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More public involvement needed in policymaking to boost economy

BIDS roundtable told

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Country's prominent researchers yesterday suggested that the government should ensure more public involvement in any policymaking process rather than external pressure.

"You (government) have to see that people are involved significantly in policy reforms and a political mechanism is needed to associate them with decision-making," Professor Rehman Sobhan, chairman of independent think tank Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), told a roundtable in Dhaka.

He said country's sovereignty cannot be compromised for formulating any policy and people's welfare should be prioritised.

However the finance adviser differed Sobhan's views and said, "There are changes taking place in our neighbouring countries and other countries who are not our neighbours but may be our major import source or export destination".

"So one has to adapt to the changes in the global economy and policies. And you cannot perhaps make the policy by yourselves. In that case, your so-called sover-

eighty in policymaking is automatically curtailed," Dr AB Mirza Azizul Islam said.

To mark the celebration of its golden jubilee, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) organised the roundtable on "Policy Makers and Policies: From the Past and into the Future".

The finance and planning adviser chaired the programme, while some former ministers and advisers of finance and planning ministry shared their experiences in policy making and placed suggestions for the country's future prospects.

On dependence on donors, Mirza Aziz said the government has to rely on external aid, although such dependence declines at the macro-economic stage.

Around 40 percent of the total development budget is financed by external aid, he pointed out.

Former finance ministers M Syeduzzaman and Abul Mal Abdul Muhit, Deputy Commander of Bangladesh Liberation Forces, Air Vice Marshal (Rtd) AK Khondokar, former adviser Hafizuddin Khan, President of the Bangladesh Economic Association Dr Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad took part in

the discussion.

Quazi Shahabuddin, director general and M Asaduzzaman, director of BIDS highlighted the organisation's past and future activities at the roundtable.

Rehman Sobhan said political parties must be involved in the country's policymaking process so that the democratic mandate that they (parties) get at the time of election for the agenda is honoured.

"Unless you get a significant popular mobilisation behind your policy choices and investment priorities, people will at some point or the other will reject it or form ways of getting around your policy reforms," he observed.

He, however, said political parties should also be legally accountable for implementing their mandates.

When the discussants criticised the present government for not placing any clear vision before the nation, the finance adviser replied, "I already mentioned the major strategies in my budget speech."

He also pointed out that the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) is also a source of knowledge about the future vision of the country.

According to the PRSP, he said, agriculture and water resources, health, education, infrastructure, particularly energy are the most priority sectors of the present government.

He however hinted at updating the second version of PRSP on receipt of suggestions from members of the civil society and other stakeholders.

Besides these, vision 2021, a long-term strategy paper for the country is under preparation in the planning ministry, the finance adviser said.

M Syeduzzaman said agriculture and rural non-firm sector should be given more priority in the policy making for future economic growth.

Hafizuddin Khan said policy should be easily understandable by the people.

Employment generation would be the major challenge for the country in the near future and so the government should lay emphasis on employment generation, said Abul Mal Abdul Muhit.

He also suggested training up the manpower before exporting to other countries.

Donors urged to provide assistance for tourism infrastructure

Bangladesh travel and tourism fair begins

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A three-day travel and tourism fair began in Dhaka yesterday with a call to promote the industry as the most potential employment generation sector.

"Tourism could be the leading employment generation sector as it can employ thousands of young people in different segments of the industry," MA Matin, adviser, Ministry of Civil Aviation & Tourism, said inaugurating the Banglalink Bangladesh Travel & Tourism Fair at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre.

Tour Operators Association of Bangladesh (Toab) is organising the fair, while mobile phone operator Banglalink is its sponsor.

The adviser urged development partners to provide assistance to infrastructure development for the industry.

He stressed the need for developing a road link through Nepal and Indian state of Assam to facilitate foreign tourists' visit to Bangladesh.

Shaikh Altaf Ali, secretary in charge of Civil Aviation and Tourism Ministry, Himangshu Shekar Das, principal secretary of Assam, India, Hafizur Rahman Bhuiyan, chairman of Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation, Rashid Khan, chief executive officer of Banglalink, and representatives from Biman Bangladesh Airlines Limited and GMG Airlines spoke.

About 80 stalls of tour operators, travel agents, hotels, resorts, airlines and travel magazines have been set up at the fair.

Tourist offices of Nepal, Thailand, Malaysia and Assam are taking part in the fair that will remain open to the public from 10:00am to 9:00pm. The entry fee has been fixed at Tk 20 a person.

A seminar on Responsible Tourism and a presentation on the Sundarbans will be held on the concluding day of the fair.

Sonargaon, Dhaka Sheraton, Dhaka Regency, Washington Hotel, Hotel Whitehouse, Hotel Omate, Hotel City Home and Hotel Northern will act as hospitality partners of the event.



PHOTO: STAR

Civil Aviation and Tourism Adviser MA Matin visits a stall after inaugurating the three-day 'Banglalink Bangladesh Travel & Tourism Fair' at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in the capital yesterday.



PHOTO: STAR

Italian Ambassador to Bangladesh Pietro Ballero along with others is seen at the launching function of Perfetti Van Melle's chewing gum 'Center Fresh' in Dhaka yesterday.

Nokia opens Wi-Fi zones in Dhaka

Nokia has launched four Wi-Fi zones at select cafes in Dhaka city, says a press release.

The Wi-Fi areas will be free for consumers who own authorised Nokia N Series handsets. The Wi-Fi zones are being powered by Agni Systems Ltd and will provide high-speed internet connection.

"This is a great opportunity for Nokia to showcase the capabilities of our mobile multimedia devices," said Prem P Chand, general manager, Nokia Emerging Asia.

