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Pakistan offers 150,000 MT of IRR-6 rice to Bangladesh

ISLAMABAD, Oct 28: Pakistan has offered 150,000 tonnes of IRR-6 rice to Bangladesh in place of par boiled rice, an official of the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) said here yesterday, report APB.

Bangladesh expressed interest in buying par boiled IRR-6 rice from Pakistan in bulk, but as this kind of rice is not available in the country the government had offered IRR-6, said the official.

People of Bangladesh mostly eat par boiled IRR-6 rice and the country tried to obtain this variety of rice from India, but this was not available there too. As such, the Pakistani officials of the EPB, TCP and Commerce Ministry have advised Bangladesh to buy IRR-6 rice from here in place of par boiled variety of IRR-6.

Heavy rains followed by floods in Bangladesh have devastated paddy crop massively. As a result Bangladesh is looking for rice from Pakistan and India to meet its requirement.

Steps to ensure adequate supply of fertiliser undertaken

The government has taken steps to ensure adequate supply of fertiliser in the current rabi and coming IRR-6 seasons, reports UNB.

This was disclosed at a meeting of the Advisory Committee on Fertiliser Distribution held with committee Chairman AM Anisuzzaman presiding.

Food and Agriculture Minister Begum Matia Chowdhury and Commerce and Industries Minister Tofail Ahmed attended the meeting.

The meeting reviewed the production, supply, stock and distribution of urea, TSP, DAP and NPK fertilisers and informed that stocks in different parts of the country were satisfactory.

The committee directed the concerned agencies to ensure supply of fertilisers as per demand in different parts of the country during the current rabi and coming IRR-6 seasons.

Committee member Mohammad Rahmat Ali MP, Agriculture Secretary Dr AMM Shawkat Ali, Industries Secretary KM Faezul Haq, BICIC Chairman M Anwarul Haq, BADC Chairman MA Wadud, DG of the Agriculture Extension Department M Enamul Haq, President in-charge of BFA Kofluddin and other concerned officials were present.

SIBL opens 9th branch at Bogra

The ninth branch of Social Investment Bank Limited (SIBL) was inaugurated at Bogra on October 25 by its founder Chairman, Prof Dr M A Mannan, says a press release.

Prof Dr M A Mannan, Member, Public Service Commission, and Chairman, Shariah Board of SIBL and Prof Dr M A Hamid, Ex-Vice Chancellor of Islamic University attended the ceremony as guests of honour.

Prof Dr M A Mannan emphasised that conventional banking system has deprived the general mass people and favoured the richer section of the society to the neglect of the poor. But SIBL is committed to reverse this trend.

The deposit mobilised from a particular area by a branch of SIBL will be invested in that area as far as possible, he said.

MIDAS-GTZ training of trainers begins October 31

Star Business Report

Micro Industries Development Assistance and Services (MIDAS) in collaboration with GTZ (German Technical Cooperation) is going to organise a 4-week Training of Trainers (TOT) Programme under their joint project - Promotion of the Private Sector: Training and supporting micro and cottage industry entrepreneurs, says a press release issued Tuesday.

The training programme, which is scheduled to begin on October 31 and continue till November 3, will be designed on CEFE (Competency-based Economics through Formation of Entrepreneurs, a GTZ-developed model).

CEFE is an innovative and comprehensive business training programme for potential entrepreneurs in the field of micro, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) development to promote private sector economy.

The essence of the upcoming CEFE TOT is to develop a cadre of potential CEFE trainers drawn from selected enterprises and to support institutions of both public and private sectors including banks and NGOs.

Sayed Alamgir Farouk Chowdhury, Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, will inaugurate the programme as the chief guest. The programme will be conducted by an international team of highly-qualified professional trainers in the conference room of BRAC.

Target tumbles during July-Aug Exporters for urgent removal of policy shackles

Apparently unhappy with the recent export performance, business leaders yesterday suggested ways to revamp the external trade now reeling under stiff competition from cheaper producers, reports APB.

In a meeting of the Export Promotion Council, they said some actions should be taken to remove the infrastructure and policy-related obstacles that are limiting their ability to perform.

Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed, who chaired the meeting at a city hotel, assured effective measures to remove the hurdles and asked everyone to work unitedly for the sake of export.

"We have a bright prospect of raising the earnings from exports. What we need is your active cooperation and help," he told the representatives of different chambers and trade associations.

The 30th meeting of the Council was held against the backdrop of recent poor performance by the export sector amid prolonged flooding and severe competition that stemmed from the financial turmoil in Asia.

According to figures released by the Export Promotion Bureau, the country's export grew by a meagre 2.43 per cent in July-August period, but failed to achieve the target fixed for the two months.

During the first two months of the current fiscal year, export earnings stood at US\$ 944.28 million down by \$22.39 million from the targeted \$966.67 million.

The striking feature was that the export volume during the two months declined by 0.95 per cent compared to the corresponding period of last fiscal year, official data showed.

Export of primary commodities nose-dived 42.10 per cent, but industrial products performed slightly better with 4.15 per cent growth in export volume during the two months.

Meanwhile AP adds: Tea, garment and handicrafts performed better followed by knitwear and engineering products.

EPB vice chairman Anwarul Bar Chowdhury said only six major items account for 91 per cent of the total export earnings, another six items bring 5 per cent and the rest 118 export items altogether fetch only 4 per cent.

Among them, garment sector alone contributes 73 per cent to the total export income, he added.

He drew exporters' attention to less-attractive agro-processing sectors, raw jute and chemical products.

Commerce Secretary Sayed Alamgir Farouk Chowdhury emphasised diversification of export goods and expansion of export market as the country's export depends on a few items.

Government's subsidy and devaluation will not help the export sector survive in future, he warned.

He, however, hoped that if backward linkages are set up, garment sector will be able to face competition in the quota-free regime beyond 2005.

Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) president R Maksud Khan said the export earnings should be totally tax-free to encourage ex-

ports.

Some 37 proposals, out of a 171-point set placed with EPB by the trade bodies, deal with complexities regarding bank loans, he said, urging simplification of banking systems and ensuring access to bank loans.

He suggested formation of export councils to promote export of specific items for diversifying the export base.

BGMEA president Mostafa Golam Quddus said increase of productivity alone will not help the garment sector survive unless it gets adequate incentives from the government. He showed a booklet of incentives and facilities given by Indian government to their exporters.

Quddus strongly pleaded for one-day weekly holiday to help exporters keep abreast of the international banking transactions.

