

Dhaka urges Congressmen to back free market access bill

US Trade Show 2005 opens

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan yesterday urged American Congressmen to back a bill in US Congress seeking duty-free market access of products from Bangladesh and 13 other least developed countries (LDCs) to the US.

The bill titled "Trade Relief Assistance for Developing Economies (TRADE)" was scheduled to be placed in the lower chamber of the Congress Wednesday. It was introduced in the US Senate on January 26 this year.

Having inaugurated the US Trade Show 2005 in Dhaka, the foreign minister said Bangladesh

will ink Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (Tifa) with United States soon to promote trade and investment.

The Tifa draft has been finalised after last leg of negotiations in Dhaka that ended on Tuesday setting stage for a platform to talk trade issues with the world's largest economy.

"The trade relation between our two nations is deepening," the foreign minister said referring to developments in Tifa and duty free access bill.

American Chamber of Commerce in Bangladesh (AmCham) and US Embassy in Bangladesh have jointly organised the 14th edition of the three-day US

Trade Show 2005 at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel. US Ambassador Harry K Thomas was present at the opening function.

Morshed said US has a big prospective market here as acceptance of foreign goods and services among Bangladeshi consumers is highest in the region.

"Even though we have trade deficit, we have a liberal import policy. Bangladesh has most liberal trade and investment policy in South Asia region," Morshed Khan said.

Speaking at the function, US envoy said American products are of highest quality in the world at an affordable price. Pointing at about \$2 billion trade imbalance with

Bangladesh, he said, "we must redouble our efforts to bridge the trade gap."

Bangladesh enjoys a favourable position in trade with US. In 2003-04 US exported \$281 million worth of products to Bangladesh, while it imported \$2.3 billion, making a more than \$2 billion trade deficit. US is also the largest investor in Bangladesh, with a total investment topping \$1.4 billion.

He said the Bangladesh Road Show to be held in big US cities in May will help Bangladeshi businesses find trading and joint investment partners.

AmCham President Aftab ul Islam said this year's exhibition will

be the largest US trade show ever held in Bangladesh.

"The number of participants has increased by 10 percent this year as more American companies are showing interest in Bangladesh market. A total of 75 exhibitors occupying 124 booths will take part in the exhibition," he said.

The show will remain open between 10:00am and 8:00pm from February 16 to February 18. The entry fee is fixed at Tk 10.

AmCham Vice-President Andrew Fawthrop and Executive Director A Gafur and officials of participating US companies were also present at the inaugural ceremony.



PHOTO: STAR

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan and US Ambassador in Dhaka Harry K Thomas inaugurate the three-day US Trade Show 2005 at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel yesterday. AmCham President Aftab ul Islam, Vice-President Andrew Fawthrop and Executive Director A Gafur are also seen.

BGMEA election today

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The biennial election of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) for the 2005-06 term will be held today.

A total of 2,227 voters will exercise their franchise to elect 20 new directors from Dhaka zone and seven from Chittagong zone at Dhaka and Chittagong offices respectively.

The voting in both the zones will start simultaneously at 8 am and continue until 4 pm without any break.

Three major groups of BGMEA are participating in the election under a common panel.

Annisul Huq, incumbent president of BGMEA, is the leader of Forum, Tipu Munshi, is the leader of a faction of Sammilito Parishad while SM Fazlul Hoque is the leader of another faction of Simmlito Parishad.

As per an understanding among these groups, Forum has 12 candidates, Sammilito Parishad (Tipu Munshi) 10 contestants and Sammilito Parishad (Fazlul Hoque) has 5 candidates in the 27-member executive committee of BGMEA.

Leaders of the three groups introduced the members of the common panel at a joint projection meeting on February 14 in Dhaka.

According to the consensus, a leader from each of the three groups will alternatively work as the president of the country's largest trade body for an eight-month tenure. Forum leader Annisul Huq will run the BGMEA in the first eight months, Tipu Munshi will be the president for the second eight months while Fazlul Hoque will lead in the third eight months in the two-year term.

The BGMEA election commission on January 29, the last date of withdrawing nominations, finalised a list of 75 eligible candidates to contest in the polls as top leaders of these three groups could not reach a consensus till then.

Bangladesh's economic gains not adequately appreciated

Saifur tells EU parliament leaders

BSS, Brussels

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman has told the leaders in European Parliament that the achievements of the Bangladesh economy, despite tremendous odds, are not often adequately appreciated.

Talking to the Vice President of the European Parliament Mr. Gerard Onesta on Tuesday the minister pointed out that Bangladesh has a vibrant political culture and has come a long way in the last 15 years in consolidating its institutions.

