

Team up with French firms to reap benefits of tech transfer

French trade officials urge local entrepreneurs

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

French trade commissioners working in South Asia yesterday urged Bangladeshi entrepreneurs to join hands with medium size French companies to reap benefits of technology transfer.

They identified telecommunications, information and communication technology (ICT), energy, textiles and agro-processing as potential areas for cooperation as France is a leading player in these areas.

French trade commissioners in South Asia made the call at a briefing at Hotel Sarina in the capital. The trade officials are in Dhaka for the first time to attend their yearly meeting on the sidelines of 'French Days 2005'.

The trade officials also hoped the move would attract more companies in this emerging region of the world.

The trade commissioners said Bangladesh visit has helped them change their impression on the country and it would yield a very positive result in the long term.

Speaking at the briefing, Jean

Leviol, head of South Asia French Trade Commissions, said: "We are trying to build an integrated programme and set a common agenda for the next year not only in Bangladesh but also in South Asia as a whole as far as trade is concerned."

Identifying key drivers for joint programmes, he explained around 150 medium size French companies would come to India next year and it would play a significant role in technology transfer. The French boss in South Asia invited Bangladeshi entrepreneurs to interact with them and choose their partners for joint venture projects.

Leviol hailed Bangladesh for opening up its market gradually and praised for its sound macroeconomic performance, hoping French companies would like to work in this kind of environment.

Marc Philippe, head of French Business Council of South Asia, said: "We are here not to sign business deals but to identify the potential of the country. We are also trying to expand the activities and expertise of

medium level French companies in Bangladesh."

Dominique Simon, French trade commissioner in Dhaka, mentioned France is the second largest exporter in agro-business area in the world. There are lots of opportunities for Bangladeshi entrepreneurs as it is an agro-based country.

Walid Otari, trade commissioner in Karachi, said this region has enormous potential, which remains still untapped. "We are trying to promote business in Asia with the French companies."

French Ambassador in Dhaka Jacques-Andre Costilhes said emerging economic powers are now in Asia and more and more French companies are now interested to come in this part of the world.

Hubert Colaris, trade commissioner in Colombo, A Qayyum Khan, president of France Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce & Industry (CCIFB) in Dhaka, and other trade officials working in Afghanistan, New Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore and Kolkata were present at the briefing.



PHOTO: STAR

(From left) Jean Leviol, head of French Trade Commissions in South Asia, speaks at a press briefing at Hotel Sarina in Dhaka yesterday as Jacques-Andre Costilhes, French ambassador, Qayyum Khan, president of France Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce & Industry (CCIFB), Marc Philippe, head of French Business Council in South Asia, and Dominique Simon, French trade commissioner in Dhaka, look on.

SAFTA NEGOTIATION Experts' last round meet begins Tuesday

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As per the directives of the Dhaka summit, experts from seven Saarc nations are meeting in Kathmandu for the last round on Tuesday to resolve the contentious issues to enforce Safta accord from January 1 next year.

According to Saarc Secretariat, the meeting of the Committee of Experts (CoE) is scheduled for two days.

Saarc leaders and Ministers of Council during the November 12-13 summit in Dhaka directed the authorities concerned to show maximum flexibility towards resolving the outstanding issues so that Safta (South Asian Free Trade Area) can come into effect on schedule.

Official sources here said the CoE meeting could go on to the third day (December 1) as well to finalise the issues as it would be the CoE's last meeting.

Rules of origin, sensitive list, revenue compensation mechanism and technical assistance to the least developed countries (LDCs) are the four outstanding issues of the Safta accord.

Of those, only the issue of technical assistance to LDCs -- Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives and Nepal -- has been resolved.

To resolve the deadlock, the technical experts had forwarded the draft to the higher Saarc bodies during the 13th summit for political directives and got necessary directions from the summit leaders as well as foreign ministers of the member states.

The meeting of the ministerial council held on the eve of the summit handed over the draft back to the committee urging members concerned to show maximum flexibility towards finalising the Safta accord immediately.

