

Minister pitches IT prospect

STAR BUSINESS DESK

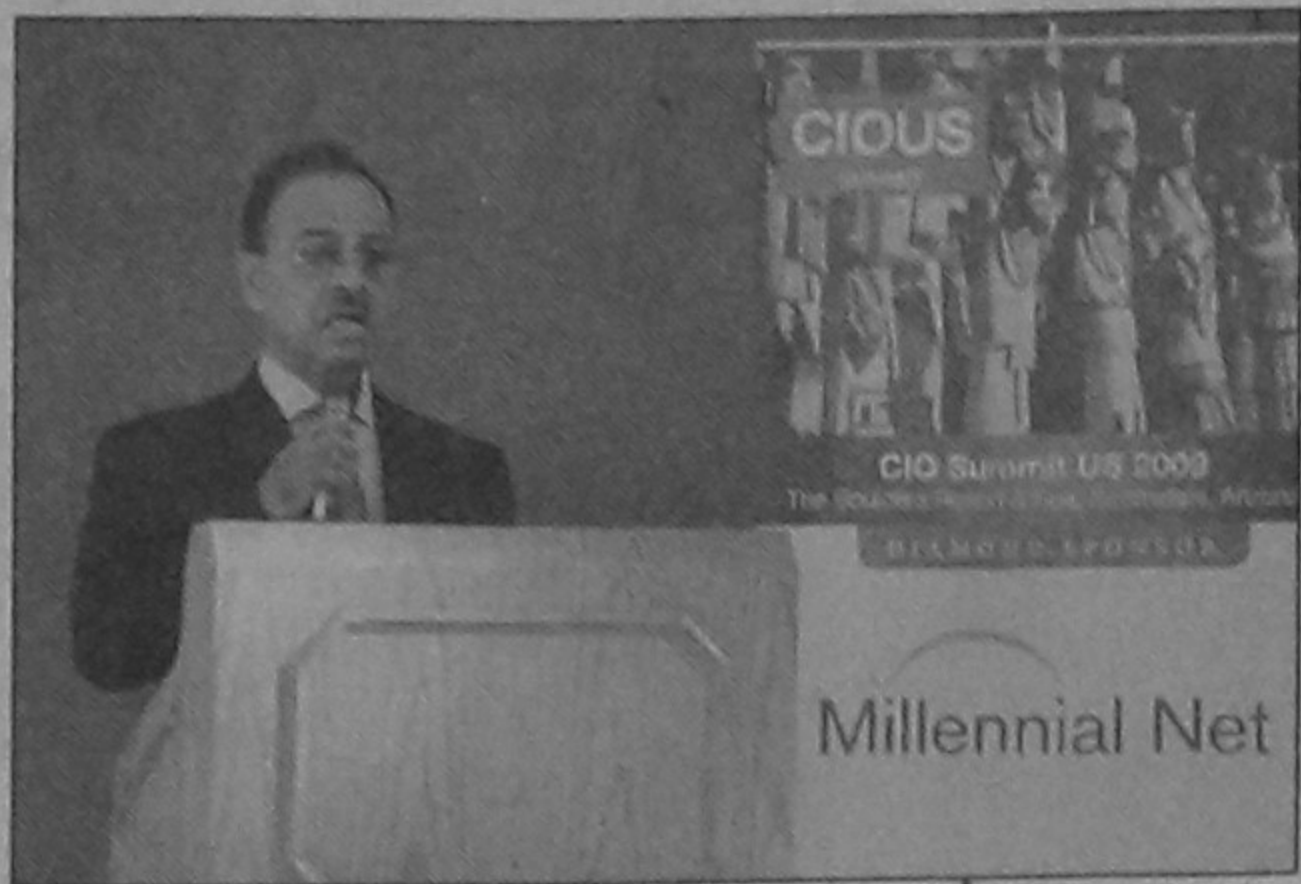
Commerce Minister Faruk Khan has said the government is offering a string of facilities, including reduced tax, to develop the country's information technology sector to establish a Digital Bangladesh.

The minister was speaking at the launch of a seminar on "Outsource to Bangladesh", organised by the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry at the CIO (Chief Information Officers) Summit of IT Executives on September 9-10 in Arizona, USA. US-based MIT was a co-organiser.

Branding the IT industry as a thrust sector, the minister said Bangladesh boasts about 25,000 IT engineers.

More than 6,000 software engineers are entering the IT sector a year from 90 universities and 700 colleges.

The seminar was also attended by FBCCI President Annisul Huq and



Commerce Minister Faruk Khan speaks at the launch of a seminar on "Outsource to Bangladesh", organised by the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry at the CIO (Chief Information Officers) Summit of IT Executives on Wednesday in Arizona, USA.

IT professional Sajeeb Wazed Joy as representatives from Bangladesh.

They presented "situation papers" on the IT sector in Bangladesh.

In his speech, Joy highlighted the future plans of the government to develop the IT sector and its various

programmes, including Wimax technology, expansion of submarine cable, establishment of IT parks and the construction of infrastructure.

Joy mentioned that Bangladesh is capable of offering quality products in competitive prices, com-

pared with nearest competitors such as India, Indonesia and Vietnam.

