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The Daily Star BUSINESS

DHAKA, MONDAY, JULY 10, 2000

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Germany seeks IT specialists

Germany will employ some 10,000 foreign IT specialists initially under a new rule to overcome shortage of such professionals in the growing German information technology industry, reports UNB.

"If necessary, the number may be increased to 20,000 at a later stage," said a German embassy announcement yesterday.

New regulations in this regard will come into force on August 1 in Germany to grant foreign Information Technology (IT) specialists access to its job market.

Applications are invited from IT specialists from all countries outside the European Union (EU). There are no quotas for any particular country.

The necessary qualification is a university or polytechnic college degree — Bachelor or Masters in any IT-related field.

IT-specialists without such a degree can only work in Germany if the employer agrees in writing to pay an annual salary of DM 100,000 roughly equivalent to US dollar 50,000 or more before taxes and deductions.

Detailed information is available in an English-language brochure, which can be downloaded from the German Federal Labour Ministry's homepage www.bma.de. The free programme Acrobat reader is required to read the downloaded file.

FICCI steps into 37th year

The Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) steps into the 37th year of its existence this month, says a press release.

This was disclosed by the President of the Chamber, Wali Bhuiyan while making a presentation at a reception organised by the Chamber recently at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel.

FICCI was established in Chittagong on July 1 in 1963 under the name of Agrabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry with the initiative of the foreign companies located in and around the city.

After independence of Bangladesh, members of the Chamber felt the necessity of changing its name and shifting the office to Dhaka and accordingly, the Chamber assumed its present name and shifted its office to Dhaka in 1987.

The objectives of the Chamber are to actively participate in the growth of the country's industrial and commercial base, make continuous contributions to the economic prosperity, operate as good corporate body, promote set and maintain highest international standards in the quality of products, services and conduct, introduce latest innovative technologies for the benefit of the country, develop the country's managerial skills, work for an active and transparent economic environment, work with the government as partners in progress, and promote and protect the business interests of its members.

Japan plans 41pc NTT fee cut to resolve row

TOKYO, July 9: Japan will propose cutting connection rates charged by telecoms giant NTT to 41 per cent by the end of 2002 to try to resolve a dispute with Washington ahead of the Group of Eight (G8) summit, Kyodo news agency reported, says Reuters.

Quoting unspecified Japanese government sources, Kyodo said Japan would propose that Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corp (NTT) cut the rates it charges rivals to link to its local lines by 22.5 per cent by the end of 2001 and by 41.1 per cent by the end of 2002.

But a spokesman at the Posts and Telecommunications Ministry said: "I have never heard of such proposals. There has been no change in our official position. But it is true that we really want to settle our negotiations with the United States."

Kyodo said Japan plans to make the proposal when officials from Japan and the United States open talks in Tokyo on July 10 to try to clinch a deal ahead of the July 21-23 G8 summit.

Washington has demanded the rates be slashed immediately by 41 per cent while Tokyo has offered a 22.5 per cent cut over four years. Unofficially, both sides have floated compromise proposals but the failed to bridge the gap at talks in March.

The Japanese government sources were quoted as saying that Japan would allow NTT to enter new services by easing a law limiting the scope of NTT's business operations in exchange for a huge fee cut.

The United States has threatened to file a complaint with the World Trade Organisation (WTO) by the end of July if Tokyo refuses to cut the fees, which Washington says bolster NTT's iron grip on the country's second-largest telecoms market.

Shizuka Kamei, policy chief of Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), called on Wednesday for a review of laws governing NTT, adding that the telecoms giant must speedily cut its access charges to global levels.

First Bangladeshi dot.com job portal launched

Star Business Report

The first Bangladeshi job-related portal, www.jobssbd.com, was formally launched yesterday.

"Both the job seekers and employers will find the website useful as it offers them the scope to fill up e-forms and register their qualifications with the site. The employers can check out the curriculum vitae floated on the net and pick desired candidates," said Md Sabur Khan, Managing Director of Daffodil Computers Ltd., at a press conference held at National Press Club yesterday.

