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UNCTAD-ICC workshop ends

A two-day workshop on 'UNCTAD-ICC project on investment guide and capacity building for Bangladesh' ended in the city on Wednesday, says a press release.

The workshop was organised jointly by United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) Bangladesh and the Board of Investment (BOI).

Representatives from the public and private sectors participated in the workshop.

A six-member team of consultants and experts from UNCTAD also attended the inaugural session.

The workshop is the first step towards preparing an investment guide, an UNCTAD-ICC Project to help the LDCs attract foreign direct investment. It may be mentioned here that UNCTAD and ICC are also preparing similar guides for five African countries.

The workshop was inaugurated by Commerce and Industries Minister Tofail Ahmed on November 2 and also addressed by President of ICC Bangladesh Mahbubur Rahman, Executive Chairman of the BOI, M. Mokammel Haque, Acting Resident Representative of UNDP in Dhaka, Andre Klap, and UNCTAD Project Manager Vishwas P Govitrikar.

Sound atmosphere for attracting investment stressed

CHITTAGONG, Nov 4: Leader of the visiting 14-member German-Asia-Pacific Business Association Peter Clausen said here yesterday that Bangladesh would have to create a sound and congenial atmosphere in order to attract foreign investment, says BSS.

Clausen was exchanging views with the members of the Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry at the Chamber House.

He pointed out that the cost of entrepreneurship had increased in Bangladesh on account of irregular power supply, lack of infrastructural facilities and bureaucratic complicacies.

With the availability of cheap labour, other necessary facilities should also be extended to the foreign investors, he said adding, that as a least developed country, Bangladesh would have to move ahead with a competitive attitude signatory to the World Trade Organisation and multi-fibre agreements.

CCCI President Kamal Uddin Ahmed explained in detail the facilities and incentives available for foreign investors in Bangladesh.

S'pore financial sector ready for Y2K

SINGAPORE, Nov 4: Singapore's financial sector is prepared for the new year and expects to function normally during the crossover into the new millennium, the Monetary Authority of Singapore said Monday, reports AP.

"The public can feel assured that they need not take any special measures in preparation for the new year," Tharman Shanmugaratnam, MAS deputy managing director and chairman of the Financial Sector Y2K Steering Committee, said in a statement.

At the end of October, more than 99 per cent of the 638 banks and financial institutions in Singapore had provided written assurances to the MAS that they were Y2K ready, the MAS said.

The assurances covered all internal testing of systems, external testing with third parties, control measures, risk management mechanisms and contingency plans.

Contingency plans include a liquidity measure to provide funds to banks facing cash shortages; reducing the volume of electronic transactions; and declaring Dec. 31 a bank holiday to ensure year-end backup processing activities are completed.

'Russia to resume gold exports next year'

MOSCOW, Nov 4: Russia's central bank will resume gold exports next year after it had to stop them in April following the imposition of a five per cent export tariff on precious metals, a central bank official said yesterday, reports Reuters.

"These funds (to pay the export tariff) have been included in our budget for next year, so we will export gold", Larisa Selyutina, the head of the bank's precious metals market methodology department, told a precious metals conference.

But she would not say how much gold the bank was planning to export, adding only that under favourable market conditions it would be able to export several dozens of tonnes.

Russia set a five per cent tariff on precious metals from April 28 for six months, then extended it indefinitely from October 28.

Bangladesh for Canadian investment in 11 sectors

TORONTO, Nov 4: Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad has invited the Canadian entrepreneurs to join Bangladesh as partners in its progress at least in 11 sectors, reports BSS.

The sectors are: power, oil, gas and mineral exploration, agro-based industries, textiles, leather, telecommunications, computer software and software application, data entry and data processing.

Highway development including bridges, express ways and tunnels, port infrastructure development, transport facilities, water treatment, distribution, sanitation, solid waste management and industrial development are the other attractive sectors where the foreign entrepreneurs can invest, said the minister.