The Wi-Fi zones are located in Kozmo Lounge at Dhanmondi, PM Lounge on Kamal Ataturk Road at Banani, NSIS at Shoppers World, Gulshan and Deja vu Café on Gulshan Avenue.

Beximco okays 15pc stock dividend

Bangladesh Export Import Company (Beximco) Ltd has declared a 15 percent stock dividend for its shareholders for the year 2006.

The dividend was announced at the 34th annual general meeting (AGM) held yesterday in Dhaka, says a press release.

Director of the company OK Chowdhury presided over the AGM.

Indian automobile to get priority at WTO talks

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

The Indian automobile industry is in an infant stage and needs protection for which top priority would be given to its interests at the WTO talks for free and regional trade agreements, Commerce and Industry Minister Kamal Nath has said.

"In cases of infant industries, we have to ensure that there is fair and equitable growth and calibrate our tariffs to commensurate with our growth. Automobile industry is also an infant sector and needs protection. This is our position at the multilateral trade body WTO as well", he said while addressing a meeting of Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers here on Wednesday.

The government would accord top priority to the interests of the automobile industry during debate on trade-related issues in multilateral forums like WTO (World Trade Organisation) and negotiations for free trade agreements (FTAs), Nath said.

On the domestic industry's concerns that FTAs and regional trade agreements would lead to an inverted duty structure under which raw materials would be costlier

than import of finished products, he said "trade agreements would work only if there is a level-playing field".

Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises Minister Santosh Mohan Dev assured the automobile industry of all possible help by way of incentives for export or excise duty cuts to sustain growth in the sector. Hardening interest rates for vehicle loans and appreciating Rupee have hit the sector.

In the first four months of this year, the performance of the automobile sector has been lower than what the government had expected, Dev pointed out.

The passenger car segment grew by 13.3 percent while the commercial vehicle sector by only 2.6 percent and the two wheeler segment has actually decelerated, the minister said.

"We are keenly watching the second quarter and if need be, we will certainly intervene to sustain growth", he added.

Dev said the heavy industries ministry has written to the finance ministry for excise duty cut and also favoured tax sops for companies that achieve a minimum threshold of export volume.

Perfetti Van Melle chewing gum launched

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Perfetti Van Melle Bangladesh Private Ltd yesterday launched its globally popular chewing gum 'Center Fresh' in Bangladesh.

The new kind of spearmint liquid-filled chewing gum has already entered the market, said organisers adding with the fresh taste of spearmint, the soft texture and liquid filling are designed to give consumers a burst of freshness.

Perfetti Van Melle, an Italian-Dutch joint venture confectionary company, launched its manufacturing operations in Bangladesh in July 2005. The plant is located at Rajendrapur in Gazipur.

Italian Ambassador to Bangladesh Pietro Ballero was present at the launching ceremony as the chief guest while Stefano Pelle, Chief Operating Officer for Russia and South Asia of Perfetti Van Melle and Ramesh Jayaraman, general manager of Perfetti Van Melle Bangladesh Ltd, also spoke at the launching function in Dhaka.

The single unit of Center Fresh is available at Tk 2 and the price of a display box containing 60 pieces is Tk 120.

KFC Gulshan celebrates 1st anniversary

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Celebrating the first anniversary of its operation, international fast food chain KFC's Gulshan outlet in Dhaka yesterday announced its commitment to serving customers with sumptuous chicken dishes.

Introduced to Bangladesh in 2006 by Transcom Foods Limited, a subsidiary of Bangladesh's leading business group Transcom, KFC (Kentucky Fried Chicken) is now offering the world famous crunchy Hot & Crispy Chicken, soft juicy Original Recipe Chicken, Colonel Fillet Burger and Zinger Burger.

KFC Gulshan also serves vegetarian menu and extensive range of desserts.

Executive Director of Transcom Foods Limited Akku Chowdhury said, "KFC is not about serving great food and delicacy...rather we have exerted all our efforts to achieve supremacy in service, quality, hygiene and safety standard."

He apprised the audience of its performance saying "in one year KFC Gulshan has served over 792000 customers, selling 833971 pieces of chicken weighing over 111196 kg and the number of burgers sold, if stacked one by one, would reach twice to the Everest".

During the period, KFC paid VAT (value added tax) amounting to Tk 1.62 crore to the state coffer.

Singer Mamtaj, who is a regular customer of KFC, said since inception she and her family members are enjoying the delicious food of KFC.

Besides KFC, Transcom Foods Limited is also the franchisee of another international food chain Pizza Hut.



PHOTO: STAR

Singer Mamtaj and Executive Director of Transcom Foods Limited Akku Chowdhury cut a cake to mark the first anniversary of international fast food chain KFC's Gulshan outlet in Dhaka yesterday.

Shamunnay releases book on budget

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Shamunnay, a research organisation, yesterday released a book titled 'Budget Sahaj Path' (Easy Learning of Budget 2007-08).

Shamunnay has been publishing books on budget since 2005 to make the budget understandable for mass people.

Shamunnay Chairman Atiur Rahman formally released the book at a function in Dhaka.

Speaking at the function, Atiur said pace of economic growth has slowed due to recent developments on the country's political and economic fronts.

People are worried due to the ongoing anti-corruption drive, he said.

He said the fear should be removed for the sake of economic development.

Referring to the meeting between the business leaders and the caretaker government, he said such kind of move should have been initiated earlier.

The business leaders told the meeting that the ongoing crackdown on corruption has created a 'climate of fear', which might push the economy to ruin.

Atiur said implementation of the Annual Development Programme (ADP) is a major challenge for the government, as the ADP implementation is yet to start, although more than two months have passed.

Atiur said Shamunnay will organise a briefing on budget implementation in every three months and the first briefing will be held next month.