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Star BUSINESS

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Bank holiday on Tuesday

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh Bank and all scheduled banks will remain closed on Tuesday (June 5) on the occasion of Eid-e-Miladunnabi, said a BB press release on Sunday.

GrameenPhone distributors' confce held

The Third Annual Distributors' Conference of GrameenPhone Limited was held at the Winter Garden of Sheraton Hotel in the city on Sunday, says a press release.

Ola Ree, Managing Director of GrameenPhone, inaugurated the conference.

Awards to outstanding GP Distribution Outlets were also given at the conference.

Speaking on the occasion the GrameenPhone MD urged the Distribution Partners to provide good service to the customers.

Mehboob Chowdhury, Sales and Marketing Director of GrameenPhone, urged the GrameenPhone's Distribution Partners to work with integrity and efficiency.

Over 400 representatives of GrameenPhone's Distribution Partners and suppliers attended the conference. Senior GP officials were also present on the occasion.

Mahboob Hossain, DGM of Distribution Department, Kafil H S Mueyed, AGM of Sales and Marketing Division and Intekhab Mahmood, DGM of Marketing Department also spoke on the occasion.

The day-long conference included presentation on GrameenPhone's Distribution System, Logistics Management, Agent Management, Marketing and a presentation on the Wireless Application Protocol (WAP). It also included presentations from the Customer Relations, Finance and Technical Divisions and the International Roaming Department of GrameenPhone.

Awards were given to the Distribution Partners with outstanding performance during the period between January and December 2000.

Maxis Telecom Limited was adjudged the Best Dealer while Sayeed Enterprise of Kishoreganj received the Best Outlet Agent award and People's Distributor Company of Dhaka was adjudged the Best Scratch Card Distributor.

In the zonal category, the Best Outlet Agents are: Oshie Telecom of Chittagong; MK Trade International of Khulna; Hussain Telecom of Sylhet; Sayeed Enterprise of Dhaka and Cell Phony of Rajshahi.

The Best Interface Awards were given to A B M Kamrul Ahsan of City Heart Mobile Centre of Barisal zone; Abdullah Khaled of North Eastern Telecom of Sylhet zone; Amjad Hossain of Monalisa International of Rajshahi zone; Nefaur Rahman Bakul of MK Trade International of Khulna zone; M Nazrul Islam of Oshie Telecom of Chittagong; Sayeedu Telecom of Sayeed Enterprise of Dhaka zone and Ahmed Mahfuzur Rahman of Maxis Telecom.

SIA launches web site

Singapore Airlines (SIA) on Sunday launched its website singaporeair.com to enable the airlines customers to have integrated services, says a press release.

The SIA customers now will enjoy free access to services at any time from anywhere in the world, the release added.

This \$100 million e-commerce development scheme will be implemented over a three-year period. It is part of SIA's \$700 million investment in e-business, IT infrastructure and CyberCabin initiatives, including in-flight e-mail.

SIA's Executive Vice-President (Marketing and the Regions) Huang Cheng Eng said on the occasion: "This is more than a web site launch. It is a giant stride towards realising our vision of providing our customers with the most user-friendly virtual travel assistant. They can now obtain a wealth of information that will be invaluable in planning a trip, whether it be for business or pleasure; and they will be able to use various devices, such as mobile phones, personal digital assistants, and of course, personal computers."

SIA's site provides the most comprehensive and integrated travel guide available. The on-line facilities, include a 24x7 on-line booking service, available at all 67 international destinations, real-time flight information to get "live" updates on arrivals and departures, seat selection for First and Raffles (business) class, and lost baggage tracing.

NBR detects fake treasury *chalans*

AIT can be used to whiten black money

M SHAMSUR RAHMAN

The National Board of Revenue (NBR) has decided to strengthen verification of treasury receipts after detecting that unscrupulous businessmen are using false bank documents to avoid tax payment.

A meeting of NBR officials yesterday decided to verify the treasury documents with the banks after the close of banking transaction hour everyday to identify any mismatch in the payments and the deposited treasury receipts known as *chalans*, one NBR official said.

Talking to The Daily Star, NBR Chairman Zakir Ahmed Khan said the meeting yesterday decided to strengthen the reconciliation mechanism for checking such frauds. But more such meetings

would be required between different parties involved in the process to stop such malpractice.

