



Novartis regional head due today

Stefan Ziegler, Asia-Pacific regional head of Pharmaceutical Division of Novartis, arrives in Dhaka today on a two-day visit.

He will be accompanied by Don Chen, the company's Asia-Pacific region's human resource head, says a press release.

During the visit, Ziegler will exchange views with business partners, government officials, and business leaders to evaluate the local business environment and market potential.

Ziegler, working in Singapore, supervises pharmaceutical operations of 11 countries – Australia, Bangladesh, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, Taiwan and Thailand.

He has a 16-year experience in the fields of pharmaceuticals, finance, sales and marketing.

Executive Motors gets after sales services award for BMW cars

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Executive Motors Limited, the dealer of BMW cars in Bangladesh, recently got an award for its after sales services for the vehicles.

The award, 'The Best Facilities 2005', was given away by Asia region Managing Director of BMW Roland Krueger in October in Singapore.

Executive Motors Chairman Mizanur Rahman and Managing Director Moklasur Rahman received the award on behalf of the company.

Starting in 2003, Executive Motors Ltd so far sold 200 vehicles. It received the award for standard after sales facilities that include painting booth, computer based colour-mixing facility, services from German technicians and quick supply of parts, officials told a press briefing in Dhaka yesterday.

US may lift ban on Japan beef

AFP, Washington

The United States is preparing to lift a ban on Japanese beef to coincide with the imminent resumption of US beef exports to Japan, US Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns said Friday.

"We are ready to flip the switch and bring Kobe beef into our marketplace," he told reporters, referring to the luxury marbled meat that is Japan's most famous type of beef.

"That can happen really any day, we are that far along in the process. We've gone through our rule-making, our risk analysis, our scientific approach, and we're ready to bring Kobe beef in," he said.

Dhaka to focus on free access of LDC goods

Bangladesh team leaves today for WTO Hong Kong ministerial

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh delegation for the WTO Ministerial Conference leaves for Hong Kong today to join the crucial negotiations with special focus on duty-free and quota-free market access of the non-agricultural products from the least developed countries.

Commerce Minister Altaf Hossain Choudhury is leading an around 20-member official delegation to the sixth session of the ministerial December 13-18, being held after a lot of groundwork to salvage the global trade regime from the Cancun collapse.

"Our main concern is to see where the negotiation on NAMA goes," a senior official, one of the key players on Bangladesh side at the world trade talks, told the news agency yesterday.

He said negotiations on the special and differential treatment to the LDCs and services sector, including temporary movement of natural persons, would also be the concern of Bangladesh.

He, however, pointed out that the most recent ministerial text drafted by the World Trade Organisation (WTO) on December 6 provided LDCs with more flexibility and options for the LDCs.

"Now the benefits for the LDCs would depend on and be clear during the negotiation on how we could negotiate the factors of flexibility," he said about the prospect of the ministerial meet.

The draft text by the WTO observes that the members are far from achieving full modalities, which it stated to be highly troubling in the ministerial.

Its final remarks say: "It will take

a major effort by all if the objective of concluding the NAMA (non-agricultural market access) negotiations by the end of 2006 is to be realised."

The official delegation comprises officials from the Ministries of Commerce and Agriculture, the National Board of Revenue (NBR), Bangladesh Tariff Commission, trade body leaders from FBCCI, BGMEA, BTMA, DCCI and ICC-B, and experts from the civil society. Besides, around 100 activists from NGOs and trade unions from Bangladesh would join some 10,000 anti-globalisation protesters to try to press home their demands. Some 300 ministers, 6,000 delegates, 3,000 journalists and 2,000 NGO representatives are converging on the business hub.

Uphold common LDC interests

Int'l civil society urges LDC trade ministries

BDNEWS, Dhaka

The international civil society has called upon the LDC trade ministries to uphold the common interests of the least developed countries (LDCs) at the upcoming ministerial conference of the WTO.

They also urged the ministers to address the citizens' concerns during the WTO ministerial to be held next week in Hong Kong. This was communicated through a joint letter written by the representatives of eight leading civil society organisations to trade ministers of 45 LDCs.

The letter was sent to the LDC trade ministers as a follow-up to the pre-Hong Kong International Civil Society Forum on LDCs held in Dhaka on 3-5 October 2005. The LDC Forum was organised by the

Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) in connection with the upcoming Hong Kong Ministerial.

The letter was signed by Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, executive director of CPD, and representatives of seven international partner organisations, which include Aftab Alam Khan of Action Aid International, Emma Harrison of Consumers International, Cheikh Tidiane Dieye of Enda Tiers Mande, Max Vander Sleen of EU-LDC Network, Anil Prabhakar Tambay of Oxfam International, Navin Dahal of South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SWATEE), and Dr Chandrakant Patel of the southern and Eastern African Trade Information Institute (SEATINI).