"We are losing much of the world job market due to lack of proper guidance and experience. We are also not availing our-

selves of the H1B visas to tap employment opportunities in the US though there is a great demand for qualified IT professionals there," he stated.

President of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industries (DCCI) Aftab ul Islam, President of Bangladesh Computer Society (BCS) AH Kafi and former General Secretary of BCS Ahmed Hassan were present at the website launching ceremony.

The www.jobssbd.com site will cater to the needs of three categories of people — IT professionals, non-IT professionals and fresh job-hunters.

"Fresh graduates with no

prior job track-records will apply in the fresh category. The applicants may submit their CVs through e-mail, post or web-logging," Sabur said.

On the other hand, the employers can find candidates after their demand through [jobssbd.com](http://www.jobssbd.com) by becoming a chartered member of the website through filling up a membership form, the MD said.

Besides, [jobssbd.com](http://www.jobssbd.com) will offer other job-related services. International-standard CV writing, professional job consultancy, job-oriented training information, H1B visa assistance, immigration help and enrollment assistance will also

be available on this very website, Sabur mentioned.

"A person will get information on how to prepare a CV of international standard, how to become more presentable for better jobs, what kind of experiences and qualifications are required for different jobs, which companies offer H1B visa, who are qualified for it and how to get it, etc."

The company will not charge any fee for providing services to the job-seekers, but will charge a commission from their employers, he added. Khan said the company will also hold a seven-day IT job fair at IDB Bhaban in the city from tomorrow.

IT sector taking off following govt support, pvt sector role

Tofail says at Insoft-Microsoft jt venture launching

Industries Minister Tofail Ahmed yesterday said the country's information technology (IT) sector is taking off following policy support of the government and participation of private sector, reports BSS.

The government has implemented all recommendations of the IT experts including Copyright Bill 2000, that was passed in the parliament yesterday to encourage investment in the sector, he said at the launching seminar of Microsoft@OEM Products at Hotel Sonargaon.

Referring to the appointment of local Insoft Systems Limited, as the product retailer of Microsoft he said the passage of the Copyright Bill 2000 would secure investment in IT sector. Insoft-Microsoft joint venture would play an important role in IT development of the country, he hoped.

The minister said the government has created Taka 100 crore equity funds in the current budget for boosting agro-based industries and IT-related enterprises. The government is IT-friendly he added.

Referring to the various measures including tax-free import of computer and accessories, easy installation of V-SAT and agreement on submarine optic fibre connection, the minister said the private sector should come forward for more

IT investment to export software for earning billions of dollars like India.

Addressing the seminar as special guest, Science and Technology Minister Major General (Retd) Nooruddin Khan said the government is going to set up IT park on 47 acres of land at Mahakhali and High-

Tech Park on 265 acres at Kaliakoir to promote the sector.

The minister said Tk 5 crore has been allotted for providing loans in software industry development. The private sector should come forward in a bigger way to exploit the huge software market in USA, Europe and Japan, he added.



Md Salauddin Gazi, Deputy Managing Director of United Commercial Bank Ltd, addresses as chief guest the inaugural session of a course on "Credit Management" at the UCBL Training Institute yesterday. AHM Nurul Islam Choudhuri, Principal of the Institute, is also seen.

—UCBL photo

Ctg Customs misses Tk 300cr as revenue earning

Administrative inertia, rampant smuggling

CHITTAGONG, July 9: Chittagong Customs House, the main revenue earning body, lost about Tk 300 crore in revenue income in the last fiscal year due mainly to administrative inactivity and rampant smuggling, reports UNB.

Concerned sources said revenue earning fell short of the target even after it was down-sized before the end of the fiscal. The Customs House fixed the revenue earning target at Tk 7,800 crore at the beginning of the fiscal year, which was revised downwards at Tk 6,384 crore considering its low collection rate.

But the total collection at the end of the year stood at Tk 6,082 crore including Tk 3,063.99 crore from tax and Tk 2,066.65 crore from VAT.

The source said the earning is Tk 1,718 crore less than the original estimate and over Tk 300 crore less than that of the previous fiscal year.

In 1998-99 fiscal year, the earning was Tk 6,415 crore.