The NBR chairman also said that the board has recently filed five cases against treasury receipt manipulators.

The taxpayers usually pay their taxes in the banks and obtain treasury receipts, which they submit with different agencies as proof of their tax payment.

But the NBR recently detected that a person named Salauddin of Old Dhaka has submitted three such treasury receipts involving Tk 4.5 lakh by forging the official seal of the central bank.

"We have also identified that such false receipts were submitted while taking registration of vehicles from the Bangladesh Road

Transport Authority (BRTA)," one NBR official said, adding that they have identified about 50 such cases.

The official also said that most businessmen engage middlemen for processing the registration. "It is probably these middlemen who are involved in the forgery. We suspect that an organised racket is involved in such illegal practices."

The NBR has advised the taxpayers to make sure that their duty, income tax and VAT are duly paid so that the money actually goes to the national exchequer.

Meantime, the NBR yesterday also decided that a taxpayer will have the option to use his advance income tax to whiten black money.

The businessmen usually pay

advanced income tax against import and other business transactions. They are supposed to get the balance after final assessment of tax at the end of the year.

But there have always been complaints from the business community that the refund is not properly done.

The business community therefore requested the NBR to allow such an option to whiten untaxed income, the NBR said.

The government in the last budget announced an option to whiten black money by paying 10 per cent tax on untaxed income.

However, the measure did not work well as the NBR received only Tk 15 crore in tax against Tk 150 crore untaxed income till April this year.

DHL launches Import Express

Importers to pay freight charges in local currency

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

DHL Bangladesh has launched a new product — Import Express — for the importers to expedite and facilitate transportation of their goods.

"Import Express is particularly tailored to the needs of business houses in Bangladesh because of the strict foreign currency remittance regulations of the country," Desmond Quiah, Country Manager of DHL Bangladesh, said at a press conference at Sonargaon Hotel in the city yesterday.

Whenever there is a need to bring in an urgent shipment, be it product samples, spare parts, design and layouts, the freight charge payment in foreign currencies becomes a major issue, he mentioned.

Apart from the companies

which are allowed to open foreign currency accounts, the rest of the importers in Bangladesh are left with practically no choice to remit the freight charges, Quiah said.

He said in many cases the option is to find an alternate solution to adjust the cost with the supplier, which is often not very convenient. With Import Express, importers can pay freight charges in local currency from Bangladesh.

"With the new service, a DHL customer is given an account number, which he or she can use to the overseas supplier. The overseas supplier simply makes a local DHL booking with this number and DHL picks up the goods and delivers them to the account holder's place," he added.

He said Import Express is a simple, easy and convenient solu-

tion for arranging imports of almost any type of products from anywhere in the world.