Listing the priorities of the LDCs,

signatories to civil society organisations hoped that the ministers will incorporate these in their policy position papers in Hong Kong.

These priorities include effective market access for agricultural and non-agricultural products of LDC origins, exemption from all trade remedial measures for all LDC exportable items, phaseout of the subsidies given to cotton growers in the developed countries, access to essential medicines in LDCs under TRIPS agreement, protection of the rights of farmers, indigenous people and local communities, free temporary movement of service providers from LDCs including less skilled workers under GATS Mode-4.

CityIT fair kicks off

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

An eight-day computer fair began yesterday in Dhaka aiming to introduce latest information technology products and services.

Fisheries and Livestock Minister Abdullah Al Noman inaugurated the show at BCS Computer City at IDB Bhaban in Sher-e-Bangla Nagar.

Matiur Rahman, editor of the daily Prothom Alo, and Aftabul Islam, former president of the American Chamber of Commerce in Bangladesh (AmCham), among others, were present at the inauguration.

A total of 175 companies, from home and abroad, are showcasing their newest computer software and hardware at 160 stalls in the fifth version of the show, which will remain open from 10:00am to 8:00pm with a Tk 10 entry ticket. School students and physically challenged people will get free access.

In his speech Noman said the task of connecting Bangladesh with the information super highway is almost completed and a cyber law has also been drafted, which is awaiting cabinet nod for final go-ahead.

He hoped the country can explore the potential in IT sector if the stakeholders work jointly.

Matiur Rahman, expressing his interest to work with the IT people in developing the sector in Bangladesh, urged them to provide after-sales services to ensure sustainable business.

BCS Computer City, the largest ICT marketplace in the country, is the organiser of the annual event titled 'CityIT-2005'. Gigabyte, Intel, Lexmark and Philips are the sponsors of the fair.

S'pore woos Bangladeshi patients

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Singapore plans to be the preferred destination for Bangladeshis seeking overseas treatment as the country offers world-class healthcare, medical facilities as well as cost effective treatment.

As part of the plan a 15-member delegation is attending the three-day Medexpo 2005, the medical services and equipment fair, at Dhaka Sheraton hotel. The delegates include officials of Singapore's four main healthcare providers-- KK Women's and Children's Hospital, National Healthcare Group, Parkway Group Healthcare and Raffles Hospital. The exposition, which ends today, gives the unique opportunity of exchanging information, Dr Jason Yap, director of Healthcare Services of Singapore Tourism Board, said at a function yesterday on the sidelines of the fair.

"We have seen an increasing number of patients from Bangladesh seeking healthcare in Singapore as many of them are familiar with us and are comfortable in our city," said Yap.

Meanwhile, at a separate function three specialised doctors from Singapore highlighted different features of treatment facilities.

They said Singapore can be a right destination for Bangladeshi cancer patients as treatment cost is relatively lower in Singapore compared to the charges in the first world countries such as US. Besides, Singapore also offers world-class diagnosis facilities, they added.

The doctors included Wong Seng Weng, medial oncologist of Raffles Hospital, Tan Chi Chiu, gastroenterologist of Parkway Group Healthcare, and Liau Kui Hin, chief of hepatobiliary and pancreatic surgery of National Healthcare Group.

Japan to speed trade talks with 3 Asian nations

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Japan said Saturday it had agreed to accelerate negotiations on separate free-trade pacts with Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines in meetings held ahead of the inaugural East Asia Summit.

Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Aso and his Thai counterpart Kantathi Suphamongkhon resolved to speed up work on the details of a bilateral economic partnership agreement, Japan said in a brief statement.

Japan and Thailand reached broad agreement in September but are yet sign the deal. "The two ministers agreed to order working-level officials to speed up the work on the text and to aim at signing the agreement at the earliest possible time," the statement said.



PHOTO: STAR

Abul Barakat (L), general secretary of Bangladesh Economic Association (BEA), speaks at a press conference in Dhaka yesterday to discuss the ongoing militant activities and political development in the country. Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad, BEA president, is also seen.

Exporters expect big buyers

Knit Expo 2005 begins Tuesday

BDNEWS, Dhaka

Knitwear exporters yesterday said they are expecting some giant foreign buyers, including Karstadt Quelle, Basler and DK Pro Fashion, at the 2nd Knit Expo 2005.

"At least 10 buyers from Germany will attend the exposition, besides buyers from USA, UK, Spain, Turkey, France, Italy, Brazil and Hong Kong," said BKMEA President Fazlul Hoque at a press briefing organised prior to the Knit Exposition 2005 scheduled for December 13-15.

"More buyers will arrive this year due to our extensive publicity and promotional activities both at home and abroad," Hoque told reporters.

He, however, said increasing bomb blast incidents that have been rattling the country for last couple of months would not hinder foreign buyers coming at the exposition.

