

New ADB country director



The Asian Development Bank's new Country Director to Bangladesh, Toru Shibuichi, arrived in the city yesterday to assume responsibilities of the Bangladesh Resident Mission (BRM), says a press release.

Prior to his present appointment, Shibuichi was the Manager of the Forestry and Natural Resources Division, West Region which covers Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Laos PDR, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam.

Shibuichi joined the ADB in 1985 and has served in various capacities in the Agriculture and Social Sectors Department.

Gulf Oil VP in city

Alain Vincent Dujean, Vice President, World Wide Operation of Gulf Oil International, UK along with CEO of Gulf Oil International, South Asia Dr V Rao Ramesh, are on a 2-day exploratory and review visit to Bangladesh, says a press release.

They will discuss and finalise the future strategic plans with its ally - Oil Bangladesh Limited - on short, mid and long term 'downstream petroleum operations' in the private sector in Bangladesh.

They will meet Munirul Islam, CEO of Oil Bangladesh Ltd. and A Rouf Chowdhury, Chairman of OBL.

ICB branch managers' confce held

A conference of branch managers of the Investment Corporation of Bangladesh (ICB) was held at its head office in the city recently, says a press release.

The Managing Director of the Corporation, Md Ziaul Haque Khondker, presided over the conference.

In the conference operational performance of the corporation in the previous fiscal year and in the first half year of 2001-2002 was evaluated.

Indenting assoc, Pak businessmen hold talks

An 11-member businessmen from the visiting Pakistan Trade Delegation held a meeting with the Bangladesh Indenting Agents' Association (BIAA) in the city on Sunday, says a press release.

Welcoming the businessmen, BIAA's President M Jamaluddin explained the role of the Association in the promotion of trade between Bangladesh and the foreign countries.

He felt that the volume of trade between the two countries could be raised provided shipping services are improved and side by side warehousing facilities are introduced.

Bels-ISSL made official security service provider of DTM-2002

Bels-ISSL, one of the leading security service companies in the country, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with The Bangladesh Monitor on Sunday to act as the official security service provider of the Dhaka Travel Mart-2002, the first-ever International Travel Fair of the country, says a press release.

Gr Captain (Retd) Najmul H Chowdhury, Director of Bels-ISSL Ltd, and Kazi Wahidul Alam, Editor, The Bangladesh Monitor and Chairman, DTM-2002, signed the MoU on behalf of their respective sides.

Sadique Ahsan, President of Guest House Owners Association, Lt Col (Retd) Khalid Azam, director of ISSL, Moinul Hoque, Corporate Coordinator of Bels, and Parijat M Khan, Marketing Manager of Bels, were among others present, on the occasion.

Global slump unlikely to hit leather sector: Exporters

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Despite the global recession, the leather sector may not face a major setback in the current financial year as the situation has already crossed the worst, exporters hope.

They attended the Dhaka International Leather Fair 2002 to attract more foreign buyers.

"With improvements in the global market, we decided to continue the fair for the fourth time," said an organiser and also a leading exporter.

Bangladesh Finished Leather, Leather goods and Footwear Exporters' Association (BFLLEA) organised the fair at Sonargaon Hotel in the city. Yesterday was the conclusion of the three-day gala exposition.

The fair witnessed a good number of visitors over the past three days, but failed to fetch significant amount of spot orders.

"Basically, it is an event to interact with buyers and their agents. We did not expect a great many spot export orders. A good number of buyers and their agents have collected product brochures. We hope many of them would visit our factory later," said a participant at the fair.

A total of 76 local and foreign companies participated in the fair. While most of the local companies showcased crust and finished leather, footwear and leather goods, almost all the 22 participating foreign companies were manufacturers of leather processing chemicals and other components.

Bangladesh is yet to be known as an exporter of leather goods and footwear. "So, the country has to go for aggressive marketing strategy. But in reality, our publicity was very poor and not at a level that could attract a significant number of foreign buyers," said another participant.

According to exporters, demand for leather and leather products is increasing in the international market. After September 11 incident, prices and the number of buyers went down significantly.

"But the situation is now improving and we are also receiving orders," said an official of Dhaka Hide and Skins Ltd.

"The international market situation has improved. I think the exporters would be able to stage a comeback later," said Md Saiful Islam, managing director of Picard Bangladesh Limited.

Export earning from the leather sector was US\$290 million last fiscal. "But it could be raised to \$800 million by exporting shoes and leather products," said Dr Karam Ali Ahmed, a local expert on leather.

There is a tremendous scope for development of finished leather and leather goods and increasing export earnings as well as employment in the country. But to materialise the potential of the sector, the government should take some important policy decision, he felt.