Regarding a query about corruption in Bangladesh, the minister said we have a free press with no government control on their reporting

freedom. The biased and one-sided reporting of the free media is unfairly critical of the government.

He wondered how Bangladesh could meet all its international debt servicing obligations so regularly if there were rampant corruption in the country.

"Obviously, the focus is misplaced," the minister briefed Onesta. Rahman also explained government policies towards minorities in the country, alleged religious extremism and successfully clarified the misconceptions in the minds of the European parliamentarians.

Answering to a query on women issues by one member of European parliament the minister said Bangladesh can boast of tremen-

dous progress in education of girl children, participation of women in civil society and bureaucracy.

In this context he said Bangladesh has already met three of the related United Nations millennium development goals much ahead of the target year of 2015.

The briefing was participated by Neena Gill, Robert Evans and Nirj Deva who are influential members of European Parliament with responsibilities of Saarc and South Asian issues as well as development cooperation issues.

Later, the minister had an extensive meeting with Dr. Benita Ferrero-Waldner, European commissioner for External Relations and Neighborhood policies.

Bangla-Denmark joint venture launched

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

AdPeople, a subsidiary of PeopleGroup of Denmark, and Adcomm Ltd of Bangladesh jointly launched GraphicPeople, an export-oriented firm which will work on desktop publishing and pre-press printing.

Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Moudud Ahmed inaugurated the firm at Gulshan in Dhaka on Tuesday.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, the minister said desktop publishing has become an important area of business in Bangladesh.

Ambassador of Denmark to Bangladesh Niels Severin Munk, Geetara Safiya Choudhury and Nazim Farhan Choudhury of Adcomm Ltd, Jan Duckert, Ronnie Job and Peter Schmidt of AdPeople and Rasmus Brix Dall, managing director of GraphicPeople, were also present at the function.

GP corporate users to get stock report thru' SMS

GrameenPhone's corporate subscribers will receive information such as sales report and stock report through SMS.

An agreement to this effect was signed recently between the mobile phone operator and software company Business Automation Ltd, the provider of the service, known as SMSPlus, says a press release.

The software company will be responsible for the SMSPlus software installation and sales services.

Rubaba Dowla Matin, deputy general manager (Market Research) of GrameenPhone, and Shobeb Ahmed Masud, director (marketing) of Business Automation Ltd, signed the agreement on behalf of their organisations.

StanChart posts 39pc rise in annual profits

AFP, London

Standard Chartered, the British-based emerging markets bank, posted a 39-percent rise in annual pretax profits Wednesday and said its recent acquisition, Korea First Bank, would be an engine driving the group's growth in earnings.

Pretax profit rose to 2.158 billion dollars (1.658 billion euros) in 2004 compared with 1.550 billion a year earlier.

The figure was above analysts' consensus forecast for pretax profit of 2.10 billion dollars.

"I am delighted to be reporting on another successful year for Standard Chartered," chairman Bryan Sanderson said in a statement accompanying the results.

"We have demonstrated our ability to drive good revenue growth and continue our strong profit momentum. At the same time, we have achieved a number of significant acquisitions and alliances that will enable us to expand in key markets and products."

The group's annual results came a month after Standard Chartered expanded its foothold in Asia with a deal to buy Korea First Bank for 3.3 billion dollars in cash.

Prospect of shrimp brightens further as fry export begins

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sathkira

Prospect of Bangladeshi shrimps brightens further as a local company yesterday started exporting fry to India.

The first consignment of 10 lakh shrimp fry produced by a Cox's Bazar hatchery was sent to India through Bhomra land port.

Abul Kashem, an official of exporting company Modern Hatchery's Sathkira office, said an

expert team from India's Ata Export Company earlier came to Bangladesh to test the shrimp fry.

Finding quality of the fry satisfactory, the expert team gave green signal for import. After getting report, the Indian company opened letter of credit (L/C) to import 10 crore shrimp fry from Modern Hatchery.

Shrimp fry export from Bangladesh is the first of its kind and it will raise hope for many shrimp fry

producing hatcheries in the country, sources said.

Shrimp fry may fetch a huge amount of foreign currency and also create jobs for many unemployed youths in the country. Bangladesh usually exports adult shrimps in the form of frozen food items to the US and European markets.

Frozen food is Bangladesh's second largest export earning sector, which fetched about \$370 million in 2003-2004.

Reverse declining trend in German aid to Bangladesh

Foreign minister urges Germany

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh yesterday requested Germany to reverse the declining trend in German assistance to this country, given its investment needs and international obligations to the Millennium Development Goals (MDG).

