

WTO HONG KONG MINISTERIAL

Govt urged to take firm stance to protect interest

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Dhaka should take a firm position in the forthcoming WTO ministerial in Hong Kong to protect its interest, said politicians, economists and civil society representatives at a roundtable yesterday.

They also said Bangladesh has already opened its market in different sectors in the face of pressures from donor agencies. But when new rules and regulations of WTO (World Trade Organisation) will be imposed, LDCs such as Bangladesh will face trade discrimination, they feared.

The speakers said WTO negotiations focus only on interests of developed states, not the interest of poor countries.

They were speaking at a roundtable on 'discriminatory policy imposed on poor states' in Dhaka. NGOs Supro and Peoples' Forum on MDG organised the roundtable. Rasheda K Chowdhury, director of Campaign for Popular Education (Campe), moderated the roundtable.

"WB or IMF cannot change our fate. What success Bangladesh has achieved so far is due to our own efforts with limited resources," said Awami League (AL) lawmaker Asaduzzaman Noor.

He said, "To avoid dependency on donor countries, we have to reduce corruption, ensure transparency and establish good governance."

"We cannot avoid the changed agricultural scenario in the post-MFA (multi-fibre arrangement) era," said Dr

Khondaker Golam Moazzem, research fellow of Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD).

Former finance minister and AL leader AMA Muhiit said the government should focus on special preferential treatment, trade facilitation without tariff and non-tariff barriers and market access to the developed countries in the upcoming WTO conference.

Bangladesh has hardly any expertise to reap benefit from the WTO negotiations, said Sohel Ahmed Chowdhury, former commerce secretary.

He said, "Although the government has established Bangladesh Foreign Trade Institute (BFTI) for capacity building few years back, its activities are yet to launch."

As a government representative, Sharifa Khan, deputy director of WTO cell of commerce ministry, said the government has a specific stance for the forthcoming Hong Kong conference.

"Without proper assessment we will not compromise on any issues at the meeting," she said.

Redwan Ahmed, a commerce ministry official, said, "We have already started discussion on Hong Kong conference".

He said Mode-4, free market access, and agriculture will be key issues for Bangladesh in the forthcoming meeting, scheduled for December 13-18.

Asia's biggest mobile tech show in HK ends today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Hong Kong

The 3G World Congress and Exhibition 2005, Asia's largest mobile technology exposition that began Wednesday in Hong Kong to promote the growth of third generation (3G) mobile telephony, concludes today.

Some 150 companies are showcasing the latest developments in 3G mobile technology, capable of transmitting voice, data and video to subscribers' mobile phones, in Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre.

The tenth version of the mega event, aimed at exploring key emerging trends that will shape the future of 3G technology and wireless industry, expects to woo more than 8,000 international attendees who are set to forge valued partnerships with the exhibitors.

"The world congress has grown substantially to cater to a rapidly expanding and diverse mobility industry," said Daniel Kirwin, managing director of the 3G World Congress and Exhibition.

Speakers and panels are debating a range of business, technical, service and market issues: How will 3G and other emerging wireless technologies enable operators to expand their markets and offer services to new customer segments? What are the market impacts as 3G goes broadband? And how will enhanced mobility services transform the customer experience?

The opening plenary session in the congress drew leading names including Marc Rouanne, chief operating officer of Mobile Communications Group of Alcatel; Carl-Henric Svanberg, president and CEO of Ericsson; Adrian Nemceck, executive vice president of Motorola; Richard Lowe, president (Mobility and Converged Core Networks) of Nortel; Paul Jacobs, CEO of Qualcomm, and Christoph Caseltz, president (Mobile Networks) of Siemens Communications.

Knitwear show in NY ends on high note

SHARIEF KHAN from New York

The two-day Bangladesh Knitwear Show in New York that aims at grabbing a bigger share of the China dominated US market concluded yesterday, drawing a crowd of more than 200 potential knitwear buyers including some leading names.

Based on the response of the buyers, the show's organiser Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) expresses its hopes that in 2006, Bangladesh may be able to export knitwear worth one billion dollars in USA. In the running fiscal, the BKMEA is set to fetch home 400 million dollars from the USA.

"This show was aimed at creating awareness among the US buyers about the quality and competitiveness of Bangladeshi knitwear," says BKMEA President Fazlul Hoque, adding "They used to think we make simple knitwear. At the show, they found out that Bangladesh has gone beyond the basics."

"The buyers upon visit made some spot orders, which were unexpected. Some of them made serious negotiations, which will continue with some of our members in the next few days. Some of them are so impressed that they said they want to visit Bangladesh next months to see the knitwear establishments," he pointed out.