Citing the example of India, he said the government should offer a number of incentives for developing the sector.



Visitors admire some leather products at a leather fair which concluded at a city hotel yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR



PHOTO: MCCI

Abdul Razzak Dawood, Minister for Commerce, Industry and Production of Pakistan, addresses the members of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Dhaka (MCCI) at its conference hall yesterday. Tapan Chowdhury, President of MCCI, Mahbubur Rahman, President of ICC-Bangladesh, Suhel Ahmed Choudhury, Secretary of Ministry of Commerce, and Iqbal Ahmad Khan, Pakistan High Commissioner to Bangladesh, are also seen in the picture.

MCCI seeks concessional access to Pakistan market

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Against the backdrop of rising trade deficit with Pakistan, the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) has requested the visiting Pakistani commerce, industries and production minister to open up their market to Bangladeshi products on concessional terms.

The request was made when Pakistani minister Abdul Razzak Dawood met the members of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI), Dhaka at its conference room in the city yesterday.

In response to the plea, the Pakistani minister said Bangladesh's export to Pakistan is falling while Pakistan's export to Bangladesh is rising. "This is totally unacceptable," the minister said expressing his support to Bangladesh's demand for wide market access. The minister said he would also like to see wider market access of Pakistani goods to Bangladesh market.

Welcoming the Pakistani minister, MCCI President Tapan Chowdhury said there are at least three Bangladeshi products that should be considered by Pakistan for preferential access.

The MCCI president listed tea, pharmaceutical and ceramic tableware as products for the preferential accesses.

Tapan Chowdhury in his speech expressed apprehension that Bangladeshi pharmaceutical

products are about to lose market in Pakistan "due to non-renewal of registrations of many existing items and non-registration of new products."

"This has become a matter of frustration because Bangladeshi pharmaceutical products were gaining market and becoming a steady item in the two-way trade," Tapan Chowdhury said. Pharmaceutical products are the third largest item exported to Pakistan, clocking US\$ 0.96 million in 1999-2000.

In this context, Tapan Chowdhury urged the Pakistani minister to take initiative for waiver of 8.33 per cent duty currently imposed on Bangladeshi pharmaceutical products and fix a time limit of three to six months for registration of all pharmaceutical items.

Replying to the request, Abdul Razzak Dawood said he would try to accommodate it as he is heading a committee on pharmaceuticals in Pakistan. However, he admitted that the health ministry in Pakistan is "very notorious" due to which, many multinational companies were facing problems.

Abdul Razzak Dawood said that he already received a proposal from the Bangladesh government for duty free access of Bangladeshi products and would consider the proposal for tea, jute and jute products.

Mentioning that Bangladesh has more liberal-

ised trade regime than that of Pakistan, Dawood said Pakistan has already gone for import duty reduction wide across that would take effect next July.

He also stressed the need for frequent exchange of business delegations to further develop the trade ties between the two countries.

MCCI President Tapan Chowdhury said due to high tariff Bangladeshi ceramic products, which is of international standard, could not find market access in Pakistan. Currently there are 60 per cent import duty plus 15 per cent VAT applicable for importing ceramic products in Pakistan. Chowdhury sought initiative for reduction of the duty by 50 per cent.

Mentioning close relationship between Bangladesh and Pakistan trade and industry, Tapan Chowdhury said it was not reflected on trade. "Rather, trade between the two nations was on the decline in recent years."

The bilateral trade between the two SAARC members declined to US\$ 116 million in 1999-2000 from US\$ 125 million in 1997-98.

The most disturbing thing is that Bangladesh's share in the bilateral trade has been falling against the rising share of Pakistan, Tapan Chowdhury mentioned.

The country's exports to Pakistan showed a 29 per cent fall in 1999-2000 over 1997-98. On the other hand, Pakistan's exports to Bangladesh posted a five per cent rise during the same period.

Direct Pak-Bangla shipping soon

Visiting minister says

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

export business and manufacturers would get rid of deadline pressure of foreign buyers.

Dawood vowed to persuade the Pakistan President to agree on duty-free access of 21 Bangladeshi items.

He said Pakistan is considering concessional airfreight cargo fare for Bangladeshi goods through PIA in both ways.

The minister said Pakistan would set up more banks and revive the existing ones to quicken business transactions and urged Bangladesh to do the same.

He said no all-out effort would be taken to ensure equitable trade between the two countries as current trade is tilting favourably towards his country and pledged to help narrow the gap. "There should be a level-playing field in mutual trade."

