

Int'l trade fair in Natore from tomorrow

UNB, Natore

A three-week International Industry and Trade fair begins here on Wednesday (tomorrow).

Commerce Minister Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury will formally inaugurate the fair, first of its kind in the district, at Kanaikhal play-ground in the town at 10am.

Natore Chamber of Commerce and Industries (NCCI) and Mini Industries Development Services (MIDAS) have jointly organised the fair.

A total of 80 pavilions were set up in the fair ground, and over 50 organisations from home and abroad including, Iran and Pakistan, will take part in the fair, organisers said.

Repo auction

UNB, Dhaka

The repurchase agreement (Repo) auction of Bangladesh Bank for commercial banks and financial institutions was held here yesterday.

Thirteen bids of one-day tenure amounting to Tk 346.75 crore were received and accepted.

The rates of interest against the accepted bids ranged from 8.60 to 8.50 per cent per annum, said a Bangladesh Bank press release.

DHL wins Asia logistics awards

DHL made it three-out-of-three by cleaning-up at the Asia Logistics Awards and the Singapore Advertising Hall of Fame Awards recently, says a press release.

On one night, in two cities, DHL was named 'Express Operator of the Year', won a prize for 'People Development' and won the International Print Campaign of the Year award for their '3 Red Lines Brand' campaign.

DHL received the 'Express Operator of the Year Award' at the Asia Logistics Awards ceremony, for the reliability of their extensive network throughout the Asia Pacific region.

DHL was commended for its unique understanding of the local markets in the region, affirming their leadership position in the air express and logistics services in Asia.

Operators were also assessed on their delivery guarantees and their customer service, for which DHL's superior product and service quality have been noted as outstanding.

DHL also received an award for 'People Development', in which voters were asked to assess how companies encouraged young people to get involved in the logistics and supply chain management industries.

DHL was singled out as having adopted a singular policy of recruiting, training and promoting young people through various programmes that encouraged young people to come forward for a career in their industry.

DHL's dedication to internal staff through its recruitment, training and reward schemes has set the standard for the industry and the company continues to be the most innovative in the industry.

Agrani Bank confce held

A conference of the officers and members of the staff of Agrani Bank Principal Branch was held at the branch in the city on Thursday, says a press release.

Managing Director A S M Imdadul Haque and Deputy Managing Director Muhammad Abdul Matin attended the conference as chief guest and special guest respectively.

General Manager in charge of Principal Branch Md Humayun Kabir presided over the conference.

Speaking on the occasion, the chief guest said some changes in system have been brought about in order to enhance dynamism in the overall activities of Agrani Bank and the bank has begun to have the positive result of the initiative.

The special guest said all should try to represent principal branch as a model to other branches of Agrani Bank.

General Manager Md Humayun Kabir in his speech said 6 more branches would be brought under WAN immediately and 100 more branches would be computerised by June.

GSM operators in South Asia form alliance

Bid to provide cost-effective services

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Leading GSM cellular phone operators of South Asian countries yesterday officially formed an alliance titled 'South Asia GSM Operators Forum' to provide cost-effective services to subscribers in the region.

The forum will also work to harness appropriate resources from within and outside the region for making the resources available for the GSM operators in the region so that the operators may provide improved services to the peoples.

Representatives of a number of GSM (global system of mobile communications) mobile phone operators from the South Asian region announced the formation of the forum at a press conference at a

city hotel.

"GSM operators of the region felt a definite need for forming a forum of South Asian GSM operators for the mutual benefit of the member operators as well as their subscribers," Mehboob Chowdhury, chairman of the steering committee of the new forum told, The Daily Star.

He said the forum will facilitate cooperation among the GSM operators of the South Asian countries and will identify the needs and project a common or unified agenda in various international forums.

The operators disclosed their objectives in a declaration titled 'Dhaka Declaration of the South Asia GSM Operators Meet 2003'. Umang Das, chairman of GSM India, read out the declaration while JM Mishara, MTNL-India, KM

George, BPL-innovision-India, KVP Baskaran of Aircel-India, Praveen Sharma, MTNL-India, Shankar Halder, vice-chairman of GSM India, Asma Khan, Mobilink-Pakistan, Rifath Mohammad of Bhiraagu-Maldives, among others, attended the press conference.

The forum will represent the common regional interest of South Asian operators in GSM Association, International Telecommunications Union (ITU) and other international forums and bodies.

The forum will also represent the common regional interest with the major vendors or suppliers of infrastructure, handset, SIM card, recharge cards and recharge loading methodologies and content providers for various value added

services.

Mehboob Chowdhury of GrameenPhone Ltd was unanimously elected the chairman of the steering committee for the next one-year period with provision for re-election for another term.

The meeting decided that there will be two representatives from each member country in the steering committee.

The meeting decided to form four working groups on different issues of mutual interest. The steering committee will appoint four working groups on technology and vendor issues, value added services and application package development, regulatory and licensing issues, and customer delivery.



