

Star BUSINESS

E-mail: business@thedailystar.net

Dhaka travel mart ends on high note

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The three-day international tourism fair, 'AKTEL Dhaka Travel Mart-2007', ended yesterday amid a huge turnout of visitors.

"We are really happy with the response from the visitors," said an official of Saudi Arabian Airlines.

"We are hopeful that many of the visitors will contact us later," said an official of Galaxy Holidays, a tour operator.

Nahid Kamal, an executive of a multinational company in Dhaka, came to the show to see if he can afford to buy a holiday package.

"I am a bit surprised that packages being offered here are very much affordable even for a mid-level executive like me," Nahid said.

The Daily Star, Channel i and Radio Today were the media partners.

Local shipbuilder wins \$100m German deal

AFP, Dhaka

Bangladesh's main shipbuilder yesterday said it had won a 100-million-dollar contract to build eight vessels, a deal seen as helping pave the way for the nation to emerge as a major shipbuilder.

Shipbuilding officials and local media said the contract was Bangladesh's single biggest export order.

Ananda Shipyards Shipways Ltd (ASSL) signed the joint deal with two German companies earlier this month to build eight ships with capacity for 325 containers by June 2010, company Chairman Abdullah Bari told the news agency.

"This is the single biggest export

order for Bangladesh and it will go a long way to making the country a major world shipbuilding nation," Bari said.

Government officials could not be reached for confirmation on whether it was Bangladesh's biggest export order as offices were shut for the weekend.

Bangladesh has become a new destination for companies seeking construction of small ocean-going vessels as traditional ship-building nations such as South Korea and China now focus on building large ships.

Schiffahrtskontor Tom Woden GmbH and Co and Ernst Komrowki Holding KG signed the deal with ASSL after inspecting its facilities on

the river Meghna and failing to find any shipbuilder willing to construct ships for them in China.

"They're convinced we can build ships and deliver them on time. We have enough skilled workforce," said Bari, adding he planned to double his 700-strong workforce to fill the order.

Riverine Bangladesh has been known for its small ferry-making industry since its independence in 1971. Most of the country's nearly 3,000 ferries were made in the country's shipyards.

Bangladesh's more than one dozen shipbuilding yards employ some 20,000 workers but officials say they can ramp up production and manpower quickly.

EU-US SUMMIT TOMORROW Transatlantic economic council to be set up

XINHUA, Brussels

The European Union and the United States will set up a transatlantic economic council at their coming summit, a move to bring the world's two largest economies towards a common market.

According to the press briefings made by both sides, economic issues will top the agenda when leaders from the EU and the United States kick off their annual gathering next Monday in Washington.

The establishment of a transatlantic economic council is among the proposals to be adopted at the summit, which will serve as a political platform to coordinate the work of business and economic organizations already in existence.

Aiming to dismantle obstacles to economic relations, the EU and the United States have already worked on their economic integration, notably through sector-to-sector dialogues.

However, the overall progress has been limited due to lack of political visibility and strong commitment from both sides, said German diplomats, whose country is holding the EU presidency.

So the transatlantic economic council will be a high-level one. According to some media reports, EU industry commissioner Guenter Verheugen has been tipped to co-chair the council together with a US counterpart of cabinet level.

National growth likely to slow down in 2007 Says ICC-B

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The national output growth is likely to slow down in 2007, according to a report prepared by the ICC-B Executive Board.

President of the Bangladesh chapter of International Chamber of Commerce Mahbubur Rahman presented the report at the Annual Council held at the auditorium of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) yesterday.

The report mentioned that the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has projected a 6.5 percent growth for FY07, which is moderately lower from 6.7 percent achieved in FY06. The Bangladesh Bank has also projected growth rate ranging between 6.5 and 6.8 percent. The central bank has, however, linked the growth rate with the favorable political environment and end of disruption to the economic activities.

The ICC-B chief in his report said Bangladesh needs stability for sustained growth and prosperity to match with other countries of the South Asian region.

He said that Bangladesh economy experienced a mixed trend in the year 2006 due to political instability during the whole year. As a result, the economic indicators showed a sign of slowdown during the last quarter of the year, he added.

He said the country would be indebted to this government for presenting a free, fair and credible election for bringing back much needed stability for sustained growth and prosperity.

The report mentioned that the country has experienced a political stalemate towards the end of 2006, which ultimately led to the declaration of state of emergency. The business leaders took a number of initiatives during the year for bringing the mainstream parties into dialogue, however, unfortunately it did not bring any tangible results, the report lamented.