"We are very enthusiastic about the outcome. This effort should continue in order to win the US mar-

ket. We are hopeful that within the next six months, we will hold a follow-up show in Las Vegas," the BKMEA chief added.

Buyers flew from different American states and Canada exclusively to attend the show showcasing products of 45 knitwear manufacturers. The buyers included names like the QVC America's largest home shopping TV channel, Perry Ellis, Jones Apparel Group, Ann Taylor and Target.

"Many buyers did not have any idea about the quality of Bangladeshi knitwear of the present times," said FA Zaman, managing director of Fakir Knitweaves Ltd, a show participant. "They also have concerns about Bangladeshi infrastructure. For instance, they fear shipment delays. And we explained to them the present scenario of our country."

Another participant Dr Muhammad A Moyeen of Pride group noted that Bangladeshi manufacturers were now developing high-end knitwear products, which surprised the buyers.

Due to fierce competition from China, Bangladeshi knitwear had been making little business in the USA over the years. The USA has an apparel market of 180 billion dollars per year and Bangladesh is taking only 4 percent of this market.

"Since the withdrawal of quota system in January, China had been abusing the system and marking an unusual export growth to USA (at a

rate of more than 100 percent)," notes Jeanne Atkison, president of Global Marketing Strategies, the company which helped draw American buyers to the show on behalf of the South Asia Enterprise Development Facility (SEDF) of the International Finance Corporation.

"This situation pushed the least developed countries (LDCs) like Bangladesh to protest to the US government," she added. Last week the US government decided that China's export to USA cannot exceed 10 percent, while there is no restriction of growth rate for Bangladesh.

"At this point, Bangladesh can increase its exports to the USA as much as it wants. The opportunities are unlimited," she said.

The BKMEA was set to visit Washington Thursday to hold meetings with the American Textiles Association (ATA), the American Apparel and Footwear Importers Association (AAIFA) and the American labour representatives.

"The ATA and the BKMEA share a common interest. Like the BKMEA, the ATA also wants to see lesser domination of China in the textiles-related market. We hope our meeting would strengthen Bangladesh's position in this regard," the BKMEA chief said.

The AAIFA, the biggest apparel importers' platform, will be invited to visit Bangladesh knitwear establishments.

Entrepreneurial talents hunt begins Nov 25

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In a bid to search for entrepreneurial talents among the business students, a competition of business ideas for profitable and realistic business ventures will be held in Dhaka on November 25.

Cellphone operator Banglalink and American International University-Bangladesh (AIUB) are jointly organising the competition styled "Bizlink '05" with Channel 1 as the media partner of the competition.

This was announced at a press conference in Dhaka yesterday.

The objectives of the competition are to improve the conceptual and communication skills of the young business students and to help new business ideas come out in the hope that these will be the starting points for many new business ventures, organisers said.

Around 30 teams from different leading universities and business schools have confirmed their participation in the competition, said Ehsanul H Chowdhury, assistant professor of AIUB.

The champion team will be awarded Tk 50,000 while the runner-up and second runner-up teams will receive Tk 25,000 and Tk 10,000 respectively.

Dr Carmen Z Lamagna, vice-chancellor of AIUB, Esrarul Haque, executive director of Channel 1, and Omer Rashid, director (Marketing) of Banglalink, also spoke.



Dr Carmen Z Lamagna, vice-chancellor of American International University-Bangladesh (AIUB), Dr Anwar Hossain, dean of School of Business of AIUB, Esrarul Haque, executive director of Channel 1, and Omer Rashid, director (Marketing) of Banglalink, are seen at a press conference in Dhaka yesterday.

US tax plan may help boost world economy

REUTERS, Washington

US proposals to overhaul the country's Social Security and tax systems could provide a boost to the global economy if accompanied by budget balancing, International Monetary Fund economists said Wednesday.

"Debt-neutral social security and tax reform in the United States has large positive effects on the rest of the world," the economists said in a research paper.

Proposals aimed at retooling both the retirement programme and the tax code face dubious futures in the current US political climate.

US lawmakers of both political parties were unenthusiastic about President George W Bush's idea of letting workers invest a portion of the taxes they pay to fund the Social Security system in personal accounts in part because of cuts to benefits.

The tax overhaul proposal, while

made public only recently, also met with public skepticism over cuts to tax breaks for home mortgage interest and state and local tax payments.

But IMF economists said that the United States could lower interest rates and boost output at home and abroad if it created personal retirement accounts along with setting aside revenues aimed at funding Social Security in a "lockbox" and steps to reduce the budget deficit.

Emirates posts \$251m profit in six months

Dubai-based Emirates has announced net profits of Dhs 922 million (US\$251 million) for the first six months from April 1 to September 30 in the financial year 2005-06.