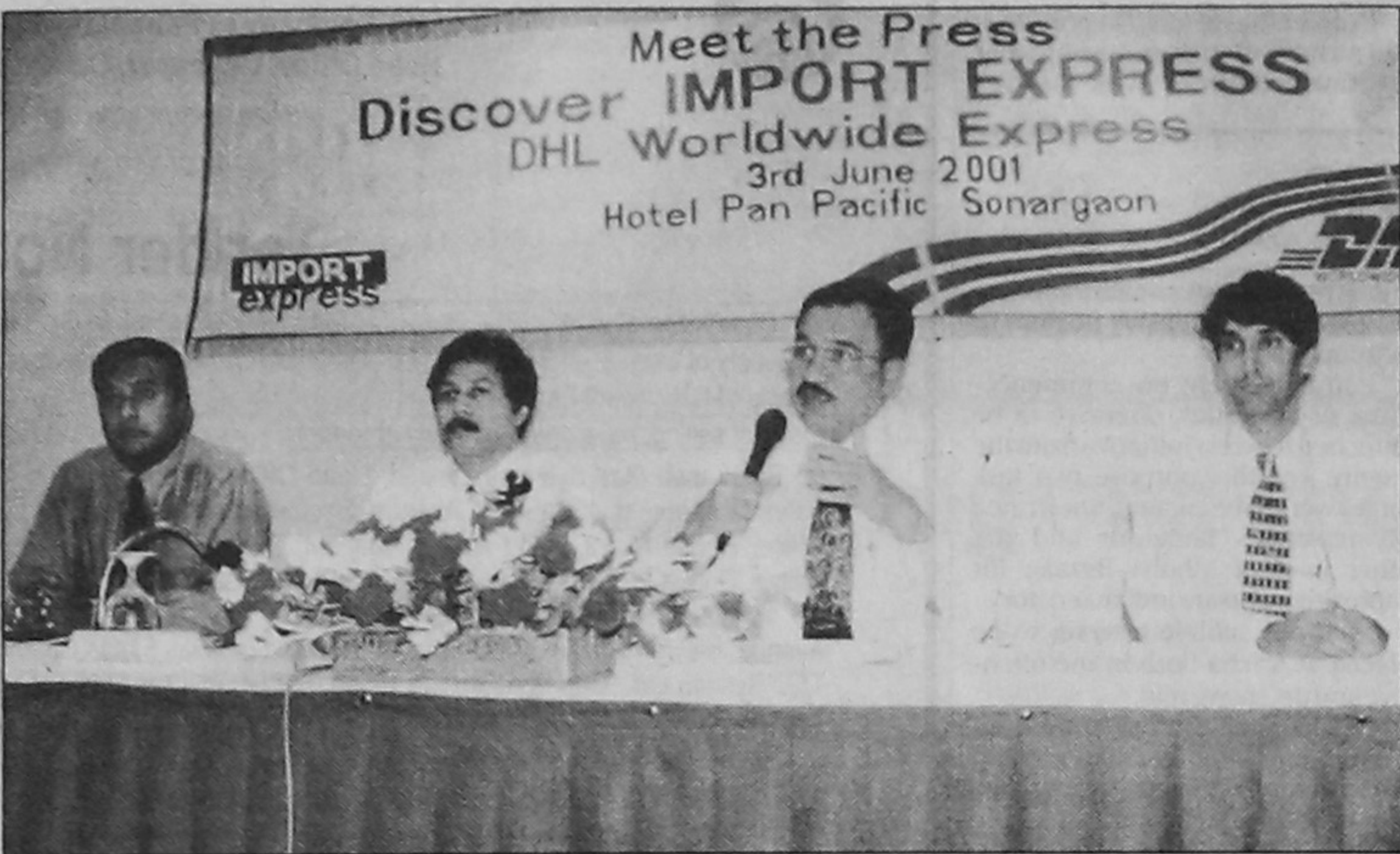
Since all payments for the service are made in local currency, the importers do not have to suffer the inconvenience of arranging payment abroad in foreign currency, he said.

DHL has been functioning in Bangladesh since 1979 with a market share of around 54 per cent, Quiah mentioned.

DHL is the largest air express company having network in 228 countries.

Sheetu Abdul Latif, Marketing and Planning Manager, Nisham Fernando, Business Development Manager, and

Ahsan Parvez, Finance Manager, also attended the press conference.



Desmond Quiah, Country Manager of DHL Worldwide Express Bangladesh, (third from left) speaks at a press conference held at a city hotel on Sunday on the occasion of launching of Import Express, a new service of the company. Other senior managers of DHL are also seen.

Aftab IT starts

e-edn site

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Aftab IT Limited, an Internet service provider (ISP), yesterday formally launched an e-education site to help the exam preparations of Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) students.

Any subscriber of Aftab IT now will have access to the web-site, enabling him or she to sit for model tests in Bengali, English, physics, chemistry, biology and other subjects without attending coaching centers and other institutes.

"All a student will need is to have a connection of Aftab IT and get himself or herself registered free of cost. Then he or she can sit for online tests in any subjects," Aftab IT consultant Akhtaruz-zaman Manju said at a press conference.

He said the site has multiple choice question (MCQ) bank with 450 to 500 questions for each subject of both SSC and HSC levels.

"An examinee will be given a question with four possible answers. As he clicks on one of the options, the next question will appear on the screen," said Manju, adding that the students will get the result soon after the exam is completed.

Akhtaruz-zaman Manju also said that the site will gradually be opened to all ISP subscribers.

AKM Shamsuddin awarded

The Country Head of Aventis Group of Companies-Bangladesh A K M Shamsuddin, has been nominated top entrepreneur by Southeast bank and The Industry magazine for his contribution to the field of life saving drugs manufacturing, says a press release.

The industry on the occasion of its 10th anniversary is going to honour 'top ten' entrepreneurs of different fields under the auspices of Southeast Bank. The award will be handed over very soon at a formal function.