An official source said that large-scale smuggling was mainly responsible for the decline in the revenue earning from authorised imports.

Meanwhile, about 1100 writ cases challenging the tax-levy

have been pending with the High Court, which is discouraging revenue collection drive of the tax officials.

Go-slow tactics and work abdications adopted by the officials following a tussle between an official and the City Corporation Mayor last year, and probe on alleged corruption of over 50 customs officials by the National Board of Revenue put dampers on the collection drive.

The officials said if the situation persists this year, the highest revenue earner in the customs department would again fail to achieve the target.

Foundation course for City Bank officers begins

The foundation course for Probationary Officers of The City Bank Limited was inaugurated by Mohammad Faiz, Managing Director of the bank yesterday, says a press release.

Badruddin Ahmed, Course Director, AHM Nazim Quadir, Executive Vice-President (Administration and Training) also spoke on the occasion.

Mohammad Faiz urged the trainees to implement the lessons in their practical life. Satya Gopal Podder and Nurul Akbar Khan, Executive Vice-Presidents of the bank, were present on the occasion. Syed Aminul Islam, Assistant Vice-President of the bank's Training Institute, conducted the opening ceremony of the course.

1 lakh apartments to be constructed in & around city

More than 100,000 apartments would be constructed in and around Dhaka city to house one lakh families of different income groups, Parliament was told yesterday, reports UNB.

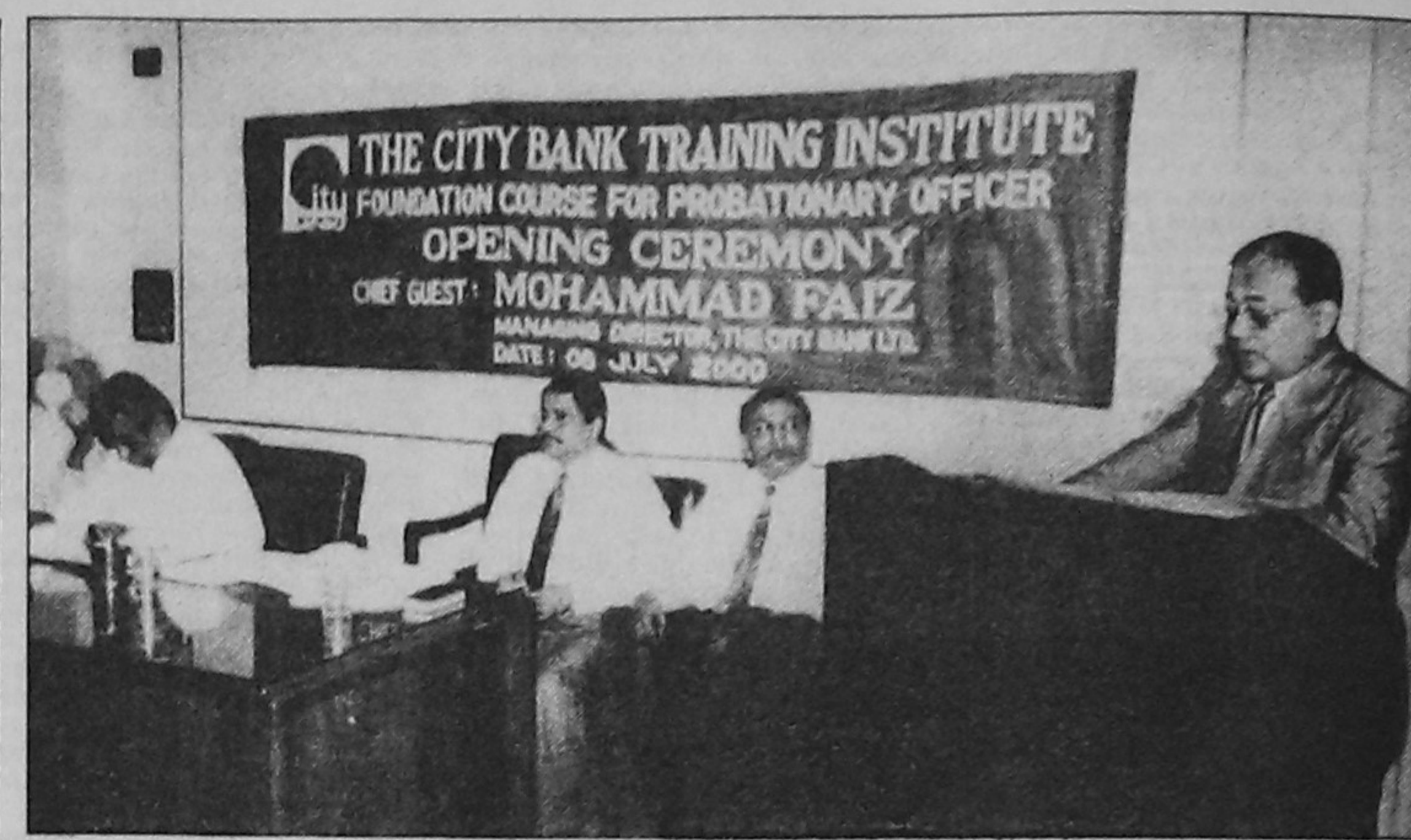
Responding to a supplementary of Golam Hossain (Jatiya Party), Housing and Works Minister Engr Mosharraf Hossain said some 40,000 apartments at Uttara, 17,800 under Jhilmil project and another 40,000 under Purbachal projects would be built to meet the housing problems.