"We hope the recent declining trend in German assistance to Bangladesh will be reversed," Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan said inaugurating an exhibition on 30 years of Germany in the United Nations at Goethe Institute in Dhaka.

An available statistic suggests that German grant for Bangladesh is about 40 million euro.

Khan, however, appreciated German development assistance in health, energy and economic reforms.

German Ambassador in Dhaka Dietrich Andreas and Prof Salahuddin Ahmed also spoke at the function.

The foreign minister said Bangladesh and Germany share the same principles of peace, democracy, justice and the rule of law at domestic as well as international planes.

"Both of us recognize that global challenge could be addressed only on the basis of cooperative partnership," he said, adding that the protection of human rights and the rule of law could guarantee stability and peace.

Khan said Bangladesh recognizes that an effective United Nations is central to collective management of world affairs. UN has the capacity to address emerging issues of global importance, he added.

Echoing the views, the German Ambassador said the United Nations provide the most important and legitimate forum for discussion of global challenges and only a "sincere multiple approach" will be able to bring about an adequate

response and universally accepted solutions.

Andreas said Germany is committed to conflict prevention, global economy and development, disarmament, banning weapons of mass destruction, international criminal jurisdiction, human rights and environmental protection.

In its effort to support the conflict resolution capacities of the UN, Germany has provided some 9,000 armed forces and police to UN peace missions. Besides, Germany's contribution to UN with some 1.3 billion US dollars, make it the third largest contributor to UN after America and Japan.

The Ambassador recalled Germany's contribution to the Security Council in 2003-04 that strengthened its resolve to actively support an overhaul of the UN in general and the Security Council in particular.



PHOTO: STAR

A group of people visit a stall at the Asia Pharma Expo-2005 at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in Dhaka yesterday. The four-day international exposition ends February 18.

Indian firm to explore gas retailing business in Bangladesh

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

State-owned Gas Authority of India Limited (GAIL) has signed an agreement with Bangladesh's Spectra International Limited to explore the possibilities of joint cooperation in compressed natural gas (CNG) infrastructure development and gas retailing in Bangladesh.

Under the memorandum of understanding (MoU), signed by GAIL Director (Planning) B S Negi and Khalid H Khan of Spectra International on the sidelines of the Third Asia Gas Buyers' Summit here on Tuesday, the Indian firm will consider undertaking CNG and gas distribution projects on build-operate and transfer (BOT) basis.

GAIL and Spectra will jointly identify opportunities for setting up training facilities in the gas sector in Bangladesh and Spectra will develop business opportunities in Bangladesh

involving the Indian company's expertise in CNG, gas distribution and marketing, according to a press statement issued by GAIL.

The two companies would also offer consultancy services to Petrobangla and its subsidiaries and other companies on design development operation and maintenance and feasibility studies for CNG, gas distribution and marketing projects in Bangladesh.

Spectra, with experience in civil construction, real estate and logistics support services in Bangladesh, will offer certain services required in the implementation of projects in a cost-effective and timely manner and also provide necessary support and coordination in obtaining statutory clearances from Bangladesh government for the projects.

GAIL officials attach considerable significance to the agreement with Spectra International in view of the proposed Myanmar-

Bangladesh-India trans-border gas pipeline project, which might facilitate siphoning off natural gas within Bangladesh from its fields in the eastern part.

GAIL, one of the state-owned Indian energy majors, has a stake in an offshore Myanmar gas block from where the product from that country is planned to be transported to India via Bangladesh.

In a boost to the tri-nation gas pipeline project, Indian cabinet had last week given the green signal to the Indian Petroleum Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar's initiative for talks with the two countries to press ahead with the project.

A meeting of technical experts of India, Bangladesh and Myanmar is scheduled to be held in Yangon on February 18 and 19 in connection with the project.

Italy plans \$1.17b food processing park in India

AFP, New Delhi

A consortium of Italian firms plans to build a 900-million-euro (1.17-billion-dollar) high-tech food processing park in India, an Italian minister said Wednesday.

Gianfranco Alois, trade and industry minister of Italy's Campania region, told AFP that the Consortium Sistema Italia Exports (CSIE), was planning to build a food processing park spread over 1,200 acres (486 hectares).

"Financial details are still being worked out but funding of 900 million euros should not be an issue. There's keen Italian interest in the project," said Alois.

The firms are negotiating with various state governments for land.

India is still a mainly farm-based economy with close to 60 percent of its one billion population depending on agriculture for a living. At least four state governments are seeking to woo the joint venture to their regions.

The project will have spinoffs for Indian farmers as firms housed in the food-processing park will source fruits, vegetables and other agriculture products from farms in the area.