

Inam Ahmed Chy joins Privatisation Commission

BSS, Dhaka

Former bureaucrat Inam Ahmed Chowdhury, who has been appointed Chairman of the Privatisation Commission with the rank and status of a State Minister, joined the office yesterday.

Later in the afternoon, the newly appointed chairman exchanged views with the officials and employees of the commission and vowed to make the privatisation process of the government more dynamic.

He urged them to work with dedication, sincerity and honesty. A career bureaucrat Inam Ahmed Chowdhury served the government and other international agencies in different capacities during his long career.

He was the Secretary of the Economic Relations Department (ERD), Vice President of Islamic Development Bank and Secretary of the Bangkok based UN agency ESCAP.

At present, he is also an adviser to the BNP chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia.

SMC annual sales confce held

The annual sales conference 2001 of Social Marketing Company (SMC) was held in the city on Sunday, says a press release.

All the members of the sales team as well as other staff including senior managers attended the conference.

Shahid Ahmed, National Sales Manager of the company, presented the FY 2001 (Oct 2000 to Sep 2001) sales performance.

According to his report, SMC distributed 28.6 million cycles of oral pills and 147.9 million pieces of condoms during the period. In addition it sold about 84.6 million sachets of packaged Oral Rehydration Salt (ORSaline) during the period.

Anis-uz-Zaman Khan, Managing Director of SMC appreciated the contribution made by the sales force to the success of the company in terms of providing quality health and family planning products to the less privileged and vulnerable people of Bangladesh at a very affordable price.

Ashfaq Rahman, Director of Sales and Marketing, also spoke on the occasion.

DHL official air express service provider of DTM-2002

DHL Worldwide Express, one of the leading air express companies of the world, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with The Bangladesh Monitor to act as the official air express service provider of the Dhaka Travel Mart (DTM) 2002, says a press release.

Desmond Quiah, Country Manager of Bangladesh of DHL Worldwide Express, and Kazi Wahidul Alam, Editor of The Bangladesh Monitor and Chairman of DTM-2002 signed the MOU on behalf of the their respective sides.

Sheetu Abdul Latif, Marketing and Planning Manager of DHL Bangladesh, was also present on the occasion.

The Bangladesh Monitor, a travel trade journal, is organising the first-ever international travel fair of the country from February 1-3, 2002 to project Bangladesh as a tourist destination and to highlight the various products the country has to offer.

The PATA Bangladesh Chapter and Tour Operators Association of Bangladesh are the co-organisers while Bangladesh Guest House Owners Association, Amadeus, Dhaka Sheraton Hotel, The Daily Star and ETV will be acting as co-sponsors.

The DTM-2002 will be participated by a large number of airlines, travel agents, National Tourism Organisations, tour operators hotels, cruise operators, resorts, GDS Companies, Car Rental Companies, Soft Drink Bottlers and various other service providers in tourism sector from home and abroad.

Inter-ministerial body to be formed to solve textile, RMG problems

UNB, Dhaka

The government decided to form an inter-ministerial committee to resolve the problems between the two interrelated textile and apparel industries in the clothing sector, besides recommending other measures to increase production and expand market.

The decision was taken when a delegation of Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA) met Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia at her office Thursday afternoon.

As per the decision, the committee will comprise Textile, Commerce and Finance Ministries and representatives from BTMA and BGMEA.

In recent times, the textile mill owners and readymade garment manufacturers and exporters have been at loggerheads over SAARC cumulation. The rules approved by the EU allow the apparel-makers to import fabrics from the South

Asian regional countries for readymade garment export to the European countries.

The task of the committee will be to submit recommendations for effective steps for increasing production and expanding markets at home and abroad removing existing problems in both the sectors recognising the prevailing local and international trade situation.

Responding to the delegation Prime Minister Khaleda again stressed creating public awareness against smuggling alongside administrative measures.

The BTMA delegation, led by its acting chairman A Matin Chowdhury, gave a presentation on overall situation of the textile sector with a package of suggestions for solution to the existing problems.

So far, they appraised the PM, some Tk 8,500 crore has been invested in the textile sector and some 27 lakh employees have been working in the sector.

Recalling the announcement of Khaleda Zia as Prime Minister in 1992 the textile sector as a thrust sector which injected fresh and needed impetus in it, the mill owners said the last government "didn't give due attention to this sector and so there are some problems prevailing here."

"Textile market is shrinking both home and abroad," the delegation said and sought government intervention for its expansion. They mentioned present world economic recession following the September 11 terror attack on USA that also put adverse impact on Bangladesh economy.

