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Gujrat business team visits DCCI today

A 16-member business delegation from Gujrat, India, led by Jagat Shah will visit the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) today, says UNB.

The delegation, comprising members from different lines of business, will be in a mission to find out export, import and joint venture partners in Bangladesh.

On the occasion, DCCI has organised a day-long programme at its auditorium from 11 am to 4:30 pm.

The delegation members are from international trade consultancy, training, mini oil mills, soap plant, machinery, spare parts, textile dyestuffs, pigments and chemicals, imitation jewelry, plastic pouch packing machinery, water purification plants, industrial oil and lubricants, wristwatch, sanitary ware, ceramic tiles, computer software, construction machinery etc.

IMF urges Africa to build social safety nets

WASHINGTON, Jan 20: A senior IMF official yesterday urged African nations to establish better social safety nets through investment in health and education, saying such spending was vital for sustainable long-term growth, says Reuters.

IMF Deputy Managing Director Stanley Fischer said in a speech at the France-Africa Summit in Yaounde, Cameroon, that fully embracing globalisation required moving labour to high productivity jobs from low productivity jobs.

That he said, required countries to "invest in the human capital of the poor - increasing their access to health, education and economic opportunity, as well as (providing) a cushion during the process of adjustment in the form of efficient social safety nets."

"In the past the IMF perhaps paid too little attention to this need, but I believe we have now given it the right priority in the programs we support through our poverty reduction and growth facility (loans) in partnership with the World Bank," he added.

Copies of Fischer's remarks were released in Washington. Fischer said that among the low-income countries that have received IMF support since 1985, per capita spending on both health and education has risen by more than 4 per cent annually on average. But, he added, that there were big variations by country and for much of that period gains in education spending in Africa were much smaller.

"We are doing more, and we intend to do more yet. There is still more to be done," he said. In the increasingly global economy, spending on education is especially significant, he said, given the growth in new skill-intensive technology jobs.

Fischer said that sub-Saharan Africa is less open to international trade than other developing regions and that studies have shown trade liberalization should improve the region's trade performance significantly and spur productivity and income growth.

Fischer implored industrialized nations to, "Lower the effective protection on goods of interest to sub-Saharan African countries, such as clothing, fish, processed foods, leather products, and agricultural products more generally."

IBBL managers' confce begins

A two-day branch managers' conference of Islami Bank Bangladesh Limited was inaugurated at the Conference Room of Islami Bank Tower in the city yesterday, says a press release.

Shah Abdul Hannan, Chairman of the Board of Directors, and Mohammad Younus, Chairman, Executive Committee of the bank, were present in the inaugural session as the chief guest and special guest respectively.

The function was addressed, among others, by Abdur Raquib, Executive President (Acting), and Nasiruddin Ahmed, Deputy Executive President of the bank.

Professor Mohammad Abdullah MP, Professor Mohammad Sharif Hossain, Engr. Eskandar Ali Khan, Nazir Ahmed and Fazle Azim, Directors of the bank, and Md Velayet Hossain, Mohammad Nurul Islam, M Fariduddin Ahmad, Tajul Islam, ATM Harunur-Rashid Chowdhury, Md Nurul Amin and AKM Habibur Rahman, Executive Vice-presidents, and top executives, zonal heads and branch managers were also present.

Shah Abdul Hannan, in his speech, expressed satisfaction over the progress achieved last year and urged the participants to uphold the bank's international standard.

He said the bank achieved the top position in the country in deposit, investment and profit.

Cement sector yields higher return

Average dividend pay-out declines by one per cent in 2000

By M Shamsur Rahman

Investment in the four listed cement companies - Chittagong Cement, Meghna Cement, Confidence Cement and Niloy Cement -- yielded higher rate of return for the investors last year compared with 1999.

The cement sector posted the highest 76 per cent growth which also resulted in higher dividend pay-out.

The dividend rate of Chittagong Cement rose to 50 per cent last year from 40 per cent in 1999. Confidence paid five per cent higher dividend to 30 per cent against its previous 25 per cent pay-out. Meghna Cement paid 11 per cent dividend against 10 per cent in 1999, while Niloy Cement paid dividend for the first

time last year. It paid 15 per cent to the investors.

The corporate sector as a whole also performed better last year as a total of 120 companies declared dividends against 105 in 1999.

However, their average rate of dividend pay-out declined by one per cent to 21.37 last year.

The capital market regulators strengthening of laws and monitoring system also encouraged companies to better govern their affairs, analysts pointed out.

