HRT) Standing Committee, DCCI, Khandker A Salam, Director, DCCI, Mamunur Rahman, Convenor HRT Standing Committee, DCCI, Md Emdadul Haque, Project Manager, DCCI, Hasanur Rahman Chowdhury, Deputy Secretary (Training), DCCI and Shahjada Basunia, Deputy Secretary (Training) DCCI were present.

Malaysian oil giant promises to buy up govt bonds

KUALA LUMPUR, July 29: Malaysia's biggest oil and gas company said Wednesday it would be willing to buy up to 20 billion ringgit (4.9 billion dollars) worth of government bonds to aid the country's struggling economy, says AP.

The proceeds from the bonds would be used to inject capital into Malaysia's cash-strapped banks, said Azizan Zainul Abidin, chairman of the government-controlled Petrolim Nasional Ltd, or Petronas.

If the nation wants liquidity, we will assist in providing liquidity, Azizan told reporters. However, he stressed that Petronas would not be using its vast reserves to bail out individuals.

Petronas monopolizes the nation's oil industry. With about 30 billion ringgit 7.3 billion dollars in reserves, it is considered a major player in the government's bid to rejuvenate Malaysia's stalled economy.

Independent market observers, such as Moody's Investors Service, have forecast that the economy will contract as much as 5 per cent this year. Due to falling global oil prices, Azizan added that Petronas will keep oil production at current levels. "There have been suggestions that we should produce more," he said, but added that if Petronas produces more petroleum at a time when the market is weak, the company will get less income.

Roundtable on automated financial services

Lack of career path keeps computer professionals away from banks

Star Business Report

A senior central bank official has said a 'career path' for the computer programmers could attract bright young professionals and improve services of the banks by accelerating the automation process.

"Due to lack of able manpower, automation and networking among the branches of banks in Bangladesh is being delayed compared to the time taken by other countries," Deputy Governor Dr Mohammad Sohrab Uddin yesterday said.

Most countries have already introduced computerised systems in their banking sector. "But in Bangladesh the scenario is quite the opposite," he said. The central bank official said that a person working in the IT department of a bank should have the opportunity to be promoted to higher levels. "People who took up such profession in the commercial banks in the 1960s could hardly be found as holding the post of a general manager prior to his retirement."

"If they are not given opportunity, then professional people will not come and the situation will not improve," Sohrab Uddin told a round table on Status of Banking Technology in Bangladesh: Problems and Prospects organised by the Bangladesh Institute of Bank Management (BIBM).

He spoke of proper regulatory framework and creating awareness among senior bankers. "The government should act fast as we have already missed the bus and have no time to lose."

He also suggested a committee to formulate rules or guidelines for electronic fund trans-

fers, on-line banking facilities etc. The situation could improve by training the bank officials and arranging scholarships to them.

He said the bank officials were also technology shy. "To get some information from branches of a bank one has to wait for days whereas in countries with automated banking system its done in seconds with few key strokes."

He said the weak services of BTB was also hindering the growth of automated banking services.

Under the current system, said Professor Jamilur Reza Chowdhury of BUET, it takes a long time to transmit or receive information. He said BTB was

expected to improve its services shortly. The professor said he once prepared a draft for telecommunication policy in which he suggested to make BTB a corporation, then change it into a company and sell shares in the market.

He said most of the users are not satisfied with the dial-up and leased line services. "VSAT or radio lines are now being used in a very limited way and are also very expensive."

Dr Ananya Raihan, a faculty member of BIBM, in his keynote paper said all private banks and most of the nationalised commercial banks have partially computerised their systems. "But Network system

between the central bank and commercial banks has not been developed. In most of the local banks, personal computers are used on stand alone basis.

"The governmental regulatory framework should be technology neutral, because emerging technology will outstrip regulations as fast as they are put in place. As electronic payment systems are still emerging, it would be hard to develop a policy that is both timely and effective," he said.

The other key speakers were Aziz Ahmed, deputy managing director of Pubali Bank, Zamsheudduzaman, deputy general manager of Bangladesh Bank and Taher Uddin, ex-MD of City Bank.



