

TISL promises better services

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Thakral Information Systems (TISL), a strategic alliance partner for International Business Machine (IBM) in Bangladesh, yesterday reiterated its commitment to provide better hardware and software services in Bangladesh.

"We in partnership with IBM continue to meet the specialised needs of Bangladeshi organisations such as government, banks, manufacturing companies, telecommunications and education," said Gurumukh Singh Thakral, chairman of TISL, at a press conference held at a city hotel.

TISL Country General Manager Jyoti P Das, Director Ehsanul Habib and other high officials were also present on the occasion.

TISL chairman said business of his company in Bangladesh has been increasing significantly as it continues to deliver world class solutions and launch new initiatives in various areas, particularly in e-business.

About the high price of education services in IBM-ACE—another partner of IBM in Bangladesh, TISL Country General Manager Jyoti P Das said prices are comparatively lower than those of others as IBM partner provides quality education to students so that they can cope with other competitors of the world.

He also said TISL has IBM certified hardware engineers to provide better customer services and has the opportunity to employ IBM engineers if necessary.

STB installs sculpture by S'pore River

As part of the 'People of the River' project taken up by the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) with the support of National Heritage Board (NHB) and Singapore Land Authority (SLA), a sculpture titled 'The River Merchants' has been installed in front of Maybank Tower by the Singapore River.

Sponsored by Maybank "The River Merchants" was inaugurated by Tharman Shanmugaratnam, senior minister of state, Ministry of Trade and Industry and Education, recently, says a press release.

Created by Dr Aw Tee Hong, "The River Merchants" depicts a typical river scene of the old Singapore with one of Singapore's earliest merchants, Alexander Laurie Johnston, interacting with the local merchants, while the coolies load goods onto a bullock cart.

The "People of the River" is spearheaded by STB to bring colour and life back to the Singapore River.

A series of 20 sculptures by local sculptors will be commissioned by the STB together with private sector organisations.

Cisco's net income surges

AFP, San Francisco

Networking giant Cisco on Tuesday reported fourth quarter net income of 772 million dollars, or 10 cents per share, a massive surge over a year earlier when it reported net income of seven million dollars.

The company reported net income of one billion dollars, or 14 cents a share, using internal "pro forma rules." A consensus of Wall Street analysts expected 12 cents per share.

"This was another solid quarter for Cisco, despite the ongoing challenges in the economy," said chief executive John Chambers.

The company said it had net sales for the fourth quarter of 4.8 billion dollars, an uptick from the 4.3 billion dollars in net sales for the same quarter a year earlier.

The company said the long downturn in technology markets, especially among slow-buying corporations, could be nearing an end.

"Enterprise customers continue to be cautious but steady in spending," the company said in a statement, but the Internet service provider sector continues to be "challenged."

Cisco is a bellwether technology company, and even a slight increase in net sales will be heralded as a turnaround for the tech sector.

On a conference call following the earnings release, chief financial officer Larry Carter said both he and Chambers will certify the company's financials for the full fiscal year.

New US laws mandate that company heads certify financial reports, following the accounting debacles at Enron and WorldCom.

REHAB seeks 'proper' policy for high-rise construction

Apartment registration cost rises following new budget

UNB, Dhaka

The country's real estate businessmen yesterday demanded a 'proper' policy for housing, particularly for the construction of high-rise buildings.

They alleged the registration cost of apartment has increased after the passage of new budget.

While exchanging views with newsmen at a city hotel the leaders

of Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh (REHAB) put forward some other demands.

REHAB President Dr Towfiq M Seraj said although their contribution in GDP is 12-15 per cent, the authorities were not paying any attention to this sector.

The suspension of the activities of land development, increase in valuation of land and absence of

policy in construction of high-rise building are among their major problems, he said.

The REHAB suggested the authorities to relax the existing rules for constructing high-rise buildings and repeal of the decision to raise the price of government lands and plots.

It demanded withdrawal of VAT on land owners, introduction of "one window service" for construc-

tion of high-rise buildings and approval of commercial plans of REHAB members.

The REHAB leadership also demanded that RAJUK should only work as a regulatory body, but should not be allowed to sell plots.

It would not only deprive most of the people of getting plots in a subsidised price, but in the long run increase price of apartments, REHAB observed.

IMF calls for more flexible exchange rate

BSS, Dhaka

International Monetary Fund (IMF) recommended Bangladesh adopt a more flexible exchange rate policy as the present fixed yet adjustable exchange rate regime is a costly way to keep inflation low.