"Introduction of two different boards by the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) and the Chittagong Stock Exchange (CSE), classifying bad and good com-

panies, also encouraged listed companies to hold regular annual general meetings (AGMs) and pay dividends," they said.

Following the introduction of two boards -- A and Z -- many companies held their pending AGMs without declaring any dividends with a view to getting promoted to group A. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) officials said.

He also said that three companies held their AGMs and were promoted to group A after the classification was enforced.

"The companies which held AGMs included many which were out of operation, but continued to remain in group A, giving wrong signals to the investors," an SEC official said.

"Now the companies which are not in operation and whose businesses are almost in the red, will be included in group Z, giving a clear indication to the investors," he said.

The top companies approving the highest dividend rates in 2000 are the First ICB Mutual Fund 125 per cent, Bata Shoe 120 per cent, Atlas Bangladesh 100 per cent, Square Pharmaceuticals 65 per cent, Singher Bangladesh 50 per cent, Chittagong Cement 50 per cent, Moino Jitex 50 per cent, Padma Oil 50 per cent, Alpha Tobacco 42.50 per cent, BAT 40 per cent and BOC Bangladesh 40 per cent.

Afghan currency hits all-time low

UN sanctions panic market players

KABUL, Jan 20: Afghanistan's currency Saturday plunged to an all-time low a day after tough UN sanctions took effect on the expiry of a deadline for the Taliban to surrender suspected terrorist Osama bin Laden, reports AFP.

One US dollar fetched around 79,000 afghanis, down from 76,000 before the imposition of the United Nations curbs, as Kabul's main Shahzada Money Market opened business, dealers said.

"The sanctions have panicked the people," said Hajj Amin Khoshti, head of the market, which acts as the country's central bank.

"People are keeping hold on their foreign currency and flooding the market with afghanis."

In the afternoon the currency recovered to 76,500 to the greenback after local traders supplied the market with around 250,000 dollars, Khoshti said.

"This helped the afghani a great deal," he added.

The fall of the local currency directly affects commodity prices as Afghanistan, in a state of war for 21 years, imports nearly all its needs, including food items.

Prices of essential commodities are beyond the reach of majority of the people in a country where a civil servant is paid only 10 dollars a month and unemployment is high.

One dollar was worth around 1,000 afghanis in 1992 when the Afghan mujahideen resistance factions toppled the pro-Moscow communist government.

The refusal of the Taliban regime, which rules 90 per cent of the country, to turn over Saudi dissident bin Laden to stand trial for alleged terrorism led to imposition of the sanc-

tions.

In November 1999 the United Nations Security Council barred the Afghan Airlines from international flights and froze the Taliban's overseas bank accounts.

It toughened the restrictions last Friday, banning foreign trips by Taliban chiefs, closing the ruling militia's overseas offices, freezing bin Laden's assets and imposing an embargo on arms supplies to the Islamist movement.

Bin Laden is wanted by the United States as the suspected mastermind behind the bombings of two American embassies in east Africa in August 1998.

Other traders feared that the local currency would keep its value decline unless the ruling Taliban interfered.

Chances for its recovery looked slim under present circumstances when the season of

dry fruits export was over and the opium-money - great backing for the local currency - had almost dried with the Taliban's total ban on poppy cultivation, they said.

The Taliban militia is battling remnants of resistance groups headed by ex-President Burhanuddin Rabbani in the northeastern rugged areas.

Rabbani, still recognized internationally as head of the country's state, prints bulk amounts of afghani in Moscow only to convert them into hard currency at the money markets in the Taliban-held areas, Khoshti said.

He said truckloads of the fresh money were then smuggled or airlifted to Kabul which pushed the local currency into its unrecovering decline.

"The opposition is playing a great role in the depreciation of the afghani value," head of the market said.

Weekly ReadyCash Prize Winners

The latest draw of the fortunate prize winners of ReadyCash was held last Thursday at Alankar Niketan at New Market in the City. L M A Hannan Azad, Managing Director of Alankar Niketan, announced the names of the lucky prizewinners.

Prizes for new cardholders	Name of Winners	Card No
Free Express		
Free Shipment	Md. Moklesur Rahman	504798000006176
Lunch for two at China Junction Restaurant	Engr. M Kamrul Islam	504798000006511
Hertz Free Rent-A-Car	Mushtaq Chowdhury	504798000006443

New ReadyCash cardholders will become eligible for prizes as soon as they apply for a card and make a transaction. The winners can collect their prizes from the Public Relations Manager of ReadyCash within 30 days of this news circulation by producing their ReadyCash card transaction vouchers. For details, one may contact at 8125294-7. ReadyCash encourages its cardholders to read The Daily Star on every Sunday for a new listing of prizewinners.