Political consensus, removal of all sorts of bureaucratic

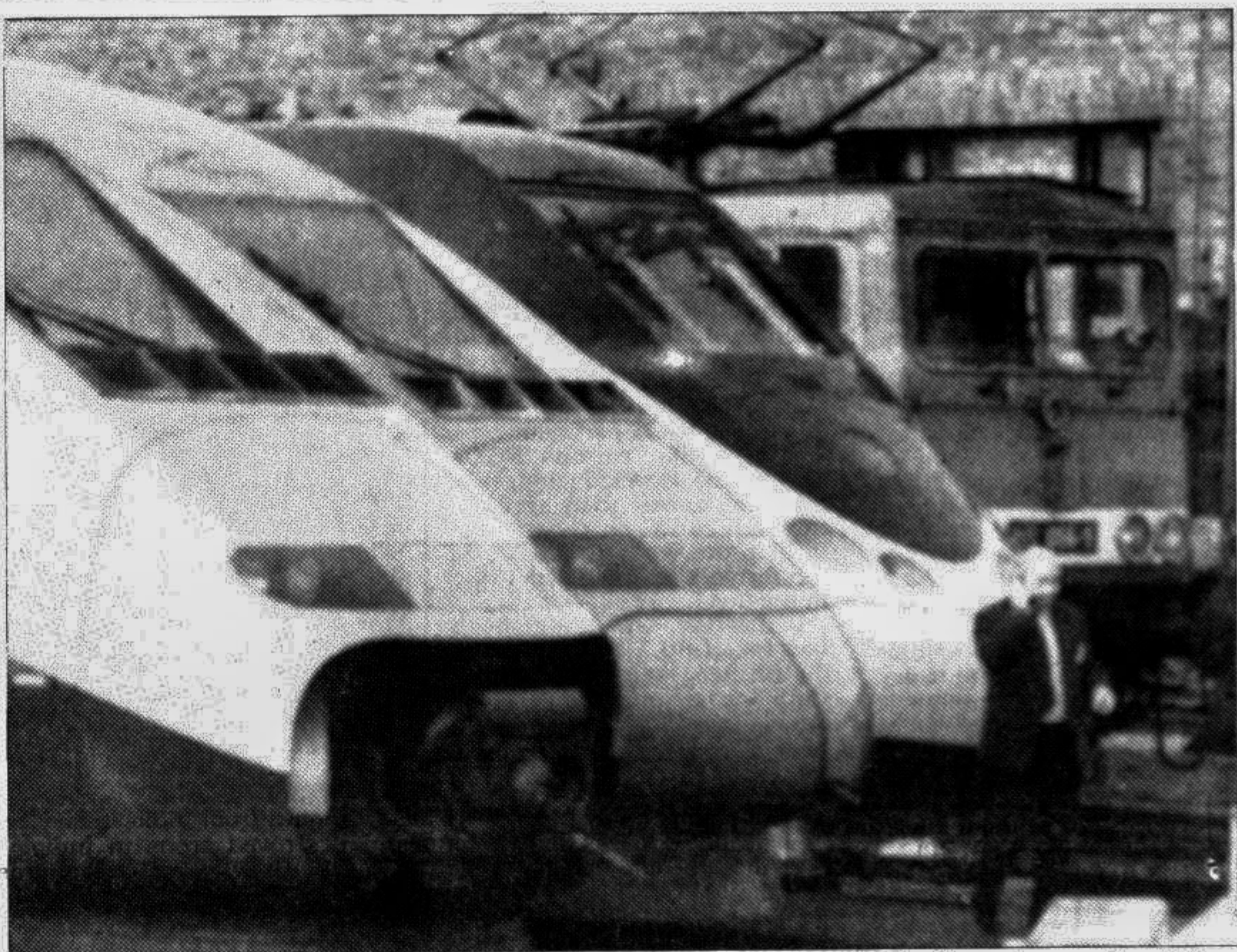
shackles and adequate legislative protection will allure foreign investors to set up backward linkages for the ready-made garment sector, BGMEA president said.

Quddus suggested a "supreme command council" be formed giving full authority to BOI chief or any other person to ensure 'one-stop-service' in real sense to the foreign investors.

He said the "apparel board," much needed by the business people and approved by the Commerce Ministry, is awaiting the Finance Ministry decision.

Golam Mostafa, who represented Bangladesh Frozen Food Association, said a separate Shrimp Board announced by the previous prime minister was not yet implemented.

Political parties should compensate for the business loss caused by political hartals.



An old train (background) passes European high-speed trains, parked on the tracks of the "Eurailspeed 98/InnoTrans" fair in Berlin, Tuesday. Some 404 exhibitors from 21 countries will present until October 30, their latest in railway technology. The first two trains (from left) in the picture are French TGVs and the third is the Italian ETR-500. — AP/UNB photo

Petrobangla pinpoints weak areas of PSC monitoring

By Sharier Khan

Petrobangla has identified several broad weak areas of Production Sharing Contracts (PSCs) which need to be strengthened to increase the country's profits in oil deals with foreign companies.

These weak areas include lack of proper financial assessment of the PSCs, quality control of exploration equipment and materials, and ability to ensure environmental safety in exploration.

To improve on these weaknesses, Petrobangla has already floated a tender to hire foreign consultants to advise its Petroleum Concessions Division (PCD), a wing to monitor PSCs.

As per the Terms Of Reference (TOR) of the tender, Petrobangla wants to assess the current PSC management to identify improvements required within PCD.

The TOR says the consultant will help PCD in establishing systems for technical review, monitoring, and control of the PSCs.

It would also advise on sound financial control mechanisms including auditing of the PSC and on quality control of exploration equipment and materials.