The unaudited results, up seven percent compared to Dhs 865 million (\$236 million) achieved in the same period last year, reflect a strong revenue performance driven by robust passenger and cargo demand, and better yields, which softened the impact of high fuel prices on operating costs, says a press release.



Moazzem Hossain (centre), editor of The Financial Express, speaks at a roundtable titled "Corporate Governance: Bridging Corporate Sector and Media" in Chittagong yesterday as Hasibur Rahman (left), executive director of MRDI, an NGO, and SM Abu Zaker, senior vice president of Exim Bank Ltd, look on.

Businesses-media ties key to ensuring corporate governance Roundtable told

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Speakers at a roundtable in Chittagong yesterday said effective ties between corporate houses and media can help establish corporate governance.

They also said the corporate houses should be more transparent in doing business.

The Management and Resources Development Initiative (MRDI) organised the roundtable titled "Corporate Governance: Bridging Corporate Sector and Media" with the support from Manusher Jonno at Agrabad Hotel in the port city, according to a press release.

The roundtable was participated by business association leaders, chief executives and representatives of business and corporate houses and newspaper gatekeepers. Moazzem Hossain, editor of The Financial Express, moderated the roundtable.

Saifuzzaman Chowdhury, president of Chittagong Chamber of Commerce & Industry, said business houses must pursue a policy of transparency and accountability to ensure governance.

Tabarrak Ullah, advisor to BGMEA

(Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association), said bridging the gap between corporate bodies and media is a must to ensure corporate governance.

The roundtable also discussed good practices by some corporate houses.

The speakers said media should also be more careful in publishing corporate news and stressed the need for advanced training on corporate and business reporting.

Among others, Belayet Hossain, deputy managing director of Purabi Insurance Company Ltd; Md Rashangir Chowdhury, senior vice president and manager, Bank Asia Ltd; Parvez Sazzad Akhter, president, Bangladesh Shipping Agents Association; MA Latif, vice president Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industries; SM Abu Zaker, senior vice president, Exim Bank Ltd; Mansur Ahmed, finance manager, Chittagong Stock Exchange; M Kamruzzaman, director, Fish Preservers Ltd; and Kalim Sarwar, general secretary, Chittagong Press Club, spoke at the roundtable, coordinated by M Nasirul Haque, chief reporter, the Suprovat Bangladesh.

Security seal for Mobil lubricants introduced

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Security seal for Mobil lubricants was introduced formally yesterday to avoid adulteration.

The seal will make it impossible for fake traders to re-use the cans of Mobil lubricants, said M Mukul Hossain, chief engineer of Mobil Jamuna Lubricants Ltd, which markets Mobil lubricants in Bangladesh.

Advisor to the Ministry of Energy Mahmudur Rahman was present at the security seal launching ceremony.

The country has waged a war against adulteration, although it is not possible alone for the government to stop the contamination, said Mahmudur. He urged the private sector to play role to stop the malpractice.

Azam J Chowdhury, managing director of Mobil Jamuna Lubricants Ltd, said the company has taken this unique initiative to provide customers with best services.

Singapore economy grows 7pc in third quarter

AFP, Singapore

Singapore's economy expanded at a better-than-expected seven percent in the third quarter, underpinned by robust growth in manufacturing and service sectors, official data showed Thursday.

The gross domestic product figure was ahead of the government's initial estimate of six percent announced last month, prompting the trade ministry to raise its full-year growth forecast to 5.0 percent.

"The slowdown in economic growth early this year has been more than reversed by the strength of the rebound in the second and third quarter," the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) said.

"This resurgence, led by manufacturing, financial services and entrepot trade, mirrored the improvement in the global economy."

"This favourable growth trend looks likely to be sustained in the remaining months of the year," the ministry said in a statement.

So far, growth has averaged above five percent in the three quarters of 2005.

The ministry forecast GDP growth for 2006 at three to five percent.

Oil prices stabilise

AFP, London

World oil prices steadied on Thursday as the market digested a surprise drawdown in US crude stockpiles, with the focus still on mild temperatures in the northern hemisphere, dealers said.

New York's main contract, light sweet crude for delivery in December, eased seven cents to 57.81 dollars per barrel in electronic dealing.

In London on Thursday, the price of Brent North Sea crude for January

delivery firmed two cents to 56.02 dollars per barrel.

Crude futures had risen overnight in New York after data from the US Department of Energy showed an unexpected drop in crude stocks for the first time in six weeks.

The energy report also showed a rise in distillates, which are used to make heating oil, indicating the slow start to winter which had been one of the main reasons behind the market's recent falls, dealers said.