PHOTO: STAR

GSM India Chairman Umang Das (2nd from L) speaks at a press briefing held after the First South Asian GSM Operators Meet 2003 ended in the city yesterday. Mehboob Chowdhury of GrameenPhone Ltd (3rd from left) is also seen.

News Analysis

Crucial economic content on India's regional agenda

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

India seems to have positioned itself for giving a significant economic content to its diplomacy to strengthen relations with its neighbours.

Economics as the buzzword of foreign policy for South Asia was clearly signalled by External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha at a seminar organised by Dhaka-based Centre for Policy Dialogue last week.

Sinha set out the parameters of this new vision by offering India's readiness to enter free trade with SAARC countries and harmonization of tariffs among the member-countries to break the ice in economic cooperation of the region.

Analysts here say Sinha's speech at the seminar indicated things, which are not beyond redemption, and trade and economics could provide the way out of the

current morass in SAARC.

India has already offered free trade to ASEAN and is waiting for its formalization with Thailand and Singapore at a bilateral level. India is also considering similar arrangement with Mexico and South Africa besides expansion of free trade agreement with Sri Lanka.

The big question is whether Sinha with the right perspective as a Finance Minister will be able to put through his economic diplomacy.

Economics, New Delhi seems to be signaling, is clearly the way out for SAARC to chart a course different and more meaningful than the one witnessed in the last two decades or so.

In fact, India has made its attendance in SAARC summit in Pakistan conditional to meaningful progress in economic cooperation among the member-countries, especially in the area of free trade.

Analysts here say New Delhi's

emphasis on economic diplomacy could help usher in a positive phase in ties with Bangladesh and Nepal, if not Pakistan.

For instance, India could provide a greater market access to products from Bangladesh and Nepal and go a long way in promoting economic integration in South Asian region, say analysts.

But does the Indian Commerce Ministry share Sinha's vision of economic diplomacy? There are hopes that a reform-savvy Arun Shourie, now in charge of Commerce portfolio in the absence of Murali Manan undergoing treatment in the USA, could take a bold initiative in toning up the regional economic scenario.

But what Sinha also made clear at the seminar is that both Bangladesh and Pakistan must recognize India's security concerns before New Delhi could go for pursuing its economic diplomacy.

Global Online launches 'serveU'

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Internet service provider (ISP) Global Online Services Limited, a Texas Group company, yesterday formally launched 'serveU' to ensure 24 hours customers' connectivity with smoother uninterrupted services.

The system scans the performance of clients using Global's ISP every two minutes. If performance level exceeds threshold value, it automatically generates an audio alarm to draw attention of the concerned engineers.

Internet Communication Gateway (ICG) Branch Connect, a corporate solution, was also launched yesterday by Stitel Technologies, another Texas Group company.

The solution is an Internet telephony gateway that integrates seamlessly into the company's data network and operates alongside the existing PBXs or other phone equipment to simply extend voice capabilities to remote locations over a data network.

This is for multi-location corporate houses who want to reduce toll charges between frequently called sites.

Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) Chairman Syed Marghub Morshed was present as chief guest on the occasion.

Bangladesh Computer Samity (BCS) President Sabur Khan, Internet Service Provider Association of Bangladesh (ISPAB) President Aktaruzzaman Manju and Texas Group Chairman Syed Faruque Ahmed were also present on the occasion.

Indonesia says tourism on track to recovery after Bali bombing

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Indonesia's tourism industry, battered by the October 12 bombing on Bali island, is on track to recover by the end of the year, Tourism Minister I Gede Ardika said Monday.

Ardika said tourists were slowly returning to Bali three months after the blast that killed 190 people and led to a 75 per cent drop in tourist arrivals and more than a 50 per cent decline in hotel occupancy.

Last month, tourist arrivals to Bali surged to 63,270, almost double the 32,296 in November, but still trailing the 91,939 recorded in October, he said.

"Indications show that we are on the right track to recovery," he told reporters after a dialogue with Malaysian tour operators and airline representatives.

"By the end of 2003, the government of Indonesia hopes that the tourism industry would return to normal and be ready to expand."

Tourism is the country's second largest source of revenue after oil and gas.

Before the Bali blast, Ardika said Indonesia had forecast tourist arrivals in 2002 to hit 5.4 million and contribute 5.4 billion dollars to the economy, based on an average 10-day stay and spending of 100 dollars per person per day.

The figure was later revised to 4.3-4.5 million visitors but Ardika said the government found the situation "was not as bad" as expected.



PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Kids crowd a stall at the 12th BCS Computer Show at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in the city yesterday.

Computer show woos huge crowd amid chilly weather

HAHIDUL HAQUE

In spite of the chilly weather, the second day of the 12th BCS Computer Show 2003 witnessed a huge crowd at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in the city yesterday.

According to the fair authority as many as ten thousand visitors including three hundred students from different schools of the city visited the fair.

Various computer firms are offering gifts and concession on purchase of different computer products in the fair.

Several companies have brought many new products on the occasion of the exposition. Of them, 3.06 Giga Hz Intel Pentium four processor was sold at Tk 45,000 yesterday. Gateway motherboard was also found at a price of Tk two to three thousand in the fair.