The consultant would also run a programme on job training to develop managerial and staff skill to

operate and maintain the PSC. To ensure compliance with PSC provisions by explorers, the consultant would also advise on ways of adopting appropriate measure in case of violation of any contractual obligation.

Petrobangla identified that there should be a number of technical experts involved in these performance improvement programmes.

These technical experts should include process engineer, plant design specialist, drilling engineer, petroleum engineer, geo-science experts like geologist, geophysicist, geochemist, and financial experts experienced in budget control and financial administration.

Petrobangla experts that if it finds efficient consultants to assist the PCD, the current and future oil and gas explorations would be managed cost-effectively.

Petrobangla has detected that the PSC operators tended to inflate cost, over-spend, and "transfer price payments having technical and financial tricks etc."

Petrobangla has undertaken other programmes including fresh recruitment at administration and expert levels to improve the PSC monitoring performance.

Dhaka demands total debt relief for LDCs

Bangladesh demanded total cancellation of the outstanding debts of the poor countries and stood in favour of African countries' much-needed international support for their economic development, reports UNB.

Ambassador Anwarul Karim Chowdhury, Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the UN, voiced the demand while participating in the United Nations General Assembly on the New Agenda for Development of Africa in the 1990s on Tuesday, said a message received here yesterday.

Ambassador Chowdhury, in his speech, said that Africa had been making real efforts for economic development. However, its efforts were not being matched by international support, as a result, Africa suffered setback in its economic development.

He said that negative efforts of obligation and liberalisation were taking heavy tolls of African economy as a consequence of which poor countries of that continent were being marginalised.

Africa despite its manifold problems had a large inherent potential — both material and human — for growth and development.

Proshika gets Tk 25cr loan from PKSF

Palli Karmo Sahayak Foundation (PKSF) has extended an additional loan of Taka 25 crore to Proshika, country's leading NGO, for implementation of its post-flood micro-credit programmes.

Proshika's programme include disbursement of Tk 463 crore among the organised marginal and poor farmers who were badly hit by the devastating floods. Earlier, Tk 60 crore was provided by PKSF to Proshika for the purpose.

Proshika's president Dr Qazi Faruque Ahmed received the cheque for Tk 25 crore from PKSF Managing Director Dr Salehuddin Ahmed at a simple ceremony at its office on October 25.

Thailand to draw more funds from IMF

BANGKOK, Oct 28: Thailand will draw more funds from the IMF-brokered bailout package, according to Deputy Prime Minister Supachal Panichpakdi, reports Xinhua.

Although the economy had improved, foreign reserves had increased and the current account was showing a surplus, a request would be made after talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) next month reviewing Thailand's progress on economic reforms.

Supachal was quoted Tuesday by the Bangkok Post as saying, "The stronger baht and higher share prices in recent weeks could indicate stronger fundamentals for the Thai economy, he said."

More loans from the 17.2 billion US dollar bailout package would be timely as interest rates were low and the repayment period long.

"The restoration of investor confidence and stabilising the baht are still the utmost priorities," he said.

The package was aimed at helping the long-term stability of the baht, he said. The baht's strengthening in recent weeks was short-term, caused mainly by the weakness of the dollar.

Investors should be cautious about share price rises as they were not firmly based, he said.

"It is still too early to say the Thai economy is picking up. We will be able to confirm whether we are turning around in next year. However, the rise in share prices, more or less, has improved the sentiment of stock investors," Supachal said.

Reception accorded to Janata Ins chief advisor

Janata Insurance Company Ltd accorded a reception to Zafar Ahmed Chowdhury, Chief Adviser of the company, at Priyanka Community Centre in the city Tuesday, said a press release.

Aziz Al-Kaiser, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the company, presided over the programme. Zafar Ahmed Chowdhury, Chief Adviser, Md. Jahangir Alam Khan, Adviser, Abdul Gaffar Chowdhury, former director, M A Hashem, Adviser, Md. Maqbul Husain, Managing Director, former ministers Zahiruddin Khan and Sk. Shahidul Islam and others were present.