The businesses have appreciated the timely initiatives taken by the present caretaker government for bringing in political stability, reforms and reconstitution of the Election Commission and Anti-Corruption Commission, progress made in the separation of the judiciary, streamlining the administration, bringing the corrupt politicians and their cronies into task, the report said.

Mahbubur Rahman observed that despite all odds at the end of 2006, export earnings recorded a significant growth of 25.80 percent, while import growth moderated to 19.8 percent. At the same time, remittance from non-resident Bangladeshis increased substantially by 29 percent.

The ICC-B report has also projected that in the coming days inflation will be a major challenge for the Bangladesh economy as rate of inflation is critical for accelerated economic growth and poverty reduction.

The continuous high global oil prices that have heightened pressure on the country's balance of payment and threatened fiscal and monetary stability underscored the

need for further rationalisation of domestically administered prices of petroleum products. It suggested that a pricing system providing for automatic adjustment of domestic fuel prices to international market situation be adopted.

The ICC-B council expects that the present government would expedite the process to remove infrastructural inadequacies, especially power shortage and sustainable improvement of port operations as well as its expansion. Immediate careful attention for modernisation of National Board of Revenue as well as Customs providing fiscal incentives, including tax holidays, to attract investment in basic industries, development of capital market, encouraging manpower export in a more organised manner and allowing Bangladeshi businesses to invest in the attractive overseas market by using part of their export earnings in order to arrest informal outflow of foreign exchange were also suggested.

Among others, ICC-B Vice-president Latifur Rahman, Executive Board members ASM Quasem, Annisul Huq, M Aminuzzaman, M Shamsul Alam, Mahsih Ul Karim and Waliur Rahman Bhuiyan, and ICC-B members DCCI President Hossain Khaled, Rokeya A Rahman, Barrister Dr M Zahir, Barrister Rafique-ul Huq and Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry Secretary General CK Hyder attended the council.

Better use of tech transfer in footwear industry stressed

Shoe component show starts

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Footwear manufacturers and exporters at a 'buyer-seller meet' in Dhaka yesterday underscored the need for greater connectivity between Bangladesh and India to reap best benefits from the South Asia region's fast growing footwear industry.

"We have sufficient quantity of leather and also easy market access in developed countries under LDCs' preferential benefit. So let there be collaboration between our two friendly countries [between Bangladesh and India] for mutual benefit", FBCCI President Mir Nasir Hossain said addressing the programme as the chief guest.

The two-day long 'Buyer-Seller Meet cum Exhibition of Indian Footwear Components' kicked off at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre.

Council of Leather Exports of India and Indian High Commission in Dhaka in association with Leather Goods and Footwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association of Bangladesh and Indian Footwear Components and Manufacturers' Association organised the exhibition.

The Daily Star is the media partner of the fair.

The event offered potential Bangladeshi buyers to have a better knowledge about Indian footwear components they might need for their export-oriented footwear industry, said the organisers.

A total of 28 Indian footwear components manufacturing companies with 40 stalls are participating in the fair.

Termining the fair a timely initiative, Mir Nasir Hossain expressed the hope that the occasion would provide an opportunity for Bangladesh and Indian leather goods promotion bodies for technology transfer and investment.

"Since Bangladesh has a huge market for leather goods component, he observed, the exhibition is of special significance to us for capacity building in the footwear component industry".

Speaking at the inaugural session of the programme, Indian High Commissioner in Bangladesh Pinak Ranjan Chakraborty said after the western countries India is the largest export destination of Bangladeshi footwear products.

Better connectivity between the South Asian countries would bring about positive changes in their economic health, said Chakraborty, quoting the Indian premier.

Pointing to the fact that trade deficit would benefit neither India nor Bangladesh economy in the long run, he spoke of some initiatives that India took to enhance trade relationship between the countries.

Indian Footwear Component Manufacturers Association Chairman Sudhir Rustagi said, "We have come to Bangladesh to create a win-win situation for both the sides".

To boost up trade relations between the countries, he emphasised speedy clearance of goods through the ports.

The South Asian Preferential Trade Agreement (Sapta) was mapped out amid great enthusiasm, but we could not make good use of the deal, lamented Saiful Islam, president of the Leather Goods and Footwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association of Bangladesh.

Better infrastructure, equity partnership of local companies with the foreign investors would greatly contribute to bolstering the country's economy, he suggested.