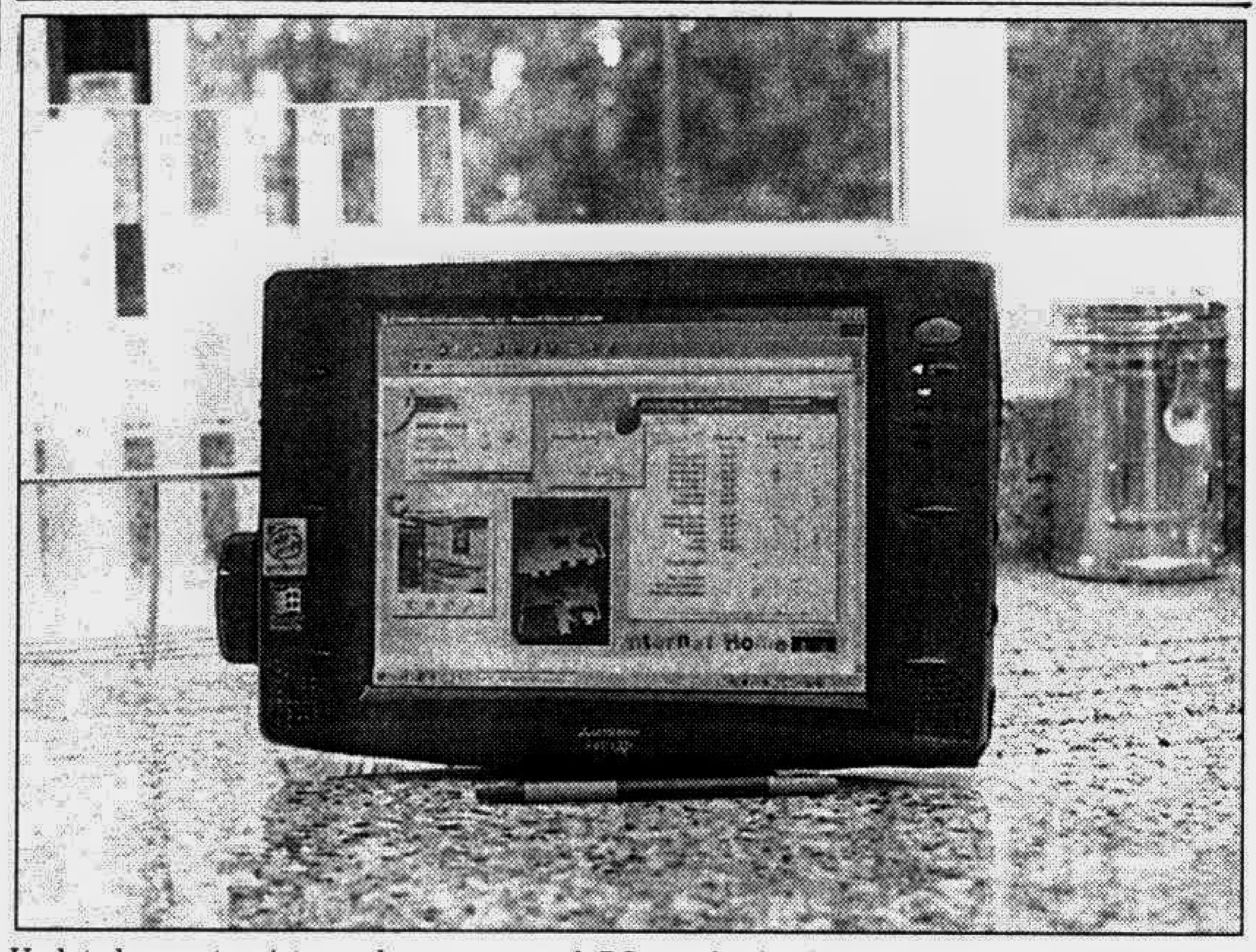
Referring to various measures taken by the present government, Samad Azad assured that foreign investment in Bangladesh would be highly profitable as the country provides cheap and hardworking labour force. With its strategic geographical location, Bangladesh can be the gateway to a market of south, Southeast and Central Asia, he added.

The foreign minister was presenting a key-note paper at a meeting of leading Canadian businessmen, entrepreneurs and corporate leaders, organised by Bangladesh Business Forum here yesterday.

The minister said Bangladesh is poised to be one of the great success stories in the region sooner or later.

Many of the participants at the forum expressed their interest for investment in Bangladesh.

Later in the afternoon, the foreign minister attended a reception accorded by the Bangladeshi citizens living in Toronto at Laxmi Restaurant where he urged the Bangladesh community to uphold the image of the country and extend support to the development pursuits in Bangladesh. The expatriates assured the minister that they would invest in Bangladesh.



Undated recents picture shows a control PC on the kitchen counter in the newly-built GBP 500,00 (USD 800,000) suburban family house which is Europe's first "Internet house" because it was constructed in Watford north of London with the latest built-in internet technology to control most functions of the home. The house, built by a partnership of the technology company Cisco and the home building company Laing Homes, has systems to control such things as heating and lighting by PCs in the house or by remote-access computers. — AFP photo

Foreigners buy Lankan shares hoping for change in govt

COLOMBO, Nov 4: Foreign investors have been buying Sri Lankan shares because fierce fighting in the island's troubled north could spell trouble for the government and help bring to power the more market-friendly opposition, says Reuters.

But if the violence continued in the long term, investors might be frightened away, brokers said.

Provisional figures showed the Colombo all share index CSE ended Thursday 0.60 per cent or 3.22 points higher at 536.54 points in trade dominated by foreigners.

Some brokers said foreign-led buying was triggered by the heavy military losses which could hurt President Chandrika Kumaratunga's bid to win re-election on December 21.