Dr Sohrab Uddin, Deputy Governor of Bangladesh Bank (3rd from left), Dr Muinul Islam, Director General of BIBM (4th from left), Dr Sujit Saha, Director (Training-5th from left), Dr Ananya Raihan, Faculty Member (6th from left), and Muhammad Mahboob Ali are seen at the roundtable organised by BIBM as a part of the workshop on Information Technology and Electronic Banking Wednesday.

Bailout package for Russia cheers Lankan tea growers

By Sugeeswara Senadhira

COLOMBO, July 29: Tea producers in Sri Lanka are heaving a sigh of relief with donors agreeing on a multi-billion dollar bailout package for Russia, which is the largest market for tea from this country.

Sri Lanka expects to increase its tea production this year to 290 million kg from the 277 million kg in 1997. It now also hopes to push exports to an all time high of 275-278 million kg. In 1997 Sri Lanka was the biggest tea exporter in the world, sending out 268 million kg - most of it to Russia.

According to tea brokers

market, Russia".

Further strain on the Russian economy could have resulted in consumers there being compelled to switch to less expensive teas from nations other than Sri Lanka, he said. Russian consumers have shown a taste for low grown teas from Sri Lanka which now make up more than half the crop produced by this country.

Nations in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) too have shown a preference for Sri Lankan tea. They bought nearly 55 million kg last year - 30 per cent of Sri Lanka's tea export.

Ceylon Tea Board (CTB) officials claimed CIS countries have also bought another 20 to 30 million kg of Lankan tea as indirect imports through other countries. The indirect tea exports to CIS went through Turkey, Dubai and Iran because of their proximity to and long-established trading ties with the CIS. CTB Director Hasitha de Alwis said.

Turkey, Sri Lanka's tea's second largest buyer, purchased 34 million kg last year, at least 15 to 20 million kg of which is said to have been for the CIS markets. A good part of tea purchased by the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which is Sri Lanka's third largest tea buyer, was also earmarked for CIS countries.

De Alwis said with the recent privatisation of tea estates, productivity has improved.

- India Abroad News Service

Asian crisis to top US-Australia talk agenda

CANBERRA, July 29: The Asian economic crisis and the recent nuclear tests by India and Pakistan are expected to dominate top-level diplomatic and defense talks this week between the United States and Australia, senior Australian officials said Wednesday, reports AP.

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright is scheduled to arrive in Sydney late Wednesday to attend the latest round of Australia-United States Ministerial (AUSMIN) talks. US Defence Secretary William Cohen is already in Sydney.

They will meet Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer and Defence Minister Ian McLachlan on Friday aboard the Australian warship HMAS Watson. Senior military officials will also attend the talks, which are the most senior regular talks between the two countries and are held annually.

Australian officials said this year's talks will take place against a very different regional environment to those of last year.

The Asian economic crisis and the nuclear testing by India and Pakistan bring a very changed situation to our discussions," said a senior Australian diplomat, on condition of anonymity.

"We'll be meeting against some fairly major dramatic events that have taken place that would affect... the security and the economic stability of the region."

2 train services to be leased out to private sector

Commercial activities of the passenger trains Karnafully Express running between Dhaka and Chittagong and Balaka Express running between Dhaka and Mymensingh will be leased out to the private sector soon, a Bangladesh Railway press release said yesterday, reports BSS.

This was disclosed at the 13th meeting of Bangladesh Railway Authority (BRA) held in the Rail Bhavan conference room.

Communications Minister Anwar Hossain presided over the meeting, which was attended by Communication Secretary Syed Rezaul Haq, Finance Secretary Dr Akbar Ali Khan, Director General, Bangladesh Railway Atiqul Hossain Khan and senior officials concerned.

The tenders of associating the private sector in commercial activities of the two trains have been finalised and necessary contracts will be executed soon.

The commercial activities include selling and checking of tickets, providing passenger comforts and ensuring cleanliness of the coaches.

A similar contract has been executed with a private company on Tuesday for operating commercial activities of Padmarag Express which runs between Santahar and Lalmonirhat, the meeting was informed.

Commercial activities of the Dhaka-Narayanganj section was leased out on July 7 last year and BR earned Tk 66 lakh during the last one year as against Tk 35 lakh before the lease.

