

Dhaka should join like-minded states in new world trade talks

FBCCI-SAARC Chamber seminar told

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh should join the countries sharing common interest, especially SAARC nations, to boost its negotiating strength in the new round of world trade talks, speakers at a city seminar observed yesterday.

Besides, both the public and the private sectors of the country should come forward as soon as possible with agenda that will be placed in the new round of negotiation, the speakers said. The agenda should be aimed at maximisation of benefit and minimisation of cost, the seminar underscored.

The seminar titled "Post Doha WTO Negotiations: Future Strategy for SAARC Countries" was jointly organised by Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) and SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI).

Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury attended the inaugural session of the seminar as the chief guest. Among others, State Minister for Commerce Barkat Ullah Bhulu, Commerce Secretary Suhel Ahmed Choudhury, FBCCI President Yussuf Abdullah Harun and Programme Coordinator of the SCCI Waqar Ahmed addressed the inaugural session of the seminar.

SCCI has been organising a series of seminar on WTO issues and post Doha negotiations in the SAARC countries. Yesterday's seminar was the second of the series. The first one was held in Islamabad on November 28 last year.

A country like Bangladesh has no option but to go by the WTO, the commerce minister said. The government needs input from all the stakeholders of the country before going for post Doha WTO negotiations, the minister added.

"Government alone cannot do this, and private sector has a very strong role to play," the commerce minister said. He also stressed the need for identifying the countries that share common interest with Bangladesh.

Amir Khosru, however, hoped Bangladesh will be able to play a strong role in the WTO. "If we fail to do so, it will create problem for future trade of the country," he said.

Amir Khosru also said the government will set up an international trade institute in the country. The institute will work as a think-tank, besides providing training facility, the commerce minister said.

State Minister for Commerce Barkat Ullah Bhulu observed Bangladesh should pursue duty and quota free access through the new round of negotiation.

In the new round, there are issues that can pose new challenges for Bangladesh and at the same time the issues may create opportunities, said Commerce Secretary Suhel Ahmed Choudhury.

"Whether we will be beneficiary or loser from the future negotiations will depend on how efficiently and effectively we formulate our agenda", he said.

He also informed a full-fledged WTO cell would be operational in the Ministry of Commerce within a year.

The commerce secretary said the FBCCI should have a WTO wing or cell within a short period of time.

FBCCI President Yussuf Abdullah Harun said, "It appears that Bangladesh is simply not ready to accomplish the huge task. Bangladesh, the lone South Asian LDC member, appears alone to fight for its benefits without any regional partner."

Bangladesh should join hands with SAARC countries and ASEAN LDCs to expedite its negotiating strength, he said.

Govt keen to promote renewable energy

UNB, Dhaka

The government wants to support a wide range of activities to promote innovations in energy-efficiency technology through policy, financing and institutional supports.

State Minister for Power Iqbal Hasan Mahmood said this at a donor-assisted workshop here Thursday.

He said the government is keen to promote renewable energy to reduce pressure on the conventional energy sources as well as keep the climate clean.

"Development of alternative environment-friendly energy sources, including renewable energy, will be one of the most challenging and important issues in the years to come," said the power minister.

National Implementation Committee (NIC), in collaboration with the Asian Development Bank (ADB), organised the day-long national workshop on "Promotion of Renewable Energy, Efficiency and Greenhouse Gas Abatement."

The state minister said world energy consumption has been growing at an annual rate of about 2 per cent for almost two centuries while conventional energy sources like coal, oil, natural gas, hydropower and nuclear energy account for about 85 per cent of world energy consumption.

In Bangladesh, 85 per cent of commercial energies are being produced from cheaply available methane gas, which is exhaustible, he added.

NBR asks foreign nationals to have income tax certificates

The National Board of Revenue (NBR) once again has asked the foreign nationals to collect their Income Tax Clearance Certificate (ITCC) or Income Tax Exemption Certificate (ITEC), says a press statement issued by the NBR.

The certificates will be required at the Immigration on the eve of their departure from Bangladesh with effect from April 1, it mentioned.

BTI begins Grand Plaza construction

Building Technology & Ideas Ltd (BTI) has begun construction of The Grand Plaza, says a press release.

President A Q M Badruddoza Chowdhury inaugurated the commencement of construction work of the project.

The design of Grand Plaza has four levels of international standard shopping mall with more than 200 shops and two residential towers consisting of 47 apartments at Bara Moghbazar in the city.

The centrally air-conditioned mall will have modern facilities like escalators, panoramic capsule lift, landscaped atrium, a food court and fully equipped children's play area.

BTI officials are confident that The Grand Plaza would be a new landmark of the city. It will be a successful shopping mall and a prestigious residential address.

Apple launches new iMac in Bangladesh

Apple Computer launched new iMac personal computing machine in Bangladesh yesterday, says a press release.