Her main rival is the leader of the main opposition United National Party (UNP), Ranil Wickremesinghe, who is considered more market-friendly.

"The market is reacting well for what is bad for the government," said Thurshan Wickremesinghe of W.I. Carr/Asia Securities.

"We are getting a surplus of foreign buy orders after the debacle. Two weeks ago our foreign sell orders were in excess," he said.

Other brokers agreed. "The UNP is somewhat favoured by the investor community, so there seems to be buying when there is blood on the streets," said Harsha Fernando of Jardine Fleming HNB Securities.

Brokers said some local investors, who usually discounted the war, were on the sidelines and watching for sustained foreign buying.

"Local investors are waiting for the foreign cue. They will jump in if foreign buying continues," Fernando said.

Other brokers said they were concerned about the long term.

"There has been no buying withdrawn due to the escalation in violence. The war has been discounted even on previous occasions of large attacks," said Aslam Ahamed of NDBS Stock Brokers.

OPEC scores high marks for cuts

Oil ends stronger

LONDON, Nov 4: Oil prices resumed upward progress yesterday as signs emerged that export cartel OPEC had kept up tight compliance with supply curbs through October.

International benchmark Brent in London for December delivery closed 48 cents higher at $22.56 a barrel, near the middle of a four dollar price range over the past five weeks.

Prices have been bouncing around this area since an early October slump from three year highs at $24.30 as speculative funds took profits from an eight month bull run.

Recent fears that OPEC might be starting to slacken compliance with the deep output cuts that have firmed prices this year were allayed by a new report showing compliance still as high as 85 per cent in October.

Preliminary indications from shipping and industry data showed adherence with the pledged 4.3 million bpd of cuts had slipped only slightly from a revised 90 per cent in September, Geneva's Petrologistics told clients on Wednesday.

Traders looking for other new clues to market direction found few pointers from a mixed set of overnight figures from the American Petroleum Institute (API) — a key indicator of trends in the world's biggest consumer.

US crude oil inventories posted a third successive monthly rise but the gain was less than traders expected, while gasoline stocks fell sharply, the API said.

Moore urges members to ensure social policies with free trade

GENEVA, Nov 4: World Trade Organisation (WTO) chief Mike Moore urged the body's 134 member states yesterday to ensure social policies went hand in hand with freer trade to ensure that ordinary people did not suffer from reform, reports Reuters.

At the same time, he told the WTO's ruling General Council that the time was ripe — as the world recovered from the effects of the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis — to launch a new round of trade liberalisation talks.

Trade, the former New Zealand labour prime minister said, "is good for the consumer, and, like the tide, it can raise all boats.

"But there are adjustment costs and there are those who perceive inequities in globalisation," he added in a reference to the growing integration of national economies of which the 134-member WTO is a driving force.

"Clearly, appropriate social policies need to accompany liberalisation; it is part of the accountability of governments to their people. In this manner, we all benefit," he declared.

Diplomats said his remarks brought some criticism from developing countries which felt he was implicitly backing calls from the United States and the European Union for talks on whether labour conditions can be incorporated into WTO open trading rules.

But officials of the body denied that this was the case.

"The director-general is not trying to set the agenda," one said. "He was simply making the point that to ensure everyone benefits from liberalisation it is important that countries bring in policies that help those who initially lose out."

These would include schemes such as retraining programmes for people who lost their jobs, the official added.

The labour issue is a hot topic among delegations to the WTO, which is bogged down in efforts to agree on a declaration that would effectively set out the agenda for a fresh round of global trade talks starting next year.

The declaration is to be issued by ministers from all member countries, and endorsed by others from the some 30 states including China and Russia that are bidding to get in, at a meeting in Seattle early next month.

Developing countries are resisting any suggestion of talks on the labour issue, saying the richer powers want this to provide an excuse for protecting their goods, and their workers' and farmers' jobs, from cheaper imports.

US and European-based worker bodies, alongside radical anti-free trade groups are planning major demonstrations in Seattle in support of the trade-and-labour link.

Moore, who came to politics through the labour movement, told the council the "generally sound" state of the world economy provided "a remarkable example of the value and strength of our open and rules-based multilateral trading system."

In the wake of Asia's financial turmoil, he said, "the good sense of government and WTO rules kept markets open, providing a critical base for recovery.

"Seldom have the gains from trade been so evident," he declared. It should be possible in Seattle to build on these achievements "to further strengthen our system, particularly to ensure that its benefits accrue to all."

Pakistani fruit show begins Nov 10 in city

A two-day show of Pakistani apples and dates begins at Hotel Sonargaon on November 10 with the intention of popularising the products and improving business contacts, says UNB.

Jointly organised by Export Promotion Bureau of Pakistan and Pakistan High Commission in Dhaka, the two-day show will display all varieties of apples grown in Balochistan and Northern areas of Pakistan. It will also display all commercial varieties of dates of Pakistan.