Chairman of Board of Investment Nazrul Islam, Chairman (North) of Council of Leather Exports of India Anil Kumar Sondhi also spoke on the occasion.



PHOTO: STAR

Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) President Mir Nasir Hossain and Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Pinak Ranjan Chakraborty inaugurate the 'Buyer-Seller Meet cum Exhibition of Indian Footwear Components' in Dhaka yesterday.

Safe workplace fair kicks off

12 firms showcase safety equipment

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

A two-day fair on safe workplace and safety equipment began in Dhaka yesterday to mark the World Day for Safety and Health at Work.

Dewan Sultan Ahmed, vice president of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), formally inaugurated the Safe Workplace Fair 2007 at the Bulbul Academy of Fine Arts at Wiseghat near Sadarghat.

Strategica in cooperation with Better Business, a subsidiary of Katalyst, is organising the fair. The Daily Star, Channel i, Dainik Shomokal and Radio Today are the media partners of the event, while Rahimafroz is the main sponsor and Savlon is the co-sponsor of the fair.

Speaking at the function, Dewan Sultan Ahmed said safety, health and environment are very important in workplaces. "If a worker does not feel secured in the workplace, he

would not concentrate on his work which would ultimately hinders production," he pointed out.

Ronald Burgois, chief technical adviser (International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour) of International Labour Organisation, said the workplace that is not safe is not a decent workplace.

According to the organisers, a total of 12 companies are displaying personal protective and safety equipment such as gloves, helmets, goggles, musk, power tools, fire extinguisher, drinking water filter, waste bin, water tank and first aid box at the fair.

They said two other similar fairs would be held at Islambagh on May 5-6 and at Wari on May 11-12.

At the inaugural function, among others, Strategica Chairman Razib Parvez, Katalyst Deputy Managing Director Sadruddin Imran, Better Business Team Leader Sakira Siddique spoke.



PHOTO: STAR

Dewan Sultan Ahmed, vice president of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), visits a stall after inaugurating Safe Workplace Fair 2007 in Dhaka yesterday.



PHOTO: STAR

Dhaka University Vice Chancellor SMA Faiz speaks at the inaugural function of the two-day Bangladesh Brand Forum in Dhaka yesterday.

Experts brainstorm as brand forum begins

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Leading national and international brand experts started brainstorming on brands and business as the first-ever Bangladesh Brand Forum began in Dhaka yesterday.

The experts said building a strong brand requires understanding of consumer needs and behaviour.

Companies can build sustainable business models by only following the brand-based business culture, said an official of leading mobile phone operator Grameenphone.

"You have to be different... you must stand for something unique to win today's hyper competitive market," said Rubaba Dowla Matin, head of brands and customer management of Grameenphone.

Inaugurating the two-day forum, Dhaka University Vice-chancellor SMA Faiz said organisations need to create, strengthen and protect brands to enter market.

The forum is organised by Brandzeal, a brand consultancy firm, in partnership with Institute of

Business Administration (IBA) of Dhaka University and Global Brand Forum from Singapore.

Grameenphone is the platinum sponsor of the forum. The Daily Star and Channel i are the media partners of the event.

Muhammad Ziaulhaq Mamun, director of IBA, and Shariful Islam, convener of the forum and CEO of Brandzeal, also attended the inaugural function at Pan Pacific Sonargaon hotel.

Later, SMA Faiz inaugurated the 'Brand Concept Fair' at the IBA of Dhaka University.

The fair presents core branding concepts and links them with real life examples.

On the sidelines of the fair, Karthik Siva, chairman of Global Brand Forum, presented a paper on 'Brand Building in Asia', Sudas Roy, professor of Kolkata-based Indian Institute of Management, presented a paper on brand management structure and process and Steven Van Der Kruit, creative director of Geneva-based fragrance and flavour house Firmenich, presented a paper on building brand in changing environment.

New DMD of Agrani Bank



Khandakar Sabera Islam has been promoted as deputy managing director of Agrani Bank, says a press release.

Prior to her new assignment, Sabera served as a general manager of the bank. Sabera started her banking career with Sonali Bank as a probationary officer in 1973.



PHOTO: ICC-B

Mahbubur Rahman (C), president of International Chamber of Commerce-Bangladesh (ICC-B), speaks at the 'Annual Council 2006' of ICC-B in Dhaka yesterday. Latifur Rahman (L), vice president of ICC-B, and Hossain Khaled, president of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, are also seen.