The communications minister expressed his satisfaction at the programmes taken up by the railway management in order to increase BR's efficiency and operate its business on more commercial basis.

Commerce minister seeks more UK investment

British High Commissioner to Bangladesh David C Walker called on Commerce and Industries Minister Tofael Ahmed at his office here yesterday, reports BSS.

During the meeting, they discussed matters relating to mutual interest particularly various ways and means for increasing trade and investment between the two countries.

The minister requested the high commissioner to use his good offices to motivate the British entrepreneurs for more investment in Bangladesh.

Later, Dutch Ambassador to Bangladesh Dick C B Den Hoes called on the minister and discussed different issues giving special emphasis on bilateral economic relations. They also discussed the possibility of floating projects for strengthening mutual trade link.

Minister calls for maintaining standard grading of shrimp

KHULNA, July 29: State Minister for Fisheries and Livestock Satish Chandra Roy stressed the need for maintaining standard grading of shrimp to further expand overseas shrimp export market, reports UNB.

He was speaking as chief guest at the national seminar on "Shrimp cultivation: Its management, environment and maintenance of export standard" held yesterday at the Paikgachhi Saline Water Shrimp Research Institute auditorium in Khulna in observance of Fisheries Week-98 being observed all over the country.

Presided over by the Director General of Fisheries Directorate Liaquat Ali, the seminar was addressed, among others, by Advocate Shaikh Nurul Huq, MP.

The State Minister said the cultivation and production of fish can hardly be over emphasised in alleviating poverty and generating employment opportunities to the common people besides meeting their demand for consumption.

He said the present government has taken up appropriate measures for development of fish cultivation in the country and increase export of shrimp to overseas markets.

Shaikh Nurul Huq, said the development of fisheries sector would go a long way to improve the economic condition of the people. He said the Prime Minister has called upon the people to motivate the people and the concerned quarters to adopt modern method in cultivating shrimp.

Another report says: A discussion meeting was held yesterday on shrimp culture at the Alispur College premises under Rupsha thana, Khulna in connection with the observance of Fisheries Week-98.

Presided over by the acting president of the college Sudhangshu Kumar Debnath, the meeting was addressed, among others, by Deputy Commissioner, Khulna, Iftekar Ahmed as chief guest, district fisheries officer Rezaul Karim, Mohammad Shahjahan Munshi, Nur-Islam and Nur Mohammad Sikder.

GM, union reach accord to end strike

FLINT, Michigan, July 29: General Motors Corp. reached a tentative agreement with its biggest union to end an almost two-month battle that virtually shut down GM's North American production and cost the No. 1 automaker 2.2 billion dollars, reports AP.

"I know it's been a hardship on our membership, this strike, and a hardship on the community as well," UAW president Stephen Yokich said Tuesday. "I hope in the near future, the UAW and GM can sit down and find a better way of doing things."

GM lead negotiator Gerald Knechtel, the company's vice president of personnel, said the automaker wants to build a more constructive relationship with the union.

Perhaps most significant was an agreement to improve relations between GM and its biggest union by instituting a process for frequent high-level talks aimed at resolving disputes without strikes.

"I think we can look with promise to the future, having settled some very difficult disputes after a period that I think all of us feel has been too long," he said.

A dispute at two brake plants in Dayton, Ohio, was the last obstacle to the comprehensive settlement that was reached. Officials said some issues still remained to be resolved at Dayton, but they agreed on a "framework" to do that.

The union said GM agreed not to sell the Delphi Flint East parts plant and the two brake plants in Dayton before January 2000. In exchange, the union promised not to strike those plants.

Confronting air pollution in Asia's cities

World Bank offers a management tool to control air pollution

WASHINGTON, July 28: Two decades of unparalleled growth, swelling urban populations, and often unchecked emissions from automobiles, factories, domestic heating, cooking, and refuse burning have made Asia's megacities prone to air pollution, with health and economic costs estimated in the hundreds of millions of dollars. A new World Bank report, Urban Air Quality Management Strategy in Asia: Guidebook, lays out a strategy to combat this pollution and its harmful effects.

Although the adverse health effects of air pollution have been known for several decades, recent analysis of these impacts in the Bank's report and in other studies reveal the magnitude of the cost to society.