Launching the new iMac at a function held in the city, Parminder Singh, Apple's Marketing Manager, said, "The new iMac has ushered in the era of flat screen computing, a welcome change from the traditional CRT displays".

According to Amit Maheshwari, Sales Manager of Apple, the new iMac's stunning 15-inch LCD flat screen has high resolution.

Thai trade fair begins in city Sunday

A three-day Thai trade fair -- "Thailand Exhibition 2002", will begin at Sonargaon Hotel on March 31, says a press release.

The government of Thailand has organised the show in a bid to further boost trade ties with Bangladesh.

This fair is scheduled to be open for trade on the first and second days and for public on the concluding day.

Only 1 or 2 foreign banks to help mobilise remittances: Saifur

UNB, Dhaka

An effort to utilise good facilities of foreign banks operating here got a lukewarm response towards helping the government mobilise remittances from abroad as a potential source of financing.

Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman made the effort yesterday, meeting executives of 11 foreign banks at his ministry office to seek their support. Chief executives of nationalised commercial banks were also present.

"Only one or two banks will help us, including Citi Bank NA, other banks have some reservations," Saifur told waiting journalists after

the meeting.

Amid weak foreign exchange reserve and decline in the aid flow, the country is now in its desperate bid to mobilise remittances believed to be sufficient enough to meet the crying need of the country if channeled legally.

However, the forex reserve took upturn very recently following a lacklustre performance for last one year due to some corrective measures taken by the government.

Official sources told UNB that forex reserve rose to \$1.27 billion, as of yesterday, in a turnaround from a billion-dollar mark in a recent plummeting.

A good prop came from remit-

tances that increased 29 per cent to USD 1.6 billion during July-February period of the current fiscal year over last year's equivalent time.

"We want to bring in remittances and the foreign banks have world-wide branches," the minister said. "I think their support will help achieve our target."

He said non-resident Bangladeshis working abroad don't have the facility to send money through legal channels.

"We'll have to bring in the money and utilise within the country. If we can do it, we'll not have to depend on the foreigners, and the development pace will be accelerated," he said.

New products woo crowd at BCS show

MAHBUB ZAMAN

The BCS Computer Show 2002 at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in the city yesterday drew a huge crowd with the fair participants displaying new products.

A wide range of new computer hardware including the latest LCD monitor, hard disk drive, printers, networking equipment and web camera, besides software, developed by local firms, are on display at the weeklong exhibition, which ends on Saturday.

The organisers had to extend the duration of the country's biggest information technology exposition by one hour to 9pm on Tuesday, which coincided with a public holiday on the occasion of the Independence Day, due to heavy rush of visitors.

People of all ages were seen in a long queue in the premise of the newly built splendid conference centre where some 123 firms are showcasing their products.

Apart from local visitors, a number of foreign delegates from the US, Canada, Singapore, Thailand and India are also visiting the ninth BCS show, organisers said.

The video conference and telemedicine session began yesterday and the organisers invited interested people to contact at samity@agni.com for taking part in the session.

Munir Hossain Rana, one of the organisers of the first ever computer fair in Bangladesh in 1985, noted columnist Zakaria Swapan and Global Net Telecommunication employee Farhad took part in the session from New York and shared their experiences with local media men and IT specialists.

The most attractive item in the fair is LCD monitor. Samsung has put three new models of LCD flat and slim monitor on sale. The price of the 15-inch SyncMaster LCD monitor is Tk 24,500 while 17-inch is being offered at Tk 38,500 in the fair.

Spectrum Engineering Consortium Ltd is offering Cornea brand 14-inch LCD monitor at Tk 19,000, the lowest of its kind. The Spectrum is also offering web cam digital camera and modern networking equipment of D-Link brand.

Sharanee Ltd is offering world renowned Seagate's 80 GB (Model:

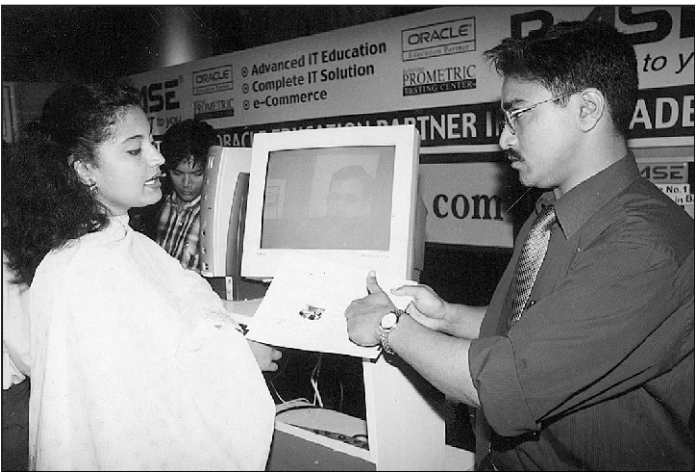


PHOTO: STAR

A visitor (L) makes enquires at a stall at the BCS Computer Show 2002 in the city yesterday.

