

RMG competitiveness hinges on regional partnership

Speakers tell BGMEA seminar

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Speakers at a seminar yesterday in Dhaka said regional trade development and understanding regional markets are key to boosting competitiveness of garment sector in the quota-free global market.

They also highlighted making the best use of information technology in garment sector for easy and quick access to information.

The speakers were addressing the seminar held on the sidelines of Bangladesh Apparel and Textile Exposition (Batexpo-2005) at Hotel Sonargaon in Dhaka.

Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) organised the three-day show that ends today.

A regional approach through cooperation with the regional businesses is needed to develop a healthy garment industry, said Rupa Ganguly of International Trade Centre (ITC), while presenting a keynote paper titled "Competitiveness of garments industry

in the post-quota era -- An ITC approach".

ITC is the technical cooperation arm of WTO and Unctad for operational enterprise-oriented capacity building for trade promotion and export development.

Regional and sub regional partnership along with a regionally integrated industry can help yield better harvest in garment sector as the sector is facing stiff competition with different regional powers in the world market, she added.

Quality services to attract buyers and improved information technology to establish a close communication between foreign investors and local businesses are also needed for the development of garment sector, Ganguly said.

Prof Jamilur Reza Choudhury, vice chancellor of BRAC University, Kutubuddin Ahmed, president of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) and former president of BGMEA, also spoke at the seminar.

Prof M Shamim Z Bosunia of the

Department of Civil Engineering of BUET, presented another keynote paper titled "Construction of Factory Buildings and Bangladesh National Building Code Practices and Realities".

The keynote speaker emphasised implementation of the Bangladesh National Building Code (BNBC) in garment industry for the safety of the garment workers.

"The BGMEA should take pre-emptive measures and declare compliance with the BNBC mandatory for all its members," said Jamilur Reza Choudhury.

The MCCI president said public and private initiative is needed in this regard as the Rajuk alone cannot implement the BNBC.

A total of 71 companies are showcasing their products in 82 stalls in the Batexpo-2005. Twenty foreign companies from Pakistan, China, Japan, Hong Kong and Taiwan are participating in the fair this year. Of these, 12 companies came from Pakistan.



Buyers make enquiry about a garment product at the Bangladesh Apparel and Textile Exposition (Batexpo 2005) at Hotel Sonargaon in Dhaka yesterday. The three-day show ends today.

PHOTO: STAR

Regional gender forum begins tomorrow

A two-day high-profile regional forum titled 'Engendering SMEs: Women in Enterprise Development' begins tomorrow at the Spectra Convention Center in Dhaka.

Around 150 officials from both the public and private sectors, leaders of women business organisations and NGOs from Bhutan, Nepal, India and Bangladesh are expected to take part in the forum, says a press release.

Besides, experts and resource persons from the USA, Canada, Australia and Switzerland will focus on the best practices relating to gender and enterprise development.

The South Asia Enterprise Development Facility (SEDF), a multi-donor funded facility managed by the International Finance Corporation (IFC) -- the private sector arm of the World Bank Group -- is organising the forum in collaboration with the

Department of Women's Studies, University of Dhaka.

"The objective of the forum is to bring women entrepreneurs into the mainstream of economic activities," said Marlon Lezama, program manager of the SEDF. The forum will discuss and disseminate information on issues affecting women entrepreneurs and identify possible interventions addressing those issues, he added.

The findings of a study commissioned by the SEDF will be presented at the forum.

The IFC research shows that market failures discriminate more against women than men and some of these imbalances can be addressed by technical assistance interventions targeted at growth-oriented enterprises.

Indian co wins oil exploration block in Vietnam

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

India's search for energy security got another boost when the overseas arm of state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Commission (ONGC) won an oil exploration block in Vietnam with an estimated in-place of oil of over one billion barrels.

The ONGC Videsh Ltd won the block on Wednesday after submitting a \$75 million bid in May this year to get cent percent operating rights in the site off Vietnam's central coast.

"We expect to sign the contract with the Vietnamese government in November this year after which exploration work will begin", said ONGC officials. This is the second energy block awarded to ONGC in Vietnam. It holds a 45 percent interest in gas producing fields in that country's Nam Con Son gas project.

China, US to start fresh textiles talks

AFP, Washington

The United States and China plan another round of talks on a drawn-out battle over textiles trade this month after their latest negotiations here ended without agreement, officials said Thursday.

"We were able to make progress, particularly with product coverage and quota levels, but we did not reach an agreement with the Chinese," chief US negotiator David Spooner said in a statement.

"We will be meeting with the Chinese again next month and will be consulting with them soon on the location and exact date of the next round of negotiations," he said after the meeting ended Wednesday.

Chinese officials in Beijing also confirmed plans for a new round of talks to forge an overarching agreement to regulate Chinese textile shipments,

which have soared since global quotas were scrapped on January 1.

Since then, the US government has slapped what it calls "cumbersome" quotas on individual categories of Chinese textile exports in response to demands for action from the US industry.

"However, our preference is to seek a longer-term solution that will permit the orderly development of textile and apparel trade," Spooner said.

"But the United States will have no hesitation in walking away from a bad deal."

In Beijing, the Ministry of Commerce said that "the two sides made positive progress in the talks, but some differences remain as well."

For US critics, the textile dispute has highlighted what they call China's "manipulation" of its exchange rate to give its exports an unfair edge in world markets.

India hopeful of WTO breakthrough before Hong Kong summit

AFP, Vientiane

Indian delegates at a 10-nation Asean conference here said Friday they were hopeful of a breakthrough in global trade talks before the World Trade Organisation (WTO) meets in Hong Kong in December.

Delegate spokesman S.N. Melon said WTO talks were at an advanced stage with negotiators plotting a roadmap which could deliver success at the summit.

"The general view is for some kind of breakthrough, hopefully by next month or mid-November," he told journalists.

The Association of South East

Asian Nations (Asean) has pledged its support for the implementation of the Doha round which ran into a deep impasse at the WTO meeting held in the Mexican beach resort of Cancun in 2003.

This was mainly due to differences over farm trade and market access for services, and negotiators have been struggling since to get the negotiations back on track in time for a broad agreement in Hong Kong.

Pushing for the talks in Hong Kong to succeed, the United States, European Union and a handful of other key players, including Australia, will meet in October in Switzerland to try to keep the talks going.

China-Asean trade soars 25pc in first half of 2005

AFP, Vientiane

Bilateral trade between China and the 10-nation Asean block soared 25 percent to \$59.76 billion in the first half of 2005 amid ongoing reductions in tariffs, officials said Friday.

The figures, released on the sidelines of an economic ministers conference held here by the Association of South East Asian Nations (Asean), followed direct foreign investment by

China into Asean of \$226 million in 2004.

"The ministers were pleased to note the phenomenal growth in Asean-China bilateral trade since both sides agreed to establish the Asean-China Free Trade Area in 2002," they said in a statement.

Asean groups Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam, and is aiming to create a

fully integrated economic community by 2020.

Asean, which recently became China's fourth largest trading partner, has struck an accord with China aimed at reducing tariffs to between zero and five percent on certain types of goods.

The accord will apply to the most advanced six Asean economies by 2010 and become effective for its least developed members -- Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia and Myanmar -- by 2015.