A 15-member delegation of exporters and growers of fresh and dried fruits from Pakistan will be present at the show to meet Bangladeshi importers, said a High Commission press release.

TFTP, Midas move to help export technology to Ghana

Technology For The People (TFTP) a Swiss-based NGO, in collaboration with its Bangladesh representative, MIDAS, is about to launch a project under which Bangladeshi enterprises will be able to transfer their technological and managerial know-how to Ghanaian partner firms on commercial terms, says a press release.

The project is supported by the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the World Bank's private sector affiliate, through its African Project Development Facility (APDF).

This new initiative serves to give practical substance and meaning to the UN concept of economic cooperation among developing countries, of which Bangladesh has been a consistent champion.

As a first step towards implementing the project, TFTP is bringing Ghanaian business executives to Dhaka on November 5 to negotiate a joint venture or other types of cooperation arrangements.

The Ghanaian firms are interested in Bangladeshi food-processing technology, leather and artificial leather goods manufacturing, pisciculture and production of automotive and industrial batteries. The businessmen from Ghana are travelling at their own expense after having secured APDF agreement to participate in the project. An APDF representative is accompanying the Ghanaian mission. Dr David Dichter, Director and founder of TFTP, is leading the delegation to Dhaka.

TFTP has had many years' experience in the transfer of technologies among small and medium enterprises.

S'pore Internet forex trade may render thousands redundant

SINGAPORE, Nov 4: Thousands of currency dealers in Singapore could be made redundant as foreign banks prepare to move into Internet foreign exchange trading, Singapore's Business Times reported today, says AFP.

The big foreign exchange trading houses have already frozen their headcounts as electronic commerce through the Web will need less manpower and lead to depressed margins, the report said.

Singapore is the world's fourth largest foreign exchange trading centre with more than 100 billion US dollars worth of currencies bought and sold in the city state everyday.

Bankers told the Business Times that foreign exchange trading would undergo profound changes because of electronic commerce, with the impact to be felt as early as the second quarter of next year.

Major players like UBS, Citibank and JP Morgan were already committing huge resources into figuring out how electronic commerce will revolutionise their business.

Cheah Wai Hong, CEMS exhibition director, speaks at a press conference on Igatex Bangladesh '99 at Sheraton Hotel yesterday. —Star photo

Int'l RMG machinery show begins Nov 11

Star Business Report

The first-ever Bangladesh International Garment and Textile Machinery, Accessories and Fabrics Exhibition (Igatex) will begin in the city on November 11.

Organised by the Conference and Exhibition Management Services (CEMS) Pte Ltd, a Singapore-based company, the three-day exposition at the Winter Garden of Sheraton Hotel will be participated by a total of 76 companies from 18 countries including 16 local firms.

"Our main objective is to provide Bangladeshi garment and textile manufacturers with a one-stop sourcing and information centre within the country for state-of-the-art technologies and products," said Cheah Wai Hong, CEMS exhibition director, at a press conference at Sheraton Hotel yesterday.

"We strongly feel that the exhibition is a very timely one as it will enable garment manufacturers in the country to upgrade their production capabilities so as to ready themselves to compete in the global market," he stated.

Some leading companies including Barudan, Brother, Duerkopp Adler, Kansai Special, Lectro Systems, Naomoto, Pegasus, Sunstar and ZSK will take part in Igatex Bangladesh '99 where products like CAD-CAM systems, cutting machinery, industrial sewing machines, pressing equipment, washing machines and embroidery tools will be put on display.

Commerce and Industries Minister Tofail Ahmed is expected to inaugurate the event.

Responding to a question, Hond said that about half of the participating companies were already engaged either in machinery or fabrics business with Bangladesh.

Chief Executive Officer of CEMS, Bangladesh, Meherun N. Islam also attended the press conference.

Kuwait backs pan-Islamic bank plan

JEDDAH, Saudi Arabia, Nov 4: Kuwait's finance minister on Wednesday told a meeting of the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) in Saudi Arabia that he backed a plan to establish a partly private pan-Islamic bank, reports AFP.

"The proposal presented to IDB's governors to create an independent financial body with a capital of a billion dollars, the Islamic Institute for the Development of the Private Sector, is very important," Sheikh Ahmed al-Abdullah al-Sabah said.

He said he was "confident that this project will be approved by all member countries" of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the parent body of the IDB.

The minister was speaking during a meeting of the IDB council of governors at the bank's headquarters in the Red Sea port of Jeddah.

Nasdaq index scores first close over 3000

NEW YORK, Nov 4: US stocks and bonds closed firmer yesterday, with the Nasdaq composite index ending above 3,000 for the first time amid a rally in the semiconductor and wireless sectors, reports Reuters.