A former president of Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), Shamsuddin is the Managing Director of three pharmaceutical subsidiaries of Aventis in Bangladesh-RPR Bangladesh Ltd, HMR Ltd and Fisons Bangladesh Ltd, the largest international pharmaceuticals group in Bangladesh.

He is also Vice president of France-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Committee member of Bangladesh Employers' Association, ICC-Bangladesh, Palli Shishu Foundation and Diabetic Association.

OPEC chief suggests selling refined oil to US

REUTERS, Dubai

OPEC Secretary-General Ali Rodríguez has suggested that the cartel sell the United States refined oil products to help Washington reduce power costs.

Rodríguez also said in an interview with Abu Dhabi television broadcast on Saturday that such a move required Washington to coordinate with cartel on the issue.

"If OPEC members expand their oil refining operations — which would require more investments — the organisations would be able to produce more refined oil resources and sell them to the United States to cover the shortages for these supplies," Rodríguez said.

"The United States knows that the cost of refining oil in our

countries is less than that in the United States, and especially that oil prices on the world markets are high."

"This way, we can help the United States reduce the cost of power... There are many ways to achieve that but the American administration must cooperate and coordinate with OPEC regarding this subject," he said.

US President George W. Bush's administration, criticised by Democrats in Congress for not getting tough with OPEC, said on Thursday it wanted to see lower crude oil prices and was having "quiet, diplomatic conversations" with cartel members.

US House Democratic members on Wednesday urged Bush, a former Texas oil man, to put pressure on the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries

and other oil-producing nations to increase their crude oil output by 3.5 million barrels per day.

The Democrats contend that an increase in OPEC production would help drive down crude oil prices and ultimately cut retail gasoline costs that soared to a record high earlier this month.

OPEC is scheduled to meet next week in Vienna, where ministers are expected to put off any decision on increasing crude oil supplies.

The Bush administration said on Wednesday it held continuing talks with OPEC members, but offered few details about what was being discussed.

"There are conversations that are going back and forth with OPEC," Ari Fleischer, a White House spokesman, told reporters.

Iraq threatens to quit UN oil-for-food programme

AFP, Baghdad

An angry Iraq warned Sunday it could pull out of the UN oil-for-food scheme which feeds its people as well as halt oil exports in a high-stakes gamble to wreck a US-British bid to impose "smart" sanctions.

Diplomats in the Iraqi capital told AFP the government could halt several months without oil exported under UN control because of major stocks of food and billions of dollars held in escrow accounts.

"Iraq will not limit itself to rejecting the (US-British) project but will fight it with all the means at its disposal," vowed the ruling Baath party's mouthpiece, Ath-Thawra.

It said Iraq had "not endured 11 years of injustice and suffering only to have such a vile project imposed" on the country, which has been under embargo since the 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

"Iraq will renounce the oil-for-food programme and take the necessary measures against countries which let it down by agreeing to cooperate with its enemies," the daily warned.

Baghdad announced Saturday a halt in oil exports from June 4, spurning a one-month extension of the oil-for-food programme launched in December 1996 as it battles to head off the proposals

for smart sanctions.

The timing of the suspension coincides with the end of the current phase of the oil-for-food deal and will wipe around 2.2 million barrels per day off the world oil market.

The one-month rollover, rather than a regular six-month term, is intended to allow time for the five permanent members of the UN Security Council to close difficult negotiations over the detail of the proposals.

Britain, backed by the United States, has put forward a draft resolution that would abolish the embargo on civilian trade with Iraq, while tightening a weapons ban and controls on smuggling outside the oil-for-food deal.

"Is it logical that Iraq should trade in all its sacrifices and suffering by accepting a new colonialist protectorate under a humanitarian guise?" asked Ath-Thawra, underlining Baghdad's rejection of the proposed new sanctions.

The oil-for-food deal allows Iraq to export crude under UN supervision to finance imports of essential goods and ease the hardships of sanctions on its 22-million population.

"This crisis has no time limit and could drag on for quite a long time," said the diplomat.

Another Western diplomat

noted that Iraq has "several billions of dollars" in accounts controlled by the world body which could be used to buy basic goods.

"It should also be noted that the harvest has been exceptional in Iraq this year after several years of drought and that will help the country to cope with a halt in imported foodstuff," he added.