LGRD Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Textile Minister Abdul Matin Chowdhury, Minister without portfolio Harunur Rashid Khan Monno, State Minister for Power Iqbal Hasan Mahmud, State Minister for Commerce Barkatullah Bulu, State Minister for Textiles Mizanur Rahman Sinha and Political Secretary to PM Haris Chowdhury were present.



M K Anwar, Minister for Industries, inaugurates a two-day annual event of French-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry held at a city hotel on Thursday.

RMG exports to EU threatened as buyers seek SAARC cumulation gain

SHAHRIAR KARIM

The country's readymade garment (RMG) export is also heading for a disaster in the European Union (EU) market after facing a hard time in the US as the European buyers are contemplating to shift orders from Bangladesh to other countries.

The recent developments in international trade are fast diminishing the country's price competitiveness in the EU market, according to sources.

The EU has already offered duty-free access to Pakistani textile and clothing and also increased 15 per cent quota for the items effective from January 1, 2002. This has become a major threat for Bangladesh as the European buyers are now intending to shift orders from Bangladesh to Pakistan.

Moreover, inclusion of China into the WTO and EU's offer to China for quota-free access of some RMG items have also become major issues now. The EU also offered duty and quota free access to some Sri Lankan RMG items last year.

And now, all this is working against Bangladesh. A number of local RMG exporters have received letters from their buyers who might shift orders from Bangladesh to other countries due to price advantage.

However, the implementation of SAARC cumulation offered by the EU could save the RMG from a disaster, exporters think.

They also said the EU buyers are now inquiring whether they can import Bangladeshi apparels under SAARC cumulation benefits offered by the EU last year. Even a delegation of German buyers came to the city recently to see whether Bangladesh can offer better prices under SAARC cumulation benefit.

Under the benefit Bangladesh can get duty-free access to the EU mar-

kets of its products made from raw materials of other countries in SAARC region provided Bangladesh's value addition is higher than others.

Although the commerce ministry has taken a decision to avail itself of SAARC cumulation benefit offered to five RMG items, it is yet to be implemented as the country's textile lobby is strongly opposing the idea.

The delegation represented Miles Fashion Group of Germany that imports apparels worth US\$ 50 to 60 million each year from Bangladesh. The company is now interested to import under the EU's SAARC cumulation derogation for better price. Miles has been doing business with the country's RMG exporters since 1989 and has a liaison office in Dhaka.

"Bangladesh is basically a difficult place to do business due to different procedural complications. However, we were the biggest German importer of Bangladeshi apparels as we could get some duty benefits," Joachim Hafemann of Miles Fashion Group told this correspondent in the city. "But the international situation is changing fast. Whatever the price advantage Bangladesh has to offer, it is diminishing fast because of rapid developments in the international trade arena. In this context, if Bangladesh takes lengthy time to implement SAARC cumulation for clothing sector we have to move out from here."

"We have a long business tie with Bangladesh and we want to continue this. But, if we can't procure garments at cheaper rates from here we have to decide to quit," he said.

Talking on the fallout of September 11 terrorist attacks and Afghan war, Hafemann said it didn't have that much impact on their business. "In fact our business is growing, but order to Bangladesh is declining."

BGMEA Vice President Qazi Moniruzzaman said he has received the same message from many EU importers who might shift to Pakistan, China or Sri Lanka.

Rich, poor countries hail new round of WTO trade talks

REUTERS, Doha

The world's most powerful economies and even some minnows have lauded a hard-fought agreement at a World Trade Organisation (WTO), meeting to start a new series of talks on dismantling trade barriers.

The European Union hailed the launch of the new round of global trade liberalisation talks on Wednesday as a "slap in the face for isolationism" while an upbeat Morocco said there was also plenty in it for developing countries.

Brazil meanwhile, celebrated its role in helping broker a deal on medical patents that will give poor countries better access to discounts on drugs for AIDS and other major killers.

After six days of haggling in the Gulf state of Qatar, ministers said broad and balanced negotiations would begin next year to liberalise global commerce, aiming to lift millions from poverty and boost the world's tottering economy.

Trade ministers from more than 140 countries agreed to launch the new series of talks, promptly dubbed "the Doha Round" by Qatari officials on cutting farm subsidies and industrial tariffs and tackling a host of other barriers to trade.

"This is a huge success for the international community" British Prime Minister Tony Blair said in a statement in London.

"The countries of the world, rich and poor, have ironed out their differences to launch a trade round that will make all of us more prosperous," he said.

The White House also welcomed the agreement from Crawford, Texas while its chief negotiator at the Doha talks said "a powerful signal" had been given to the world.

