

SEC asks foreign cos to offload shares

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Securities and Exchange Commission chairman yesterday urged the foreign companies operating in Bangladesh to offload a portion of their shares to make the stock market more vibrant.

"You may have enough funds and you are not interested to raise fund from the capital market. But I urge you to share your gains with the people of this country as part of your corporate social responsibility that is also an important aspect," said Mirza Azizul Islam, the SEC chairman.

The commission will try to make the procedure as simple as possible in case any of the foreign companies operating here is interested in coming to the stock market, he assured while speaking at the monthly luncheon meeting of FICCI at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel.

President of Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) Mahbub Jamil and its Vice-president Andrew Fawthrop also spoke at the function.

The SEC is trying to increase quality and variety of shares in the market and will also encourage good companies in offloading shares with premium if there is any basis, Islam said adding that foreign investors here can consider issuing asset-backed securitised bonds.

Considerable improvement in technological infrastructure, the overall macro economic situation and the government's interest rate policy have helped in creating renewed interest in the stock market, the chairman noted.

Stressing the need for disclosing financial statements properly, he added that the commission is also trying to persuade the Institute of Chartered Accounts of Bangladesh (ICAB) to take action against the auditors who are not



Mirza Azizul Islam (2-L), chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), speaks at the monthly luncheon meeting of Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) in Dhaka yesterday. FICCI President Mahbub Jamil (2-R) and Vice-president Andrew Fawthrop (L) are also seen in the picture.

doing their jobs properly.

Islam said the commission is trying its best to bring about transparency in the market. "We are trying to make sure that proposals for public offer are properly scrutinised before the regulator's approval."

Referring to some steps taken by the SEC recently, Islam added that the commission has started closely monitoring the holding of annual general meeting of listed companies. "And we have got good results of it as the number of defaulting companies in this regard

has reduced."

The 1996 boom in the capital market completely eroded the investors' confidence, he said and observed that the market has regained its vibrancy in the recent times but too much volatility in the market is not desired.

Speaking in the meeting, Mahbub Jamil, FICCI president, said a vibrant and well-regulated stock market is the sine qua non for the overall growth and development of the national economy since the country has been pursuing a free market economic policy.

A volatile stock market, as has been seen recently, erodes investors' confidence and scares the common investors away and paves the way for unscrupulous market players to reign supreme in the bourses by resorting to clandestine and unethical practices.

"We are happy that the SEC took a bold stand on not to succumb to the undue pressures of some market players and as a result the market bounced back quickly," he added.

Jt venture co to build biodiesel plant

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

JB Bio Diesel Company Limited, a Japan-Bangladesh joint venture concern, is going to build a biodiesel plant in the country soon.

"Biodiesel is the name of clean burning alternative fuel. Produced from vegetable and animal oil, it is very environment friendly and its production cost is much less than that of diesel," JB Group Chairman Mohammad Selim said yesterday at a press conference organised by the company at the National Press Club in the city.

Frontier Japan, a wing of Taiyo Group of Company Japan, will provide the plant with financial and technological supports.

The plant, worth about \$6 million, will increase employment opportunities as well as government's earnings, he hoped.

Importing different raw materials such as palm oil from the East Asian countries, the plant is expected to produce about 60,000 litres biodiesel everyday. Such plant will be expanded to every district later based on its primary success, Selim said.

The produced biodiesel will be exported to Japan in the first phase, but it will be available in the local market soon, he added.

Frontier Japan Chairman Fuzita Sohey and Marketing Manager Youchi Tera Numa also attended the press conference.

Eight-day BCS Computer Show begins in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

An eight-day BCS Computer Show began here yesterday. State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Mir Mohammad Nasiruddin inaugurated the show at VIP Tower Auditorium in Kazir Dewri area.

Chittagong ICT Forum (CICTF) and Bangladesh Computer Samity (BCS) are jointly organising the exhibition, the largest-ever in the port city, sponsored by Intel, HP, Samsung and Asus. A total of 15 pavilions, four galleries of the sponsor firms and 55 stalls have been opened in the show. The fair will remain open from 10.00am to 8.00pm everyday.

Banglalink, Prime Bank sign deal on bill collection

Cell phone operator Banglalink and Prime Bank Ltd have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on Thursday in Dhaka for automating the bill collection process of the company.

Lars P Reichelt, chief operating officer and managing director of Banglalink, and M Shahjahan Bhuiyan, managing director of Prime Bank, signed the MoU on behalf of their organisations, says a press release.

Wal-Mart Feb sales rise about 4pc

REUTERS, Chicago

Wal-Mart Stores Inc, the world's largest retailer, said on Saturday that sales at U.S. stores open at least one year rose approximately 4 percent in February.

On a recording detailing sales through Friday, Wal-Mart said food sales were stronger than general merchandise and the Southeast was the strongest reporting region. The Arkansas-based retailer said that the average shopper spent more for the week ended Friday, driving up same-store sales. Sales toward the end of the week slowed in the Northeast due to a snowstorm, Wal-Mart said.

Wal-Mart said it has seen good initial demand for Easter items.

The retailer's four-week February sales reporting period ended Friday. It releases monthly same-store sales for February on Thursday.

Ecneec okays 10 projects involving Tk 2,192cr

BDNEWS, Dhaka

The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecneec) yesterday approved 10 development projects with an expenditure of about Tk 22 billion (Tk 2,192 crore) in various sectors.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia presided over the meeting, held at the Planning Commission.