Japanese vehicle exports fall by 3.3 pc

TOKYO, Oct 28: Reflecting weak demand in neighbouring Asian nations, Japanese exports of cars, trucks and buses slid 3.3 per cent in September for a fifth consecutive month of declines, an industry group said Wednesday, reports AP.

A total of 421,339 vehicles were exported last month, the Japan Automobile Manufacturers Association said.

Passenger car shipments in September fell 0.1 per cent compared to the previous month to 338,925 vehicles, while truck exports dropped 14.5 per cent to 78,253 and bus exports skidded 16.7 per cent to 4,161, the association said.

Shipments to the US, the largest single market for Japanese vehicles, rose 3.8 per cent to 120,957. But exports to Asia plunged 50.1 per cent to 28,459 vehicles, it said. European exports climbed 2.8 per cent to 89,502.

Among leading manufacturers, Toyota Motor Corp. shipments overseas in September fell 2.2 per cent on the month to 129,892 vehicles and Honda Motor Co. exports slipped 11.8 per cent to 47,948. Mitsubishi Motors Corp. shipments abroad fell 34.7 per cent to 41,368. Nissan Motor Co. bucked the trend, exporting 13.5 per cent more vehicles in September than the previous month for a total of 69,899.

Economists, bankers plead for NCB reforms, BB autonomy

Top economists and bank officials of the country yesterday pleaded for the reforms of commercial banks immediately and said, as a part of it the central bank has to be given absolute intervening power making the post of its governor a constitutional one, reports BSS.

Speaking at a seminar on "re-structuring of commercial banks in Bangladesh" the speakers laid emphasis on recapitalising the commercial banks and gradual cut of inefficient staff at nationalised commercial banks through 'golden handshake'.

They suggested that the management board of the NCBs be made 'fully autonomous' and appointment of managing director or general manager be done by Bangladesh Bank.

Organised by Bangladesh Institute of Bank Management (BIBM) at Mirpur here, the seminar was addressed by Professor Wahiduddin Mahmud, Chairman, Banking Reform Committee, Dr Atiur Rahman, senior research fellow, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), Kazi Abdul Mazid, Managing Director, Prime Bank Limited, Alauddin A. Majid, former managing director of BASIC and Prof Baqui Khalily, Department of Banking and Finance, University of Dhaka.

Prof Muzaffar Ahmad of Institute of Business Administration (IBA), University of Dhaka, presided over the seminar while Dr Toufic A Chowdhury and Abdul Jalil Chowdhury presented the keynote papers.

Dr Toufic A Chowdhury said the restructuring of commercial banks in Bangladesh is a must. He said the first bank restructuring measure was taken in 1982 with denationalising two commercial banks and allowing a number of new private

commercial banks to operate in the country.

The present government has made a six-member reform committee to recommend bringing discipline in the banking sector. He suggested three-pillar effective legal system, good management and a strong and effective central bank for the banking sector's development in the country. He also suggested autonomy for Bangladesh Bank.

Chowdhury called for recapitalising of the commercial banks and said the insolvency of the most NCB's would not be resolved only by injecting new capital and carving out of bad loans.

"Improvement of the quality of loan portfolio, the professional skills of officers as well as congenial atmosphere should also be ensured in this regard", he added.

Islamic Trade Fair Dhaka receives \$57,500 spot orders

Bangladesh has received a spot order of US \$57,500 to export melamine and jade goods at the 7th Islamic Trade Fair in the Lebanese city of Tripoli, reports UNB.

The week-long fair, sponsored by the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), concluded in the Lebanese city on October 18, said an export Promotion Bureau press release yesterday.

Two Bangladeshi companies — Messers Uttaran Enterprise and Sharif Melamine Industries — took part in the fair with handicrafts and melamine products respectively.

AC Soubra and Co Ltd of Beirut has signed a contract for purchasing melamine tableware worth US\$ 50,000 while another Lebanese company signed contract for importing jute hammock and floor mat worth US\$ 7,500.

Lebanese President Elias Hrawi inaugurated the fair and visited the Bangladesh stalls.