In its recent country report, IMF said with the continued public sector deficits being financed by domestic borrowing the achievements on inflation have come at the cost of a declining level of international reserves and increased recourse to administrative controls to support the regime.

"A lower reserve position has

substantially reduced the authorities' ability to defend the peg and render the country more vulnerable to external shocks," the report said.

IMF report pointed out that the more flexible exchange policy would bring about many advantages. It would depoliticise the determination of the exchange rate and ensure quick adjustment of the exchange rate to market developments, provide a role for monetary policy in macroeconomic management and enhance the ability of the authorities to address external shocks in a timely manner.

The reports also said that the flexible exchange policy would provide appropriate signals for the

generation and allocation of savings and the conduct of monetary policy and stem the loss of international reserves thereby reducing the need to rely on distortions to address balance of payments problems.

IMF report also argued that Bangladesh's low export diversification also suggested advantages in shifting to greater flexibility in its exchange rate system. "As exports are concentrated heavily on ready-made garments and a few primary commodities, such as cotton and jute, the country is vulnerable to terms-of-trade shocks in the context of a pegged exchange rate regime," it said.

Prime Bank, Uttara Finance sign investment agreement

An investment facility agreement between Prime Bank Limited and Uttara Finance and Investments Limited was signed the bank's head office yesterday, says a press release.

Prime Bank Limited sanctioned both funded and non-funded investment facilities to Uttara Finance and Investments Limited for extending lease finance, the release said.

Shah Md Nurul Alam, managing director of Prime Bank Limited, and Sayyed Husain Jamal, managing director of Uttara Finance and Investments Limited, signed the agreement on behalf of the respective organisations.

M Shahjahan Bhuiyan, additional managing director, Md Motior Rahman, SEVP, Shafiqul Alam, EVP, Md Rafiqul Islam, EVP, Md Golam Rabbani, SAVP, Md Touhidul Alam Khan, AVP of Prime Bank Limited, and SM Shamsul Arefin, SVP of Uttara Finance and Investments Limited, were present in the signing ceremony.

TIC appreciates Bangladeshi trainees

BSS, Tokyo

Bangladeshi trainees have earned high appreciation from the authorities of Tokyo International Centre (TIC), one of the world's leading training institutes for foreigners on human resources development.

"The participants from Bangladesh are very good in terms of their academic interest, sincerity, discipline, scoring and some other required criteria," Managing Director of TIC Kenji Iwaguchi told the news agency here recently.

The TIC, one of the 15 training institutes of Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) located at Nishihara here, has been providing training for more than 10,000 participants each year from 122 countries of the world.

Late King Birendra of Nepal had taken a four-month training at TIC when he was the Crown Prince of the Himalayan Kingdom.

Bangladesh is one among the privileged countries which are sending their citizens every year for specialised training under JICA sponsorship in Japan. Last year, 225 Bangladeshis were trained only in the TIC. This year an equal number of Bangladeshis will be trained in same institute, TIC sources said.

Last month 30 scholars from Bangladesh arrived in Japan for their higher studies at different universities under Japan Development Studies (JDS) programme. Besides, a 29-member youth delegation under JICA's Youth Invention Programme had just concluded their training at TIC and some other places in Japan that include Osaka, Nagano, Chiba and Komagane.

Another 26 have also left Bangladesh for Japan under Group Training Course of JICA, of whom 13 will be trained in TIC. Ten more Bangladeshis, who have already been selected, are likely to arrive in Japan soon, sources said.

This year's youth training programme was basically focused on Japanese small and medium enterprises (SMEs) as well as lives of Japanese people, their language and culture. Youths aged under 35 from different business associations, BSCIC, insurance institutions, EPB, Tea Board and national news agency BSS took part in the more than three-week training programme.

"There is no quota system in TIC, but the performance of previous year for every country is being considered," said Kenji San. He, however, said TIC is likely to introduce quota system in its operation due to ongoing economic recession in Japan.



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India readies new energy conservation blueprint

International meet in Delhi Aug 23-24

AFP, New Delhi

India will unveil a new blueprint for energy conservation at a global meeting to be held in the Indian capital later this month, Power Minister Suresh Prabhu said Wednesday.

"An action plan has been prepared to conserve the maximum energy in the shortest time and will be unveiled at the meeting," Prabhu told reporters here.

The meeting entitled "Energy Conservation in the New Millennium" will be held on August 23-24 and is being jointly hosted by the government and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), a nodal body of Indian industry.