Shah Abdul Hannan, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Islami Bank Bangladesh Limited (IBBL), addresses a two-day branch managers' conference of the bank at the Conference Room of Islami Bank Tower in the city yesterday.

Commodity: Weekly Roundup

Prices of rubber, coffee go up while sugar down

LONDON, Jan 20: Oil prices moved sideways this week as the market took in its stride a decision by OPEC to cut output by 1.5 million barrels per day, more than five per cent of its total output, says AFP.

A barrel of Brent reference crude for March delivery was selling for 25.72 dollars on Friday afternoon, the February contract, which expired this week, closed out last week at 25.63 dollars.

In New York, the light sweet crude February contract stood at 30.45 dollars a barrel at the close on Thursday, from 29.43 dollars a week earlier.

The market had already factored in the output cut from the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), though analysts said jitters would persist until more was known about Iraq's future exporting intentions.

Rubber: Bouncy. Rubber prices bobbed around this week amid signs of a stockbuild in Japan.

In London, the rubber index for February delivery climbed to 49.50 pence per kilo from 48.75 a week ago.

Coffee: Cutback. Arabica coffee prices pulled away from their recent lows this week after producers in Mexico and central America indicated that they might hold back crops in a bid to bolster prices, traders said.

On the New York futures market, Arabica prices for May delivery stood at 69.60 cents a pound on Thursday, from 66.50 cents the previous week.

Sugar: Powder. Sugar prices fell back further this week amid largely technical trading, with few new fundamental factors to change the overall market sentiment.

contracts fell to 244 dollars a tonne from 248 dollars a week earlier.

In New York a pound of white sugar (for May delivery) slid to 9.87 cents from 9.90 cents.

Vegetable Oils: Panned. Soybean prices continued their downward trend amid forecasts of a strong harvest in Brazil and a record US output for 2.77 billion bushels in 2000.

On the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT), a bushel of soy for January delivery ticked down to 4.735 dollars from 4.7975 dollars the previous week.

Grains: Ceding ground. US grain prices fell back this week, while prices remained stable in London.

US may lose \$10b a year from TV, film production overseas: Report

WASHINGTON, Jan 20: The US economy may lose as much as 10 billion dollars a year from film and television production moving to less expensive sites abroad, according to a government report released yesterday, says AFP.

The so-called 'runaway film production' has had an impact on one of the biggest export industries of the US economy - Hollywood films and television.