The Council along with the Summit even reiterated the original date of putting Safta in place from January 1, 2006. Now everything is depending on the attitude and flexibility of the negotiating teams of three developing countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) -- India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, officials said.

Official expressed optimism that the upcoming CoE meeting would be able to finalise the accord by resolving the differences as they were given directives from the highest political body of Saarc.

"Since the Summit has upheld the original enforcement date, we expect technical teams to come with maximum authority and mandate from the governments to finalise the deal," said an official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Basis software show begins today

UNB, Dhaka

SoftExpo, an exposition of software products, IT enabled services and system solutions, will begin today at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in Dhaka.

Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (Basis) is organising the five-day exposition with financial assistance from GrameenPhone.

More than 125 ICT companies are participating in the exposition.

ADB, Thailand discuss funding for infrastructure

AFP, Bangkok

The president of the Asian Development Bank said Friday he had discussed the possibility of helping to fund Thailand's 1.70 trillion baht (about 41 billion dollars) plan for new infrastructure projects around the country.

"ADB support could not only be for mega-projects in the medium-term but (also for) other infrastructure investments over the longer-term," ADB president Haruhiko Kuroda told reporters.

Kuroda was wrapping up a three-day visit to Bangkok where he inaugurated the bank's new resident mission and held talks with Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and other top officials.

Thailand has launched an ambitious five-year scheme to improve infrastructure, especially transportation, around the country.

The plan calls for extensions of Bangkok's subway and SkyTrain lines, including a line that will connect to the new Suvarnabhumi international airport, located about 25 kilometers (16 miles) east of the city.

Other projects include new railways, roads and bridges, as well as low-income housing projects and water management systems.

Kuroda said Thailand's relationship with the ADB was evolving as the country emerges as a regional donor and no longer needs the same type of aid as its poorer neighbors.

"Thailand is a middle-income country," he said. "Many middle-income countries can borrow from the ADB for good projects ... particularly for infrastructure investment."

The government expects infrastructure spending to invigorate growth over the five years, helping offset pressure from rising oil prices and the resurgence of bird flu in the region.

Axiom launches business portal

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Axiom Technologies Ltd, an IT company, yesterday launched a web portal from where buyers and sellers will be able to buy, sell or bid.

Suitable both for individual and corporate use, the web portal will also facilitate advertisement and participation in auctions.

The web portal also plans to include online transaction and integrate the portal with mobile phones in future, Rizwan Bin Farouq, managing director of Axiom Technologies Ltd, said at the launching ceremony.

If a visitor registers with the site, www.rizbiz.biz, he or she will be able to advertise on the site, participate in auctions and take advantages of brokerage services.

Marketplace section of the site can be used for corporate use and visitors will be able to purchase or sell products after registering with the site.

The site also provides cataloging services to showcase product and services so that buyers can find these easily.

The site has a stock market section and it can be used as an effective medium of communication between bourse members and their clients.

As the internet technology has spread in all the district towns of the country, people from any distant place will be able to sell or buy anything taking the facility of the web portal, Akand Sabbir Ahmed, general manager of the company, said.

Noor Solayman, in charge of brokerage service, and Ahsan Akhter, media content developer of the portal, were also present at the launching ceremony.

Europeans may invest in housing sector

Rehab chief says

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Investors from European countries such as Spain, Germany and UK may invest in Bangladesh's housing sector, Toufiq M Seraj, president of Rehab, said yesterday.

Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh (Rehab) president said if the investors find business scenario in Bangladesh friendly, they will invest here.

He was speaking at a press meet in Dhaka where a nine-member European delegation of 'Euro Builders' project was also present.

'Euro Builders' is a joint venture project between Bangladesh and European Commission launched six

months ago. The main objective of the projects is to promote European direct investment in the low-cost housing sector in Bangladesh, transfer housing technology from Europe to Bangladesh, and increase foreign trade between Bangladesh and Europe.