The conference will be inaugurated by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee.

"At least 10 major countries and several private companies will be attending," the minister said without

naming them.

Prabhu said India has recently enacted a new energy conservation act which he said was the "most comprehensive such law anywhere in the world".

Provisions like energy audits, energy labelling and managing the demand would be part of the new action plan, he added.

"However, this (law) is not going to be a coercive step. Energy conservation would be done through a self-regulatory mechanism," Prabhu said.

The first step towards energy conservation must be taken by the government itself which is a big consumer of power in the country, he said.

"Charity must begin at home so we have decided that the government of India will be the first to initiate steps to conserve energy in government buildings both in New Delhi and the state capitals," Prabhu said.

Asked if the government may

consider altering the Indian Standard Time (IST) so as to have more than one time zone, the minister said while this was not under consideration, the government was consulting experts and states on changing office timings in accordance with the regions.

"We are evaluating how to match profiles with power load," he said. "For instance, the sunset timings in the east are different from west, so what more can be done, we are evaluating it."

Demand for power in India is steadily rising by eight per cent per annum and it was this "demand supply gap" that was targeted to be bridged by saving energy, the minister said.

It is estimated that the country needs an investment of around 200 billion dollars to generate new power capacity of 100,000 MW to meet the spiralling demand.

Stress on SMEs to boost export

FBCCI-ADB roundtable held

BSS, Dhaka

Experts at a roundtable here Tuesday pleaded for strong support towards capacity building and steady financial backing for the small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to help them emerge as a potential export sector.

They referred to existing problems being faced by the SMEs in different areas, including institutional and expertise developments. This sector, they said, must be developed with all modern facilities through specific programme-oriented guidelines in the greater interest of national economy.

The Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) and Asian Development Bank (ADB) jointly organised the roundtable with FBCCI President Yussuf Abdullah Harun in the chair. ADB's senior financial expert Dr Dean Velasco presented a key-note paper focusing on long-term strategy for the development of SMEs in Bangladesh.

Experts and chamber leaders, who participated in the discussion, included Al-Husseini, Muhammad Yunus, Shamsuddoha, Prof. Masuda M Rashid Chowdhury, Abdul Huq, Dr Najmul Hussain and ADB's senior consultant Dr Victor Byarios. FBCCI members and other

business leaders were present at the roundtable.

The key-note speaker touched upon strategic issues and potential response initiatives for SMEs with focus on expanding its export base. "Poverty reduction needs more determined action in various fronts in Bangladesh, ranging from immediate interventions to safety nets by creating jobs through investing in human resource development for a long term benefit in the economy," he said.

Referring to the vastness of SMEs in Bangladesh, Yussuf Abdullah Harun called for establishing a broad-based institution involving the government, private sector and the NGOs to eventually develop it as a foreign currency earner. "The main base of the economies of countries like Japan and Italy is SMEs and we can also gradually switch over to this sector by building its capacity," he said.

The experts said the SMEs in Bangladesh could not flourish to its full potential due to many problems, including limited capital base and the sector had failed to draw the attention of formal financing institutions. They called for identifying specific targets to remove the impediments in capital formation as well as export expansion of the sector.

UK monarch to award Greenspan with honorary knighthood

AFP, London

Queen Elizabeth II is to award Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan with an honorary knighthood for helping to steady the global economy, Britain said Tuesday.

But the powerful US central bank chief must refrain from calling himself "Sir Alan" because he is not a British citizen, said a statement released by the Treasury in London.

Instead, he may place the letters KBE -- for Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire -- after his name.

"The award is in recognition of his outstanding contribution to global economic stability and the benefit that the UK has received from the wisdom and skill with which he has led the US Federal Reserve Board," the Treasury said.

Greenspan, 76, will pick up the award when he is next in Britain, it said.

"I am most privileged to accept this honor," Greenspan said in separate statement.

"I have valued my close relationships with the Bank of England and with many chancellors of the exchequer, going back nearly 30 years."

The Federal Reserve boss joins fellow US recipients of the award such as ET film director Steven Spielberg, comedian Bob Hope, Gulf war veteran General Norman Schwarzkopf, and former president George Bush.

ASEAN car manufacturers make strong recovery

AFP, Bangkok

Southeast Asia's major car producers have emerged from the regional financial crisis stronger and with a promising future, according to a new report by market researcher Automotive ResourcesAsia.