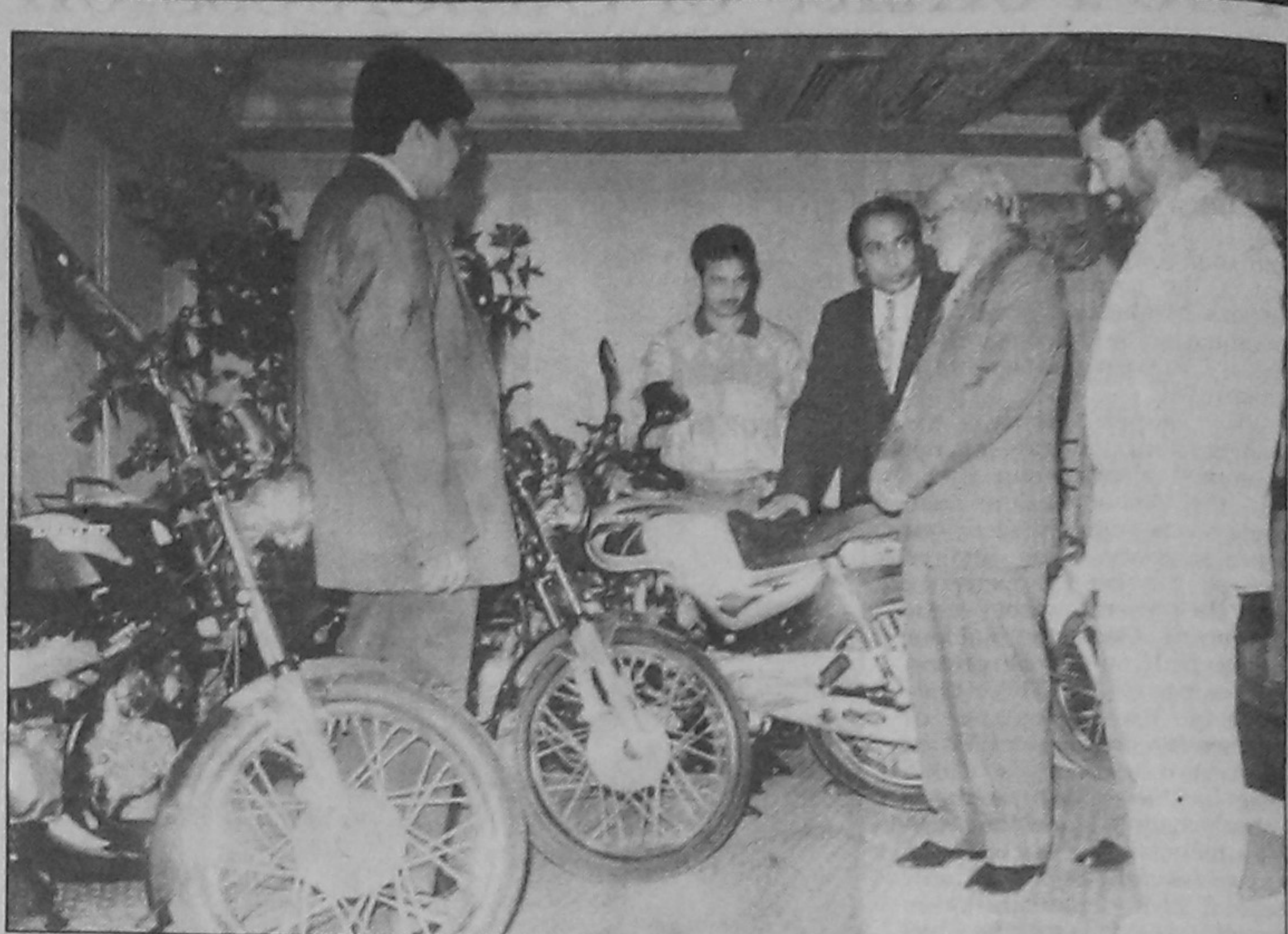
The most serious impact is in the area of made for television movies for US networks and cable systems," Commerce Secretary Norman Mineta said in a statement.

"However, the impact is far ranging, 'runaway film production' has affected thousands of workers in industries ranging from computer graphics to construction workers and caterers. These losses threaten to disrupt important parts of a vital American industry."

The report said industry figures, show US production of made for television 'movies of the week' declined more than 33 per cent in the last six years, while production at foreign locations increased 55 per cent.

The trend is "causing a substantial transformation of what used to be a traditional and quintessentially American industry into an increasingly dispersed global industry," the Commerce Department said.

It said some industry data suggest the yearly economic loss to the US economy may be as much as 10 billion dollars.



Former minister Dewan Farid Gazi inaugurated the marketing of 'Kinetic' motorcycle in Bangladesh at a dealers' conference held at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel in the city on Thursday. The conference was arranged by the Kinetic distributor Roadmaster Motors Limited. M K Khemra, Executive Director of Kinetic Engineering Limited, was the special guest on the occasion. Engineer AZ Enayet Rasul presided over the function.

KL swoops on employers hiring illegal workers

Bangladeshis among 50 detained

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 20: More than 500 policemen and immigration officials swooped down on the northern province of Penang to nab employers hiring illegal immigrants, the national news agency Bernama reported, says AP.

About 50 workers from Indonesia, Bangladesh, India and China and their five Malaysian employers, mainly restaurant owners, were detained in the early hours of the operation late Friday, according to the report.

Bernama did not say how long he crackdown would last but quoted Abdul Hadi Mahmud, a senior military official, as saying late Friday that similar exercises have also been launched in other provinces.

Authorities estimate at least 5,000 employers across the country are hiring illegal workers, mainly as construction and factory workers and helpers in restaurants. More than 1,000 employers were nabbed last year.

In Penang alone, employers were fined more than three million ringgit (\$789,000) for hiring illegal workers last year, Bernama quoted Mohammad Saad Akhir, a senior immigration official, as saying.

Illegal immigration to Malaysia, one of Southeast Asia's

Caribbeans against including Brazil, US in free trade deal

MONTEGO BAY, Jan 20: Caribbean leaders at a one-day summit with Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien said Friday they supported a hemisphere-wide free trade agreement but warned that including trade giants like Brazil and the United States in the deal could hurt poor Caribbean nations, says AP.

In April, Chretien will host the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City, Canada, where leaders are expected to build momentum for implementing the Free Trade Area of the Americas, or FTAA, by 2005.