Barracuda) hard disk drive at Tk 9,400. The Sharanee is also selling palm top computer, which has 8 MB memory, (Brand: PSION Revo) at Tk 19,000.

It also displays 5:1 multi-speed CD duplicator, which can write 5 CDs in three minutes. The duplicator is priced at Tk 1,65,000.

MultiLink International Ltd, which offers five per cent discount for all its products, brings HP desk printer (Model: 656C) at Tk 4500.

JAN Associates is selling Cannon items and other accessories at 20 per cent discount.

International Computer Vision brings mini CD player and super slim hard disk drive.

Local firm Apollo Technologies presents its own touch screen monitor using sensor system and locally made software. The hardware is priced at Tk 2 lakh while the software cost depends on client's requirement.

Sakaime Ltd displays fast and accurate scoring machine that can save time and labour in the computer-based tests like MCQ.

Besides, Internet service providers (ISPs) are offering different attractive packages with rebate price. However, people are not happy with the Internet packages offered in the fair.

"We expected more attractive packages of broadband, radio link and dial up Internet service providers at cheaper rates", a student of American International University said.

In2IT Ltd offers two different web packages for students as well as business organisations. A package of the NETLAAB includes 2-MB web hosting, one domain name registration, sample web site resources and one full service pop e-mail account at only Tk 250.

The other package includes 5-MB web hosting, unique domain registration, ready made sites and 20-hour Internet access at Tk 1500.

Proshika Net also offers packages for the students that include a web site with sufficient memory and a domain-based e-mail address at Tk 800, and a domain name at Tk 600. Besides, the ISP offers 30-MB web hosting at Tk 1700 per year for general people in the fair.

Proshika also gives special tariffs with its Internet registration card and refill card.

Besides, it is also offering special rate in its accounting software that has been customised recently. It also brings a brand new software - Virtual Office.

Global Online is offering radio link dedicated Internet connection for the city's corporate users.

ConnectBD offers different pre-paid services, besides its unlimited browsing facilities at Tk 3000 per month.

Aftab IT Ltd is offering Internet connections for the home users and dedicated broadband connections in lower prices.

BOL Online is offering its I-Kit at Tk 40, besides gift with every purchase of Internet recharge card.



PHOTO: THAI TRADE CENTRE

Picture shows a press conference organised at a city hotel on Wednesday in connection with a three-day Thai trade fair -- "Thailand Exhibition 2002" which will begin at Sonargaon Hotel Sunday.



PHOTO: BTI

President A Q M Badruddoza Chowdhury inaugurates the construction of The Grand Plaza, a project of Building Technology & Ideas Ltd (BTI), at Bara Moghbazar in the city.

Govt plans Myanmar cell at EPB

M SHAMSUR RAHMAN from Yangon

The government is planning to set up a Myanmar cell at the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) for fostering trade with the neighbouring country.

The cell will deal with business activities between Bangladesh and Myanmar, Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury told The Daily Star prior to leaving for Bangladesh, ending his four-day official visit to Myanmar on Wednesday.

During his visit, Khosru met senior ministers of Myanmar and held bilateral talks. He also jointly inaugurated a weeklong

Bangladesh trade fair in Yangon.

The cell will be set up by next month to help resolve the problems especially those relating to border trade, the minister said. "It will also facilitate business with Myanmar and help narrow trade gap which is now largely in favour of Myanmar".

The minister also said purpose of his visit was to explore new markets for Bangladeshi products and improve its export scenario, which is now heading southwards with little sign of improvements in near future.

"So we have decided to give special emphasis on our next door market and for this we have decided to open a cell that will solely deal with the business activities with

Myanmar," the minister said.

The minister quoting figures from the Central Statistical Office of Myanmar and EPB of Bangladesh said in 1995-96, Bangladesh imported goods amounting to US \$ 8.76 million and the export from the country was US \$ 3.3 million. "In 1996-97, our export stood at US \$ 7.89 million while import was US \$ 16.68 million from Myanmar."

"In 1997-98, the export came down to only US \$ 3.58 million, which was only two per cent of the imports of US \$ 68.73 million. In 1998-99, our exports dwindled almost to nil with US \$ 0.58 million against a staggering figure of import of US \$ 172.76 million," the minister said.



Ahmed Iqbal new DSE chairman

BSS, Dhaka

Ahmed Iqbal Hasan has been elected chairman of Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) unopposed for the year 2002.

The election was held at the 40th Annual General Meeting of DSE in the city on Thursday, says a press release.

Chairman of DSE Shafiq Khan presided over the meeting.

Abdul Haque and Khwaja Ghulam Rasul have been elected uncontested Senior Vice-Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the bourse respectively for the same year.