In reply to Kamal Ahmed Majumdar (Awami League-Dhaka), he said there are 3,426 abandoned houses at Mirpur in Dhaka. Of them, 1011 were sold out and 128 allotted to freedom fighters or families of martyrs. The minister admitted that many abandoned houses at Mirpur were illegally occupied through forged documents and corruption in collaboration with government officials and employees in the past.

He assured the House that the present government is taking specific actions so that the abandoned houses do not remain under illegal occupation of fake owners.

Replying to another supplementary, Engr Mosharraf said necessary steps were taken so that families of freedom fighters did not suffer or ousted from their allotted houses.

He said the remaining abandoned houses could be allotted among the freedom fighters' families on priority basis on receipt of applications.



Mohammad Faiz, Managing Director of The City Bank Limited, delivers the inaugural speech at the foundation course for Probationary Officers of the bank yesterday. Executive Vice-Presidents of the bank Satya Gopal Podder and Nurul Akbar Khan, Course Director Badruddin Ahmed and Principal of the bank's Training Institute Syed Aminul Islam are also seen in the picture.

—City Bank photo

Export earnings post 8pc growth in 11 months

Star Business Report

The country's export earnings recorded an around eight per cent growth during the first 11 months of last fiscal year, fetching US\$ 5136.71 million against a target of \$ 5259.83 million.

The earning however is 2.34 per cent short of the July-May target of last fiscal year. May proved to be a better month for the country with goods worth \$542.14 million exported which was around \$64 million higher than the average monthly target of \$478.17 million, according to the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB).

Although the export earning is 7.87 per cent higher than the corresponding period of the previous fiscal year, it may still remain marginally lower than the target at the end of the year," said an EPB official.

The export volume increased by 7.54 per cent during the first 11 months of FY2000 while the price index rose by 0.33 per cent, he stated.

Although the export volume of primary products shot up by 11.87 per cent, the price index for this very segment fell by 5.67 per cent. However, both the export volume and price index of the industrial products recorded positive growths of 7.15 per cent and 0.87 per cent respectively.

Export of knitwear, frozen foods, leather and raw jute surpassed their targets marginally, while some other major items including readymade garments (RMG), jute goods, tea, handicrafts and chemical products faltered in reaching their respective targets.

RMG exports fetched \$2758.67 million, which is 2.92 per cent short of the \$2841.67 million target. This is however 3.97 per cent higher than the corresponding period of 1998-99 fiscal.

Knitwear worth \$1131.06 million, up by 2.82 per cent from the target, were exported. This was also 20.87 per cent increase from that of previous fiscal year.