Briefing newsmen after the meeting, Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman said, the committee approved a project in the water sector under water resources ministry worth about Tk

1,059 crore.

The other important projects, which have been approved by Ecneec, are Tk 630 crore teachers' quality improvement project and Tk 174 crore infrastructure development scheme of different upazila.

Another project to buy dredgers for improving navigability of the rivers was also approved at the meeting.

Responding to a question about slow utilisation of funds under the development programme, Saifur said funds utilisation this year is better than that of previous years, but exact figures will be available

later.

UNB adds: After the Ecneec meeting the finance and planning minister categorically told reporters that the country's development activities will continue in home-grown fashion even if the donors get dissatisfied.

"Development of our independent country will take place in our own fashion. If they become dissatisfied, we've nothing to do," he said, three days after international financiers to Bangladesh's development agenda re-appraised the country's current situation in their own meeting in Washington.

Relaxed visa regime in South Asia needed to boost tourism

South Asia Sub-regional Economic Cooperation meet told

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Liberalised visa regime in South Asian countries is needed to promote tourism in the region.

The observation came at the 5th Tourism Working Group Meeting of South Asia Sub-regional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) in Dhaka yesterday.

Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation and Asian Development Bank (ADB) jointly organised the two-day discussion to find out potential of tourism in the regional cooperation.

The meeting also observed difficulties of visa process and border formalities and lack of facilities such as telephone, rest rooms, restaurant, refueling stations and medical centers are the main obstacles to attracting tourists in this

region.

State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Mir Mohammad Nasir Uddin spoke as chief guest at the meeting.

Representatives from Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh and officials from WTO, UNESCAP, ADB, PATA attended the meeting.

Public and private sector collaboration is needed for promoting tourism in every SASEC country, the meeting was told.

Hau Du, officer in charge of ADB Bangladesh Development Mission, said SASEC can lead to build a cooperative forum among the states in this region.

She also stressed the need of developing human resources through proper training to get the

untapped potential of tourism.

From 1950 to 2000, tourism sector of the world grew by 7 percent, said Harsh Varma, chief of Technical Cooperation, World Trade Organization (WTO).

Realising the importance of tourism, he asked the SASEC members to take initiatives for diversifying their tourism products.

Bhoj Raj Ghimire, secretary, Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation of Nepal, Dasho Karma Dorjee, secretary, Ministry of Trade, Industry and Tourism of Bhutan, Renu Jain, undersecretary, Ministry of Tourism of India, Peter De Jong, president and CEO of Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA), also spoke at the meeting.

Qatar to sign mega gas deal with Shell

AFP, Ras Laffan, Qatar

Qatar was due to sign on Sunday an eight billion dollar deal with Royal Dutch/Shell to supply liquefied natural gas to the United States after laying the cornerstone for a mega project to supply LNG to Britain.

The deal with the Anglo-Dutch energy giant, under which Qatar will supply eight million tons of LNG annually to the United States, will be announced on the eve of a Doha Gas Conference opening Monday, industry sources said.

Another major deal, with France's Total, is expected to be unveiled on the first day of the four-day conference, which will be attended by executives from international energy majors.

Chinese coal shortage may hurt world market

AFP, Beijing

China's breakneck economic growth is causing a dangerous shortage of its most important energy source coal, with potential consequences for the entire world, state media warned Sunday.

Scarcity is so severe officials even worry about that it could cause social instability among the 1.3 billion Chinese, the China Business Weekly reported.

"The imbalance between coal demand and supply will become more acute this year," the National Development and Reform Commission said, according to the paper.

"Easing the tightened coal supply will be the first priority for us," said the commission, the nation's top planning agency.

China is the world's largest consumer and producer of coal, which accounts for about two thirds of its energy needs.

The impact of the coal shortage could be global since soaring domestic demand could force the government to cut off export quotas and push up global prices, the paper said.

Last year, when China's economy expanded by 9.5 percent, its voracious demand was a key factor in causing international prices of coal to double.

World Bank urged not to impose tough conditions on Bangladesh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Speakers at a seminar here yesterday urged the World Bank not to impose any tough terms and conditions on Bangladesh that are not commensurate with the country's socio-economic potential.

The seminar styled 'The World Bank in Bangladesh' was organised jointly by the bank and Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) at the chamber auditorium.

Criticising the World Bank's loan system, CCCI President Saifuzzaman Chowdhury Javed urged the bank to offer soft lending.

The World Bank seems to have no hesitation to offer loan and grant to development projects, but the terms and conditions are stringent,

said the chamber leader.

He was critical of the 'dictating attitude' of the World Bank while disbursing funds to certain development projects. "Besides, there is a general feeling that the bank eats up half of the fund it gives to Bangladesh in the name of consultation or interest against the loans," he said.

The CCCI president however praised the World Bank's active assistance in attaining Millennium Development Goal (MDG) in Bangladesh by 2015.

Dr Jyoti Prakash Datta, professor of economics at Chittagong University, suggested a World Bank project to train up politicians of the country.

"Our political leaders don't know

the politics in true sense. They often tend to interfere in all activities and policy-making decisions. So, there should be a project to train them up properly," he observed.

Presenting the bank's wide array of operations in Bangladesh, World Bank's Senior Communications Officer Subrata S Dhar said there is a misconception about the bank.

"The World Bank now is much different than it was some 10 years ago and the bank is much more open and transparent to the general public," he said.

He said the bank does have some constraints to get involved in all the development activities of the country.



State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Mir Mohammad Nasiruddin inaugurates the eight-day BCS Computer Show in Chittagong yesterday.