The British proposal includes the opening of escrow accounts in neighbours Iran, Jordan, Syria and Turkey to finance cross-border trade and to halt the highly profitable smuggling of oil.

"It is not in the interests of any of these countries to damage Iraq and its people," Ath-Thawra said. "They must not make the mistake of getting involved in the US-British game because their proposal is still-born and Iraq will emerge the victor."

Diplomats said Washington would find it hard to convince Iraq's neighbours, particularly Iran and Syria, to cooperate with smart sanctions. "Smuggling can not be totally stopped," one diplomat said.

Meanwhile a Turkish official told AFP on Sunday that storage tanks at the Turkish Mediterranean port of Ceyhan held 2.5 million barrels of Iraqi oil when the flow was cut on Saturday and 80 percent of it was to be taken soon.

India struggles to retain foreign investors

AFP, New Delhi

Foreign investors are beginning to leave India for emerging economies like China, as they run smack into a cobweb of rules, regulations and intervention at the state level.

The list of companies leaving India, after moving in en masse during the early 1990s when the government unleashed sweeping free-market reforms, include major European, American and Asian groups.

"A slew of foreign firms have packed their bags. It is a wake up call for New Delhi to cut red tape and pursue much more investor-friendly policies," said Gautam Mahajan, president of the Indo-American Chamber of Commerce.

Four foreign power companies, including Europe's largest, Electricite de France (EDF), have

pulled out of Indian power projects worth three billion dollars, citing long delays and the slow pace of reforms.

EDF walked out of a proposed 1,000-megawatt power project in the western Indian state of Maharashtra following years of hurdles and hold-ups.

Ramesh Narayan, chief of EDF's subsidiary in India, told AFP that "inordinately long" delays forced it to pull out of the 1.1 billion dollar joint venture, which also includes France's Alstom.

"We gave it a long, hard try for seven years... The coal-pricing and risk issues finally made the project unviable. Recent regulatory changes also made the project's tariff unacceptable," said Narayan.

While EDF struggled to get off the ground in India it added 34,000 megawatts of power in

countries such as Germany and China.

The pull out of EDF followed the withdrawal in January last year of US-based Cogentrix Energy Inc., from a 1.3 billion dollar, 1,000-megawatt power project in the southern state of Karnataka.

Now another US energy giant, Enron Corp., has moved closer to pulling the plug on its Indian plant.

On May 19, Enron subsidiary Dabhol Power Company (DPC) issued a preliminary notice to terminate its contract to sell power to India's Maharashtra state.

The move followed months of wrangling between Enron and Maharashtra state over payment defaults by the state utility, Maharashtra State Electricity Board, and is likely to further tarnish India's business image.

"It will have an impact on how people look at India and that is very unfortunate because we do see India as a potentially good market," Peter de Wit, director of Shell International Gas told reporters.

"The sort of circumstance they (Enron) are faced with now doesn't give a lot of confidence to people who want to consider long-term contracts in India."

Shell plans to spend 19.5 billion rupees (\$415 million dollars) to build a five million ton-a-year liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal at Hazira, a port in the western state of Gujarat.

The Dabhol project is the single largest US investment in India and was seen as a litmus test of India's commitment to economic reforms and globalisation.

Australian telecoms group United Holdings and its Korean supplier Mocomo Inc announced last month the closure of an electronic parts production facility in northern India, sacking at least 200 people, to relocate to China.

"Foreign firms also said it took them longer to start operations in India."

France's leading liquor company Groupe Pernod Ricard took roughly four years to launch its first brand in India.

"I started Pernod's operations from scratch in Japan and Korea. I came to India with the clear intention of quickly launching our first brand," said Albert Aggressi, former Delhi head of Groupe Pernod Ricard, before leaving India.

"But a few weeks became some months then years. Very frustrating," he added.

BGMEA team meets Mannan

BSS, Dhaka

A delegation of Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) Sunday called on Labour and Employment Minister Abdul Mannan at latter's secretariat office here, an official handout said.

The delegation, led by its president Kutubuddin Ahmed, discussed issues relating to implementation of labour laws in the garment sector.

Mannan gave a patient-hearing to the BGMEA representatives and assured them of providing possible all cooperation for the garment sector.

BGMEA vice President Mohammad Shaiful Islam Mohiuddin, Director Lutfar Rahman Matin and member Masud Khadem Mona were present during the meeting.