"We have removed the stain of Seattle," US Trade representative Robert Zoellick said. "By agreeing to launch new global trade negotiations, we are helping to deliver growth, development and prosperity throughout the world."

The WTO which also welcomed China and Taiwan into its midst during the six days, agreed to embark in January on a "round" of talks to last no longer than January 2005 to boost trade flows and ensure all countries trade on a level playing field.

EU officials were jubilant over the deal to kick off the new trade round which the 15-nation EU has been campaigning for five years.

"It is good news not only for Europe but for all the members of the WTO. A new trade round is a slap in the face for isolationism," EU Farm Commissioner Franz Fischer said.

EU Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy said the WTO train had been "all but derailed" following the last WTO ministerial meeting in Seattle.

France settled for the addition of a deftly drafted caveat that the outcome of the talks would not be pre-judged.

Saifur promises to strongly pursue share scam cases

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday said the government would vigorously pursue the 1996 share market scam cases as stated by the prime minister in her first speech to the nation.

"I think what the prime minister meant was to take up the cases with the attorney general so that the scamsters are punished," Saifur said at a 'Meet the Reporters' programme organised by the Dhaka Reporters' Unity at the unity office.

The finance minister also reiter-

ated that dealers should be delinked from members of the bourses for the sake of transparency in capital market.

Saifur said the stock market regulators would be asked to prepare necessary guidelines for bringing the needed changes.

Earlier, the minister at a presentation ceremony of Central Depository Bangladesh Limited (CDBL) expressed his surprise that the members of the stock exchanges are also engaged in trading.

"If the members are also brokers,

then transparency cannot be ensured," Saifur earlier said at the presentation ceremony, adding that a lot of reforms would be needed to ensure transparency in stock dealings to restore investors' confidence.

Speaking at the DRU programme, Saifur yesterday said the government has so far taken a number of steps to bolster the economy, some of which would indirectly help revitalise of the stock market.

"These steps are so far isolated ones, but we would try to draw up a comprehensive package," he said.

CCIFB annual event opens

UNB, Dhaka

Reaffirming the government's determination to restore law and order to attract more foreign investment, the Industries Minister has warned that action would be taken against those who will try to create anarchy in the country.

His remarks came while inaugurating a two-day annual event of French-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCIFB) at a city hotel yesterday.

Highlighting the role of France during the liberation war of Bangladesh, Industries Minister M K Anwar said France has become one of our important partners over the years.

"We need to find new ways to help each other against the backdrop of world economic slowdown," he told the function that included French trade show, discussion on business and investment in Bangladesh and French fashion show.

French Ambassador to Bangladesh Michel Lummaux and President of CCIFB Michel Folliet also addressed the inaugural function.

The minister later opened a daylong French trade show there. Nineteen French companies, including Alcatel, Moulinex, L'Oréal, Renault, Alliance Francaise took part in the trade show.

Poor nations score big win on WTO health front

REUTERS, Doha

Poor nations, displaying rare unity and preparedness, on Wednesday won a World Trade Organisation (WTO) deal that allows them better access to cheap drugs.

The agreement was formally approved by trade ministers of the 142-nation WTO after six days of grueling negotiations at a conference in Qatar.

It means that a country suffering devastating pandemics like AIDS and malaria will be able to skirt WTO rules on pharmaceutical patents to produce or buy generic drugs.

"This is a very important achievement for the developing countries, especially for the Sub-Saharan African countries," Nacer Benjelloun-Touimi, Morocco's WTO negotiator, said.

The deal gives the world's 48 least-developed countries a 15-year grace period to implement WTO rules on drug patents, and allows them the right to seek further extensions after that.

The issue of patent rules set out in the WTO's TRIPS intellectual property agreement has been one of the hottest issues in the WTO.

Rich nations, led by the United States and Canada with support from Switzerland, Japan and some European Union countries, had

sought stronger commitments from developing countries to implement TRIPS rules in order to protect the \$300 billion-a-year industry.

"Generally, it is acceptable, although we would have preferred a more focused package," said Robin Tickle, spokesman for economy minister Pascal Couchepin of Switzerland, which is home to some of the world's biggest drug firms.

"The agreement serves the dual goal of meeting the interests of the developing countries and protecting patents of Swiss companies," Tickle told Reuters.

The declaration said: "We recognise the gravity of the public health problems affecting many developing and least developed countries, especially those resulting from HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and other epidemics."

It added that while WTO countries reiterated their commitment to the TRIPS accord, members have the right to "protect public health, and in particular, to promote access to medicines by all."