An Internet service provider (ISP), Global Online Services Limited, a Texas Group company launched 'serveU' to ensure 24 hours customers' connectivity with smoother and uninterrupted services.

Internet Communication Gateway (ICG) Branch Connect, a corporate solution, was also launched yesterday by Stitel Technologies, another Texas Group company.

Focus Future Works launched 'Aj Amer Chuti'-a multimedia CD for the children. Foreign Affairs Minister M Morshed Khan was present at the launching ceremony.

A seminar on 'necessity of broadband connection throughout the country' was also held at the seminar hall of the fair.

The existing barriers and their possible solutions were discussed at the seminar.

Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) Chairman Syed Marghub Morshed was present as chief guest, while Science and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Secretary Karar Mahmudul Hassan was present as special guest at the seminar.

Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Service (BASIS) President Habibullah N Karim and Internet Service Provider Association of Bangladesh (ISPAB) President Aktaruzzaman Manju were also present.

A programming contest will be held at the fair venue today. Thirty teams from city's different schools and colleges are expected to participate in the contest. A demo version of the contest was held at the fair venue yesterday.

A seminar on 'Bridging the Digital Divide: Application of ICT in Bangladesh Perspective' will be held today at 10 am in the seminar

hall. The seminar will be telecast 'live' at www.baishakhi.tv and www.ranks-bd.net.

European Union (EU) will also organise a seminar today at 5 pm at the same place.

116 computer firms from home and abroad are participating in this year's exhibition. The firms include software developer companies, hardware sales firms, Internet Service Providers (ISPs), information technology based magazines and other firms.

Some foreign companies from Asian-Oceanian Computing Industry Organisation (ASOCIO) and World Information Technology Services Alliance (WITSA) are also taking part in this exposition.

European Union (EU) has taken a stall in the exhibition for the first time to promote Bangladeshi IT sector in the international arena.

'BCS ICT scholarship' for poor and meritorious students will be formed with some portion of the entrance fee.

The entrance fee has been fixed at Tk 20. But students of various schools and colleges can enter the fair free, provided they have prior permission from the authority.

The seven-day show remains open from 10 am to 8 pm everyday and will conclude on Saturday.

Tk 210 crore BSCIC park in Munsiganj on the cards

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC) has ventured a Tk 210 crore plan to set up an industrial park near the capital.

The proposed "Shilpa Pali" will be set up on about 400 acres of land along Dhaka-Chittagong Highway at Gazaria, Munsiganj, 37-km southeast of Dhaka city.

BSCIC will develop the land and make industrial plots available to entrepreneurs with all facilities and utility connections, including gas, electricity, telecommunication and water, within three years of beginning of the project.

BSCIC Chairman MA Mannan yesterday presented the project proposal to Industries Minister MK Anwar and explained site selection procedure, break-up of estimated cost and prospects of the cost.

Leaders of various trade chambers and industrial associations were present at that time at the Industries Ministry's conference room.

The state-owned corporation for promotion of small enterprises would welcome private partnership in its venture for industrial park, the Chairman said.

The proposal was conceived on the advice of National Council of Industrial Development (NCID), the

highest industrial policy-making body headed by the Prime Minister.

The Industries Minister said viewing the problems often faced by private entrepreneurs in developing land for industries, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia had asked Industries Ministry to opt for having its own industrial parks with all facilities for use of private sector.

He advised the BSCIC to discuss modalities of the project implementation with the private sector people. BGMEA President Kutubuddin and representatives from FBCCI and other trade bodies appreciated the initiative and extended their full support in its implementation.

High import tariffs

Thailand may lose huge foreign investment

THE NATION/ ANN

Thailand could lose as much as \$140 billion a year in foreign investment as the country's comparatively high import tariffs prompt investors to shift their focus to other Asean countries, the Federation of Thai Industries warns.

The federation has urged the government to put pressure on Asean members to cut import duties in line with the Asean Free Trade Area (Afta) agreement, and to cap all local tariffs at no more than 10 per cent to help Thai producers compete with Asean rivals.

Other Asean members are

poised to win shares of Thailand's domestic and export markets if Thai manufacturers lose their competitive advantage due to high production costs, the federation said.

Its vice chairman Chavalit Nimla-or said recently that the federation and the Finance Ministry had agreed tariff reductions under the Afta agreement would boost the chances of Thai investors and exporters to expand into other Asean markets.

"Whether the tariff cut will really benefit Thai operators depends on government efforts to speed up dialogue and encourage all Asean members to comply with the agreement," he added. Thai operators

must be prepared to take advantage of tariff privileges, he said.

At the same time, Chavalit said, the country's whole customs-tariff structure should be harmonised with tariffs under the Afta framework and the bilateral and multilateral trade agreements the government has negotiated with other nations.

The federation has also urged the government to accelerate tariff cuts on 4,000 remaining products by early 2003 to maintain domestic markets. If the new tariff structure is delayed, Thai operators may be hurt, owing to import tariff differentials.