"Crushing setbacks during the financial crisis have produced a stronger, more resilient ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) automotive industry," ARA's director of market research John Bonnell said.

"ASEAN's recovery is a good example of the Phoenix affect," he said, referring to the mythical bird which rose from the ashes.

The report forecast production by Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia

and the Philippines to grow to two million vehicles by 2006. Volume rose from 465,000 in 1998 -- in the midst of the regional crisis -- to 1.28 million last year.

Thailand was leading the region's recovery, with production of 459,000 vehicles in 2001, representing 36 per cent of the region's total, the report said.

It found that exports were driving the industry, with ASEAN shipping more than 250,000 cars and trucks to global markets last year. Export volume is expected to climb close to 600,000 vehicles by 2006, with Thailand contributing some 500,000.

As Japanese producers Toyota and Isuzu move their pick-up truck production base to Thailand over the next few years, Thailand was

expected to lead other ASEAN producers by assembling 940,000 vehicles -- or 48 per cent of regional production -- in 2006, the report said.

Thailand has become a Southeast Asian manufacturing base for several global automakers over the past few decades, due to its central geographical position, good infrastructure, generous tax and legal incentives, and a supply of equipment and spare parts.

Japanese automakers Toyota and Nissan pioneered the industry in the 1960s and 1970s, and were joined in the 1990s by US firms General Motors and Ford and Europe's BMW.

The ARA report also found that regional demand was gradually recovering.

US tries to scupper HR lawsuit against Exxon

AFP, Washington

The US State Department attempted Tuesday to scupper a human rights lawsuit brought by a group of Indonesian villagers against oil giant Exxon Mobil on the basis that hearing the case would be bad for business.

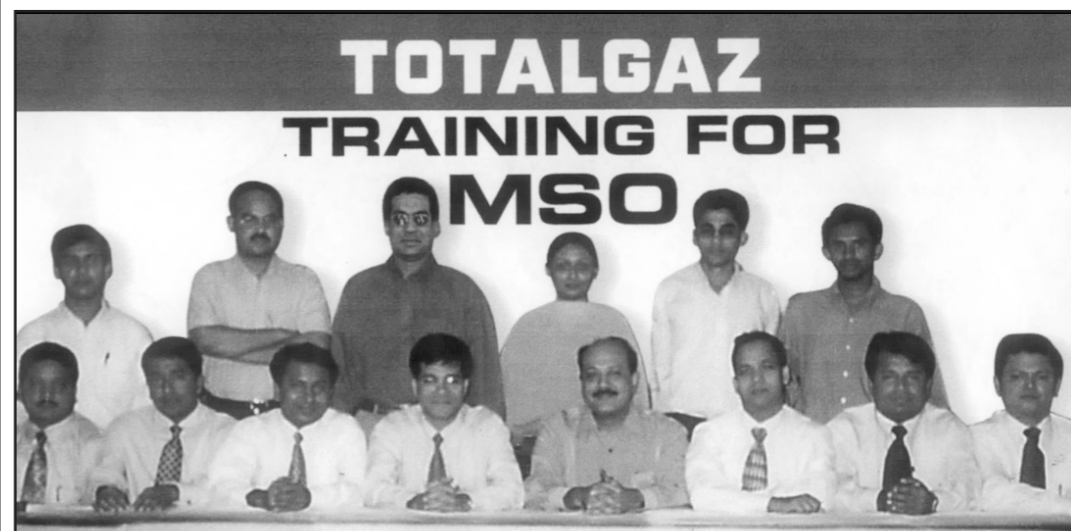
Villagers from the violence-torn Aceh region claim Indonesian

security forces bankrolled by Exxon Mobil to protect their gasfields had committed human rights violations against local people.

In a statement to the court, the State Department noted that "increasing opportunities for US business abroad was an important aspect of US foreign policy" and warned that hearing the case could "prejudice the government of

Indonesia and Indonesian businesses against US firms bidding on contracts in extractive and other industries."

Ajudication of the lawsuit would also risk "a serious adverse impact on significant interests of the United States, including interests related directly to the ongoing struggle against international terrorism," the statement said.



TOTALFINA-ELF group, a leading oil company in the world, organised a 'MSO (Mobile Sales Officer) Training and Orientation Programme' at a city hotel recently. Picture shows MM Siddiqui, marketing manager of TOTAL GAZ, Shakib Lohani, managing director of Casandra Ltd, and Meer Mahmud Habib, director of Casandra Ltd, among other senior executives, at the seminar.