Poor countries and Western campaigners backing them had accused rich nations, and the big pharma-firms, of putting profits before health.

The United States, Canada and Switzerland and the companies themselves insisted that patent protection was vital to ensure the

revenue that is used to finance research on new medicines.

But popular opinion around the world was roused against the companies by an effort they launched two years ago south Africa changing its law to allow purchase of generics.

Also influential was a novel, "The Constant Gardener," by best-selling British writer John LeCarre, which portrayed pharmaceutical manufacturers as using poor Africans as guinea pigs for new drugs, and worse.

Amid an international outcry, the pharma-firms dropped the South African case early this year.

On Wednesday seven campaigning groups - including the Brussels-based Medecins Sans Frontieres, British-based Oxfam, Third World Network of Malaysia which is normally a fierce critic of the WTO, and the London-headquartered Consumers' International, issued a joint statement hailing the declaration.

It said the document showed that WTO members recognised the "Lethal side-effects" of the TRIPS agreement and had given teeth "to the measures that countries can use to counteract them..."



Anis-uz-Zaman Khan, Managing Director of Social Marketing Company, speaks at the annual sales conference of the company held on Sunday in the city.

Main points from Doha WTO declaration

AFP, Doha

Ministers from the 142-member World Trade Organisation wrapped up a six-day conference here Wednesday, approving a declaration outlining an agenda for a new round of multilateral trade talks.

Here is a summary of some of the meeting's principal conclusions:

AGRICULTURE: Ministers adopted a text calling for negotiations with a view to "phasing out" agricultural export subsidies, as demanded by the United States and an alliance of exporters known as the Cairns Group.

But the European Union, which strongly resisted pressure to make any commitment to end subsidies, managed to win the insertion of language making it clear that participants would take part in such negotiations "without prejudging the outcome".

PUBLIC HEALTH: The conference, in a concession to developing countries, determined that a WTO agreement on intellectual property rights "does not and should not prevent (WTO) members from taking steps to protect public health".

Developing countries had demanded authorisation from the WTO to override patents held by big pharmaceutical companies in order to make cheaper, generic

drugs available to their people in times of medical crises.

ENVIRONMENT: The text goes some way to meeting EU calls for negotiations to determine the relationship between trade and environmental protection.

Developing countries resisted any such linkage, fearing that industrialized nations will in fact use environmental clauses in trade pacts to protect their markets.

LABOUR RIGHTS: The conference concluded that the International Labour Organisation is the appropriate venue to discuss the place of core labour standards in trade accords.

INVESTMENT: Negotiations on liberalising investment policies were put off until after the next WTO ministerial meeting in 2003.

ANTI-DUMPING: Japan and South Korea were the big winners in this debate, as WTO ministers agreed that the imposition of anti-dumping duties on imports deemed to have entered a country at unfairly low prices was a proper subject for debate.

US officials say anti-dumping measures are necessary to preserve public support for free trade. By all accounts the United States would have preferred to keep anti-dumping off the table in Doha.

World trade ministers throw off Seattle curse

AFP, Doha

Trade ministers from more than 140 countries erased the stigma of the fiasco in Seattle by overcoming parochial differences and launching a broad-based agenda to free global commerce.

Two years ago the World Trade Organisation attempt to the same thing in Seattle, on the US west coast, collapsed under the weight of internal cracks and outside pressure from militant street protests.

A failure this time would have thrown into question whether such sweeping trade agreements, ranging from bananas to financial services, are even practical.

But at the six-day marathon talks held in a sumptuous Gulf-side hotel in the Qatari capital, WTO ministers also risked being accused of fiddling while Rome burned if they went home empty handed.

The world economy is sliding towards recession.

"Today the members of the WTO

have sent a powerful signal to the world," US Trade Representative Robert Zoellick told fellow WTO members in a defiant message moments after the new round was launched.

"We have removed the stain of Seattle," he declared.

"We will continue to cooperate successfully. We will continue to press for open markets. We will continue to build a global trading system based on common rules."

WTO chief Mike Moor said the meeting was historic, not least because it brought China - by far the world's most populous nation with 1.3 billion people - into the global trading system.

It also came at a time of fragile global nerves.

"Everybody appreciated the need to give a signal of confidence in the very difficult time we are going through," he said at the final plenary. "In a world too often divided we have done something important."



Desmond Quiah, Country Manager-Bangladesh of DHL Worldwide Express, and Kazi Wahidul Alam, Editor of The Bangladesh Monitor and Chairman of Dhaka Travel Mart 2002, sign a MOU making DHL the official air express service provider of the DTM-2002 in the city recently.