Seraj said under the project 15 delegates from Bangladesh visited Spain, UK and Germany. And now the European delegates are visiting Bangladesh.

Speaking at the press briefing, Antinio Bustos, president of Association Young Entrepreneurs, Spain, said, "We are here now to exchange ideas and technical support. Later we will actively work to expand our co-operation to Bangladesh's

potential housing sector."

"Bangladesh holds huge potential to attract foreign direct investment in real estate sector," said Mirko Hanel, head of department (International Projects) of Technology-Transfer Zentrum Bremerhaven, Germany.

Rehab officials said in their four-day visit, the European delegates will meet local developers, attend seminars and visit projects to see the real picture of housing business in Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, the ongoing five-day 'Rehab Fair-2005' witnessed a large number of visitors yesterday at Dhaka Sheraton hotel.

The fair concludes today.

BKMEA again seeks nod to import yarn thru' land ports

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Knitwear manufacturers once again have sought government permission to import yarn through land ports arguing that the price of local yarn is still higher than that of the imported yarn.

The knitwear manufacturers also said the finance minister in September warned the spinners that the government would liberalise yarn import if they did not reduce prices. But the spinners are yet to reduce the price, they added.

"We have already sent a letter to the Ministry of Finance reminding it that the price still remains unchanged," BKMEA (Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers & Exporters Association) President Fazlul Hoque

yesterday in Dhaka told a press briefing, which was organised to inform the press about the outcome of the recently concluded knitwear show in New York.

Textile millers can meet 600 to 700 tonnes of yarn of the total requirement of 1,000 to 1,050 tonnes per day and knitwear units consume 60 to 70 percent of the total yarn. "And in the peak season (from October to March), knitwear demand for yarn stands at 1,300 tonnes per day," he said.

The rest of yarn is being imported through waterways, the BKMEA chief said.

"So, we urge the government to allow only the knitwear exporters to import yarn through land ports," Hoque said.

Speaking about the November 15-

16 Bangladesh Knitwear Show in New York, he said the show will help Bangladesh to fulfill its target of doubling knitwear exports to the US in the next year.

BKMEA in association with SouthAsia Enterprise Development Facility (SEDF) organised the fair where 45 knitwear units showcased their products.

The first-ever Bangladeshi knitwear exhibition at Hotel Pennsylvania in Manhattan attracted several hundreds of potential knitwear buyers.

The US is the biggest buyer of Bangladeshi apparels in general. But for knitwear, it is not the biggest. "We eye around \$400 million exports this year and we target \$1 billion exports in 2006 calendar year," he said.

Air India launches companion free scheme

Air India has launched a Companion Free Scheme (CFS) for its first and business class passengers travelling on Dhaka-London-Dhaka route, says a press release.

While ticketing can be done from immediate effect, outbound travel is valid until December 23. The tickets will have one-year validity.

Under this scheme, a first class passenger can take a companion along with for a surcharge of only 25 percent, while a business class passenger can take a companion along with for no additional cost except the applicable taxes.

The first class fare paying passenger will be entitled to Limousine services too for pick and drop at London. Under the companion free scheme, the one-way fare for first class works out to US\$ 1179 and return fare US \$ 2358 per passenger, while for business class passengers it works out to one-way US\$683 and return US\$ 1366 per passenger.

Deflation in Japan shows signs of easing

AFP, Tokyo

Deflation, which has stifled the Japanese economy for almost eight years, showed fresh signs of easing in October as core consumer prices ended a four-month streak of minor declines.

Analysts said the data reinforced the market's belief that the world's number two economy will return to modest inflation in early 2006, setting the scene for the Bank of Japan to end its super-expansionary monetary policy.

Core consumer prices in Japan were flat in October from a year earlier, official figures showed Friday, in line with expectations.



PHOTO: AXIOM TECHNOLOGIES

Rizwan Bin Farouq (2-L), managing director of Axiom Technologies Ltd, and other officials of the company are seen at the launching ceremony of a business portal of Axiom in Dhaka yesterday.