Frozen foods did pretty well in fetching the country \$290.64 million, which surpassed the target by 7.12 per cent and up by 18.18 per cent from previous fiscal's corresponding period.

Jute goods worth US\$ 246.18 million were exported against the \$284.17 million target. This is 13.37 per cent less than the target and down by 10.61 per cent from 1998-99 fiscal's corresponding period.

Leather worth \$172.89 million was exported during the

period, which is 4.78 per cent up from the target and 14.13 per cent higher than 1998-99 fiscal's same period.

Raw jute valued at \$66.55 million was exported during the period against the target of \$66 million. This is 0.83 per cent up from the target and eight per cent higher than the previous fiscal's corresponding period.

Tea export from the country during the July-May period nosedived with 12.04 million kg worth \$17.08 million exported against the target of \$36.67 million. This is a huge 53.42 per cent fall from the target and 55.11 per cent less than previous year's same period.

The price of tea in the international market dipped by 16.96 per cent during the period while Bangladesh's export volume declined by 45.89 per cent.

Export earnings from handicrafts amounted to \$4.77 million against the \$9.17 million target. This also shows a big 47.98 per cent decline from the target and 17.33 per cent slump from the corresponding period of FY 99.

During the period under review, chemical products worth \$83.42 million were exported against the target of \$88 million, showing a 5.20 per cent from the target.

Parliament passes Copyright Bill

The Parliament yesterday passed the Copyright Bill, 2000 to protect the rights of intellectual properties and help flourish creative works, reports UNB.

State Minister for Sports, Youth and Cultural Affairs Obaidul Quader piloted the bill with stringent provision of punishment of different terms for violation of the copyright of individuals or organisations.

Moving the bill, the state minister said copyright rules play an important role in the development of education, culture and science and technology at the national and international levels.

The new law would help writers, artists, filmmakers,

musicians, producers, publishers and computer software companies to protect their copyrights, he said.

The bill provides for maximum punishment of four years' imprisonment and fine of Tk 200,000 in cash for violation of copyright rules.

The House adopted the bill with some amendments moved by Saranjit Sengupta.

Earlier, Finance Minister Shah AMS Kibria introduced the Bank Company (Amendment) Bill, 2000 and the Financial Institution (Amendment) Bill, 2000. Both the bills were sent to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Finance Ministry for scrutiny.

JS body finalises report on SEC (Amendment) Bill

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Finance yesterday finalised its report on Securities and Exchange Commission (Amendment) Bill 2000 to place it before the House, reports BSS.

A Parliament Secretariat press release said the report was finalised after the committee scrutinised the bill.

Held with Chairman of the committee Mohammad Ali Ashraf in the chair, the meeting was attended by members of the committee Srimiti Chitra Battacharya, AHM Mustafa Kamal and MK Anwar.

Finance Minister Shah AMS Kibria attended the meeting on special invitation.

Indian Railways on new hi-tech track to boost revenue

NEW DELHI, July 9: Hard up Indian Railways is cashing in on its biggest asset — the world's second largest rail network — by building an optical fibre backbone and even selling off trackside plots to vegetable farmers, says AFP.

"Passenger fares can't be touched so that rules out a revenue windfall. We have to come up with other innovative ideas to generate funds," said Indian Railways finance commissioner PAV Vasudevan.

The railway had its annual budget hiked 23 per cent to 110 billion rupees (2.5 billion dollars) for the fiscal year to March 2001, and the government's contribution was raised by 40 per cent to 35 billion rupees.

But Railway Minister Mamata Banerjee told parliament she would have to borrow close to 36 billion rupees more to make up for shortfalls.

To get on the right track, Banerjee recently announced ambitious plans for a 20-billion-rupee broadband telecom and multimedia network.

"Indian Railways plans to

use its right of way over 63,000 kilometers (39,060 miles) to lay optic fibre cables along railway tracks," said Vasudevan.

These high-speed lines will be leased out to Internet service providers, and businesses for the transmission of data and multimedia content.

In the first phase of the project, the four major cities of Hyderabad, Bangalore, Pune and Ahmedabad will be linked by an 8,000-kilometer (4,960 miles) optic fibre network.