Bangladesh earned US\$ 919.02 million from knitwear exports in July-September of the current fiscal, an 18 percent increase from the corre-

sponding period of the last fiscal year. The total earning was \$2819.47 in 2004-05 fiscal, according to BKMEA (Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association).

BKMEA is going to hold the second Knit Expo 2005 at Dhaka Sheraton hotel to net buyers from home and abroad. Prime Minister Khaleda Zia is expected to inaugurate the fair.

About 70 enterprises from Bangladesh, India and Pakistan will participate at this year's fair, BKMEA officials said. Of these, 45 are knitwear exporters and the remaining are yarn and machinery producers, and communication technology, accessories, printing and chemical traders.

BKMEA president said although the continuous bomb blasts cause 'a setback' to economic development, particularly, to exports, it will not impede foreign buyers from attending the fair.

"We have been carrying out an extensive publicity for last four

months to net maximum number of foreign buyers available at the fair," he said.

Hoque said a BKMEA delegation led by him got huge responses from German-based knitwear buyers during carrying out a weeklong promotional campaign in Germany for the Dhaka exposition last month.

He also said, as part of the promotional activities for the exposition, they talked with different consultants, buyers and manufactures associations during their visit to Germany.

Germany is the single largest knitwear importer from Bangladesh. According to the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB), export of knitwear from Bangladesh to Germany was \$ 668 million in 04-05 fiscal.

Banglalink, a mobile phone operator, will sponsor the exposition.

India eyes EU-style Asian economic community

PM leaves for KL to attend India-Asean, East Asian summits

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

With his vision of an Asian Economic Community like European Union, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh leaves here today for Kuala Lumpur where he attends two key summits with leaders from Asean and China, Japan, Australia and South Korea aimed at promoting trade with the region.

Singh will take part in India-Asean summit on December 13 and will also attend the first ever East Asian summit comprising ten countries of Association of South East Asian Nations (Asean) and India, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand the next day. Russian President Vladimir Putin, on a visit to Malaysia, will attend the East Asian summit as a guest of the host country.

Ahead of Singh's trip to the Malaysian capital, India and Asean resolved the ticklish issue of rules of origin to kick start the long-

awaited Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the region by January 2007.

The rules of origin, aimed at preventing flooding of Indian markets by goods from China taking advantage of the FTA, have been sorted out, Secretary (East) in Indian Foreign Ministry Rajiv Sikri told reporters here.

The FTA between India and Asean had run into difficulties over disagreements on textiles and agricultural goods. The two sides had agreed in 2002 to start talks for FTA to implement it by 2006 but differences over interpretation of rules of origin delayed the proposal.

China has either entered into or negotiating FTAs with a number of Asean countries. In fact, China's trade volume with Asean is much bigger than India.

Trade between India and Asean is expected to be nearly \$25 billion this year and anticipated to grow by 30 percent annually with the launch of the FTA. Last year, trade between India and Asean

registered a sharp increase of 40.8 percent over 2003, up from \$12.5 billion to \$17.6 billion, according to official estimates.

While India's FTA with six major economies of Asean, including Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia, would go into force right away, it would begin in the year 2016 with poorer countries Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos.

As part of its "Look East" policy first launched in late eighties, India has already entered into FTAs with Thailand and Singapore besides a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) with the city state. India has also set up joint working groups with Malaysia, Indonesia, South Korea and Japan for CECA.

Asked if India viewed China as a rival in the context of East Asian summit, Sikri said "We do not see any rivalry between the two countries."



PHOTO: STAR

Visitors browse websites free of cost at the eight-day computer fair that began yesterday at IDB Bhaban in Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka.

China's biggest bank lends more to private firms

REUTERS, Beijing

Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, the country's biggest bank, is boosting loans to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) despite higher risks from this type of lending, its chairman said Saturday.

Like other Chinese banks, ICBC has traditionally lent to state-owned firms rather than smaller private firms, even though these now make up the majority of businesses in China.

"Lending to SMEs is a must for Chinese commercial banks because the market for traditional banking services is becoming smaller while there is great demand for loans from SMEs," Chairman Jiang Jianqing told a forum.

Between January and November, the bank had extended 162 billion yuan (\$20 billion) in new loans to 26,000 Chinese SMEs, up a third from the start of the year, he said.

Lending to small firms accounted for 22 percent of new lending in the first 11 months, he added.

ICBC is one of three big Chinese state banks given cash by the state to help clean up debt-ridden balance sheets as they look to sell shares to investors.

Much of the bad loans cleaned off their balance sheets had been extended to state firms for political reasons but the banks still see lending to private firms as more risky.

Despite efforts to improve credit risk controls, the bank has reported its bad loan ratio rose to 4.6 percent in September from 4.5 percent at the end of June.

Small firms in China have long faced difficulties getting bank loans and official credit curbs imposed since 2003 have choked off funds to many fast-growing private firms, forcing them to borrow from unofficial lenders at higher interest rates.