The FTAA would include 34 countries from the Arctic to Argentina, with 800 million consumers in nations with a combined gross domestic product exceeding \$10 trillion, making it the largest trade bloc on earth.

Some leaders, however, argue that Caribbean nations like St. Kitts and Nevis - with a population of 45,000 - cannot compete in the proposed free-trade zone, which include countries with strong economies and trade bases.

"They are smaller economies and they have special cases," Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien said, after meeting with leader in the 14-nation Caribbean Community.

If allowances for vulnerable Caribbean economies are not included in the final agreement for the trade deal, the Caribbean Community should consider "what is the alternative if any available to us," said Jamaican Prime Minister P.J. Patterson.

"Special consideration needs to be given in all areas," Patterson said.

While not committing to lobbying for any specific concessions, Chretien said Caribbean concerns should be addressed at the hemisphere summit.

"When we implement the FTAA in 2005 there will be special problems for these countries to adjust to that reality," he said.

Do you have business problems? Write to us at:

Sunday Business Solutions
The Daily Star, 19, Kawran Bazar, Dhaka, Bangladesh, email: dstar@bangla.net

Sarwar Ahmed, MBA (sarwar@asia.com) hosts this column. He leads a business sector of a multinational company in Bangladesh.

The Daily Star has introduced a new business solution column which appears on Sundays. While running your business, you come across problems and wish someone would help. This column will provide you with insights to solve your problems.

CULTURAL SHOCK
I'm new in an organization and find myself in a hostile environment. I joined because I was told the work environment was friendly. What has gone wrong? Depressed.

A: It is indeed depressing to find yourself in a place where you don't enjoy work! There can be several reasons why you are getting the wrong end of the stick and are feeling unwanted.

A primary reason for this predicament is perhaps there was an internal candidate aspiring for the position you have joined. Your joining in from the outside has dashed hopes of the aspirant and is an indication within the organization that insiders are not promoted. Hence the cause for resentment.

The other major reason is your own grooming - where you come from. You are the sum total of experiences you have had so far. These experiences that you bring with you may not be compatible with the work culture where you have stepped into.

Let's say, you were working in a garments operation and you switch job to a consumer products company. Quite obviously, the garment culture will not necessarily work in the consumer products company.

Business organizations today are likened to a living organism. When a foreign body enters a living organism its innate defense mechanism seeks to either accept or destroy the intruder. Your job first of all is to ensure that you are accepted by your peers.

You need to first analyze the working environment - what is the definition of friendly? How friendly is it, and at what level? What about the CEO?

What is his leadership style - autocratic, democratic, bureaucratic? An organization establishes its 'culture' around the CEO's behaviour. What about your immediate boss? What is his leadership style? Once you get a feel of the workplace, then get going to get yourself accepted.

How do you go about doing it? Make friends. Meet and talk with your peers.

Human contact is very important. Smile. Take things lightly. Meet as many people and as frequently as possible without giving the feeling of intruding. This way, you break the ice and make yourself visible.

Next, make yourself available to provide solutions in your area of expertise. If you have joined the Marketing Department, for example, be helpful to others - don't say, "It's not my job!" Your acceptability will soar and that is what is important. Look for some small but quick wins.

Take decisions, do things that will show success. Successes will prove you are the right person. Your personal skills will prove how quickly you will be accepted in your organization. And that in the end, will lead to satisfaction on the job, at your workplace and at home.

BP to double its investment in Malaysia in next decade

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 20: Petrochemicals and chemicals giant BP Amoco said Thursday it plans to double its total investment in Malaysia by 2010, says AFP.

"We will double our investment by 2010 and we are looking forward to continue with world-scale operations here in the country," said Peter Wentworth, chief executive for Malaysia.

So far the company had invested some 1.6 billion dollars, excluding the 150 million dollar cost of a new trimethyl anhydride (TMA) plant to be built in the eastern peninsular town of Kuantan.

Wentworth, quoted by Bernama news agency, said BP's exploration activities are expected to increase - particularly in the Malaysia-Thailand Joint Development Area in the Gulf of Thailand.

The Kuantan plant, due to be completed by the end of next year, will produce 65,000 tonnes a year of TMA.

BP is the world's leading manufacturer of the material, which is used for paints, quick-cure inks for cans, toner binders, vinyl plasticizers for car interiors and high-performance wire insulation.

Wentworth also said BP expects world oil production to be sufficient to keep oil prices in the range of 18 to 25 dollars a barrel.