The minister said his government would clear all sorts of snags for addressing the existing trade imbalance and increase volume of trade and investment between the two brotherly countries. "We want to expand economic collaboration with Bangladesh through joint venture, especially in garment, textile, pharmaceutical, agro-processing and other profitable sectors."

Appreciating Bangladesh's efforts in RMG sector, Dawood said his country is planning to form a strategic alliance with Bangladesh in such sectors and also urged local entrepreneurs to do the same with Pakistani enterprises.

Responding to a DCCI member's proposal, he assured that he would try his best for construction of a friendship bridge over Buriganga

river to initiate confidence building measures which is pre-requisite for bilateral trade and investment.

Chaired by DCCI President Matiuur Rahman, the meeting was also addressed by Jahiruddin Ahmad, former commerce minister, YA Bawan who co-founded DCCI during the then East Pakistan era, Mahbubur Rahman, president of International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), Bangladesh, Benajir Ahmed, immediate-past president of DCCI, Rashed Maksud Khan, former president of DCCI.

Pakistan High Commissioner to Bangladesh Iqbal Ahmad Khan, members of Pakistan trade delegates and DCCI members were present at the meeting held at chamber.

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Visiting Pakistan Commerce, Industry and Production Minister Abdul Razzak Dawood said this at a meeting with Industries Minister M K Anwar here today.

Dawood said they have restructured a lot in these sectors to become globally competitive. "So, our entrepreneurs could invest on their own or in joint venture with private and public sectors in Bangladesh."

He said Pakistan is ready to cooperate with Bangladesh at any length to strengthen bilateral trade and investment relations to develop mutual economies.

Echoing the same spirit of further cooperation in economic sector, M K Anwar said Bangladesh wants to bring dynamism in textile sector to

face open competition in this sector from 2005.

He said Bangladesh needs more fertiliser factories to meet local demand. "Besides, foreign investors are welcome to invest in this sector as we have sufficient natural gas as raw material for urea."

Stating the history of the State-Owned Enterprises and industrialisation policy as it started with the establishment of EPIDC, the Industries Minister elaborated the metamorphosis of nationalisation in early seventies and then disinvestment since late seventies.

He said most of the SOEs under the Ministry have been disinvested and more are in the process as the government is pursuing the privatisation policy progressively.

He said, "We allow 100 per cent foreign equity and there is no discriminatory policy for public and private sectors and local and foreign investments."

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Appreciating Bangladesh's progress in garments sector, the

Pakistan Commerce and Industry Minister explained their experiences in maintaining the growth in both garments and textile sector.

He said Pakistan is allowing high quality fabrics import and at the same time supporting setting up of quality garments industries to infuse competition to combat the situation after 2004.

Dawood inquired about the Bangladesh position about SAARC cumulation in exporting garments to EU countries with GSP.

Anwar said garment manufacturers and textile owners have different view about SAARC cumulation. He said, we want to improve our textile sector to increase value addition in garments export.

He said Bangladesh has scope to develop small and medium scale industries and sought Pakistan support in this regard.

Jamuna Bank opens branch at Agrabad in Ctg

Jamuna Bank opened its 5th branch at Agrabad in Chittagong on Saturday, says a press release.

Ameer Kashru Mahmaud Chowdhury, Commerce Minister inaugurated the branch as chief guest at a ceremony at the bank premises.

Speaking on the occasion, the Commerce Minister expressed his optimism that Jamuna Bank would contribute significantly to the growth of the economy of the country by mobilising savings, financing the economic activities in different sectors with special emphasis on export sectors, specially in the IT and agricultural sector.

Al-haj M A Khayer, Chairman of the bank, also spoke on the occasion.

Arifur Rahman, Vice-Chairman of the bank, Md Solaiman Khan Majlish, Managing Director and other directors, attended the ceremony.



PHOTO: DTM

Bels-ISSL signs a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with The Bangladesh Monitor on Sunday to act as the official security service provider of the Dhaka Travel Mart-2002. Gr. Captain Najmul H Chowdhury, Director of Bels-ISSL, and Kazi Wahidul Alam, Chairman, DTM-2002 and Editor, The Bangladesh Monitor, ink the MoU on behalf of their respective sides. Sadique Ahsan, President of Guest House Owners Association, Lt. Col. (Retd) Khalid Azam, Director of ISSL, Moinul Hoque, Corporate Coordinator of Bels, and Parijat M. Khan, Marketing Manager of Bels, were also present on the occasion.



PHOTO: JAMUNA BANK

Ameer Kashru Mahmaud Chowdhury, Commerce Minister, inaugurates the 5th branch of Jamuna Bank at Agrabad in Chittagong. Photo also shows Al-haj M A Khayer, Chairman of the bank, other directors and invitees attending the ceremony.