The state-run railway has already laid cables across 2,000 kilometers (1,240 miles) and hopes to complete the job in 18 months.

"We are adding 150 kilometers (93 miles) of cable every month to the existing network. We are targeting the IT hubs of Bangalore, Hyderabad, Bombay and Delhi," Syed Ashfaq Amjad Zaidi, who is looking after the project, told AFP.

Zaidi said companies would pay rental fees to the railway for using the optic fibre network.

"We expect to give the rail-

ways enough money to expand the network. This year, we expect to contribute five billion rupees to the railways. Our earnings will treble with the completion of the network," Zaidi added.

He said the project would be implemented through a corporation with seed capital of 500 million rupees.

"The corporation will raise funds through an initial public offering (IPO) and loans," said Zaidi.

"We are still in the process of selecting a management consultant to develop a business plan and help us market the broadband backbone."

US business consulting firm McKinsey, accounting and consulting agency Pricewaterhouse Coopers and Arthur Anderson are among 23 consultants which have already made presentations to Indian Railways.

A somewhat less ambitious revenue-earning plan will involve leasing land alongside railway tracks to farmers to grow vegetables and fruits.

"This may be a small revenue stream but it will stop peo-

ple from squatting on a railway land," said one railway official.

"We are also planning to lease land to private builders to construct shops and commercial complexes."

The railway plans to allow private companies to grow teak and eucalyptus trees on 50-acre (20 hectare) plots on its real estate.

"If the plantation idea takes off we may earn anything in the range of five to 7.5 billion rupees from it by the end of this fiscal year," said the official.

The railway has also hired the Housing and Urban Development Corp (Hudco) to develop and market commercial complexes at its sprawling New Delhi and Calcutta railway stations.

"We own prime real estate in most towns and cities in India. We have to exploit this to get us out of the financial doldrums," said the official.

India's antiquated railway network carries 13 million people along a network linking 7,000 stations every day.

Asian currencies need to choose halfway house

Experts say on sidelines of G7

FUKUOKA, Japan, July 9: Asia's currencies should live in a halfway house between a free float and an absolute fix, regional experts said here on the sidelines of a Group of Seven meeting, reports AFP.

The best prescription is to let Asian exchange rates float around an anchor made up of a basket of major world currencies, they said, countering the official US Treasury position.

The proposal is included in a list of "policy recommendation for preventing another capital account crisis" released by the Asian Policy Forum during the G7 finance ministers' weekend meeting in Fukuoka, Japan.

The forum, which groups 17 research institutes under the ADB (Asian Development Bank) Institute, issued the report three years after the outbreak on July 2, 1997, of the Asian financial crisis.

It confirmed the need for emerging economies to prepare themselves for external shocks rather than wait for the slow process of reform of the inter-

national financial system.

"The two extreme exchange regimes are not appropriate... for Asian economies," said the report, published by the Tokyo-based ADB Institute.

Instead, it said, "emerging Asian economies with open capital accounts can adopt a managed float exchange rate policy," which would be the best way to maintain international competitiveness while avoiding sharp fluctuations in exchange rates caused by capital flows.

The financial crisis, argues the forum, was mostly due to a flight of capital equivalent to 11 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) of the affected countries.

That money had been attracted to the region by an exchange rate stability supposedly guaranteed by the more-or-less rigid pegs between regional currencies and the dollar.

That is why an "exchange rate compatible with competitiveness can be based on an appropriately trade-weighted currency basket rather than a sin-

gle currency," the forum's report said.

"The currencies in the basket should include major currencies, such as the US dollar, the yen and the euro, as well as other currencies representing major trading partners of the economy concerned," it said.

Another key recommendation in the report's package is for the creation of a regional financial arrangement (RFA) "that would provide a lender of last resort facility as well, together with the implementation of an effective surveillance system over Asian economies."

"A new structure of conditionality should also be explored, in collaboration with the IMF, that focuses specifically on problems related to the characteristics associated with capital account crises," it added.

But the plan risks getting a cool reception in Washington, which was strongly opposed the Japan's Asian Monetary Fund proposal in 1997.