Public Relations

The business of bridging gaps

By Ashraf Kaiser

tributors etc. PR concerns any organisation, commercial or non-commercial. It exists whether we like it or not. If you look at international institutions or business houses or service providers, there is no one without PR activity. Weather it's done by internal PR department or external consultants. It may be done in a casual fashion or with lots of efforts.

But in Bangladesh, the concept of PR is still in a foggy state. What is public relations? I asked one of my journalist friends. His short and strait answer was -- "Shattered bridge between media and companies where PROs of different offices are fighting tight to maintain the regular traffic of news vehicles. We see lot of these people at press club or at our office where they come to distribute press release. They are the official microphone of the companies." Since, my brother looks after public relations for a financial institution, I asked my mother what does her son do? She told -- "He is always doing the good for his office. It's good that for him we get a few complementary newspapers every day." This is the understanding of PR in Bangladesh! Now look at Philippines, where PR as a profession has got certain foothold. I heard the story of Cosette F. Romero, managing director of Ogilvy & Mather Public Relations. On her own version -- "I have been in PR for a long time now, but my biggest frustration is still that my mother doesn't fully understand what the business is all about. When some body asked 'What does your daughter do?' Oh, she is in public relations." And what is that? You know, advertising. Over time she has become a little more accurate. Now when asked what I do, she will reply: 'Public relations...you know, press releases.'

I am sure if I ask the same question to every other person on the streets of Dhaka I might get the similar or worst answers. Because, to the general public it's a foggy business and invisible activity. The people, who are in-touch with this profession, they also sometimes become confused when it comes to the day to day activity. It's because PR is a sophisticated and classified communication

medium. In our universities, PR is not even part of the curriculum of mass communication department as it is in west. As far as strategy driven professional PR practice and practitioners are concerned, we are not familiar with those here. And it seems more misunderstood than practically any other business. But it's changing very fast.

Some people relate PR with advertising and propaganda. Public relations is neither 'free advertising' nor 'new shape of propaganda'. Both advertising and propaganda, is prejudiced in favour of its topic: good PR in the other hand, should be factual, unbiased and free of self-praise. Advertising, promotion or propaganda may not be used by an organisation, but every organisation is involved in PR. For example, a fire brigade does not advertise for fires or even advertise its services, but it does have relations with many publics.

It's sometimes said that PR is a new concept. But it's not true. Public relations is as old as civilisation. Mankind has always tried to communicate

and make itself understood. Some origins of modern PR has grown in the end of last century. The first PR consultancy firm was set up by a journalist, Ivy Ledbetter Lee in the beginning of this century. In a later stage he became advisor to oil tycoon John D. Rockefeller.

If I talk about the bottom line of independent PR consultants in particular, it's a trendy, stylish, competitive, prestigious billion dollar business in the world. All cash-rich communication giants WPP group, Omnicom and Interpublic are seriously into PR services for the clients along with their advertising, direct marketing, event management and health care activity. The WPP group, being owner of world's top advertising agencies J Walter Thomson, Ogilvy & Mather and Hill & Knowlton PR consultants, largest communication giant in the world, experienced a decline of 2.7% in its advertising revenue in the first nine months of 1997 while over the same period PR rose to 11.5% and consultancy service 10.9%. Because of high competition and less earning from advertising

industry, most of the agencies are depending on PR wing for their future expansion and financial growth. World's no-1 advertising agency McCann-Ericsson last year bought UK based Weber PR for reinforcing its one stop communication services. After Europe and America all communication conglomerates are looking at Asia-Pacific region for their future growth of PR business.

Our neighbouring countries, China, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and even in Nepal, PR consultancy as business has reached in a grown up stage in last couple of years. In Bangladesh, leading advertising agencies are also just going to start PR consultancy in a professional manner along with some independent consultants although it took almost one century to reach this consultancy concept in Bangladesh. I believe this market is ready for all sorts of PR business and the rest of the progress is dependent on the approach of the concerned professionals. But the problem would be finding PR personnel with adequate skills and experience. Truth is, good stuff are not born, they are trained. If we can ensure proper training, the business of PR consultancy would emerge as a stronger one in coming days.

The writer works as a media professional and works at PR firm.