According to the report, thousands of people die prematurely each year from air pollution in each of Asia's most polluted cities. In Jakarta, Bangkok, and Manila, where transport is a major cause of air pollution, the social costs from exposure to air-borne dust and lead were close to 10 per cent of average urban incomes in the early 1990s. In many Chinese cities, where reliance on coal is heavy, air quality is so poor that the costs of pollution-related sickness and death are even higher.

The guidebook provides tools to compare costs of pollution control with the benefits of cleaner air," said Richard Ackermann, the World Bank's Environment Sector Manager for South Asia. "In Asian cities, economic development and environmental degradation need no longer go hand in hand. Environmental risks can be kept

from escalating."

This message was clearly heard during recent World Bank-sponsored conferences in India and Bangladesh. In both Delhi and Dhaka, strong endorsements were given to phasing out of leaded gasoline and polluting two-stroke engine vehicles along with stricter enforcement of standards for diesel vehicles and other gross polluters. In addition, Asian cities more generally are giving serious consideration to higher taxes on private vehicles, broad support to public transit, and the creation of new apex bodies to coordinate air pollution management across sectors.

Local authorities, city planners, and engineers, will be able to use the guidebook to develop action plans that would be an integral part of the air quality management system for their metropolitan regions. In addition, national and local laws, and their rigorous enforcement, are needed to implement solutions.

Four city-specific Urban Air Quality Management Strategy (URBAIR) studies - Mumbai (Bombay), India; Manila, Philippines; Jakarta, Indonesia; and Kathmandu, Nepal - are also available as part of this series. Local institutions may use the city-specific reports in conjunction with the guidebook to formulate policy decisions and to begin their own investment strategies.

"Strategies to control pollution from industries, domestic sources, and refuse burning include setting feasible targets, developing cost-effective regulations, improving compliance, and educating people about the implications of back-

yard burning, poor vehicle maintenance, and general air pollution linkages to health," said Jitendra Shah, URBAIR Task Manager.

The guidebook details the steps involved in an air quality management system and provides details on air quality modeling, choices of abatement measures, and how cost-benefit analysis is used to choose appropriate measures. According to the guidebook, the components of an action plan are:

- Assessment. Assessing air quality, environmental damage, and abatement options provides input to the cost-benefit or cost-effectiveness analysis.

- Action. Abatement activities include improving fuel quality and traffic management; institutional strengthening, enforcing pollution standards, and promoting compliance via persuasive and economic instruments; and public awareness and environmental education.

- Monitoring and evaluation (oversight). A thorough and ongoing monitoring system keeps authorities and the public informed about the short- and long-term changes in quality and assesses the results of abatement.

Legislative actions and new regulations have highlighted the sense of urgency posed by the air pollution problem in Asian cities. Private businesses are increasingly willing to invest in cleaner technologies. Vehicle manufacturers, oil companies, and distributors are working with governments to develop policies to minimize clean-up costs. Building strong political commit-

ment and translating action plans into viable projects and programmes are the focus of the next stage of the URBAIR initiative.

"In the absence of integrated abatement strategies, increased air pollution will pose an even greater threat to the health and well-being of Asia's urban populations, eventually under-cutting the prospect for further economic growth. Dynamic partnerships among government, industry, and the public will be crucial in making air quality management a part of urban development plans across Asia," said Kristalina Georgieva, the World Bank's Environment Sector Manager for East Asia.

HISTORY OF URBAIR

Recognizing the growing severity of air pollution caused by industrial expansion, rapid urbanization, and increasing vehicle population, the World Bank, through the Metropolitan Environmental Improvement Program (MEIP), started URBAIR in 1992. The first phase of URBAIR covered five cities - Mumbai (Bombay), India; Jakarta, Indonesia; Kathmandu, Nepal; Metro Manila, Philippines; and Colombo, Sri Lanka. The URBAIR studies are based on readily available data and reports along with input from workshops and missions conducted in 1993-94 by local consultants and experts from the Norwegian Institute for Air Research (NILU) and the Netherlands' Institute for Environmental Studies (IES). This effort resulted in this action plan for air pollution abatement.

- Source: World Bank release.