He urged IT entrepreneurs to invest in the IT sector in Bangladesh, as the government is ready to provide the best facilities to the foreign investors.

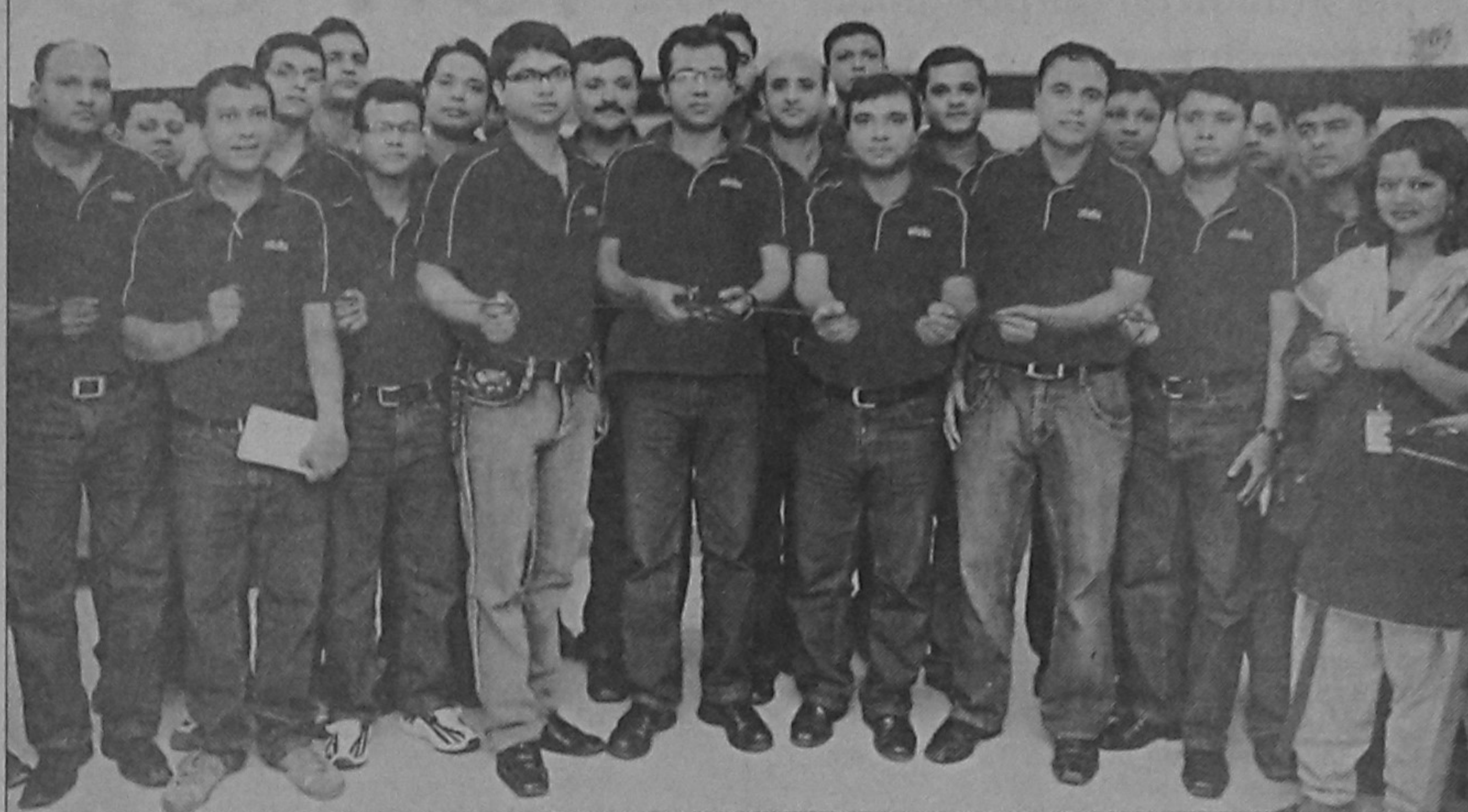
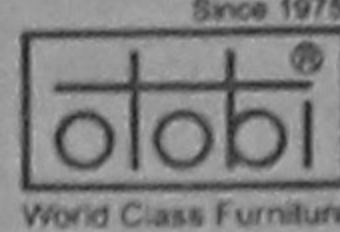
"The young generation of Bangladesh is highly educated in English. Bangladesh is considered an ideal place for establishing software companies, call centres and other IT-related services," Joy told the seminar.

Anisul Huq invited IT entrepreneurs to attend IT fairs in Bangladesh to get an idea about the IT sector.

The FBCCI chief hoped the seminar would play an effective role in developing and expanding the IT sector.

IT Executives of Microsoft, Unisil, Coca-Cola, Cisco, Bank of America, Austin Energy, Radio Shack, Hewlett-Packard (HP), Wells Fargo and Millennium Net were present at the seminar.

Opening Ceremony of OTOBI Extension outlet at Uttara



Abu Naser, regional head of Customer Relationship Management (retail), South Asia of OTOBI, inaugurates the company's extension outlet at Uttara in Dhaka recently. The outlet will provide a 15 percent to 50 percent discount offer for Eid.



HBM Iqbal, chairman of Premier Bank Ltd, speaks at the bank's Monthly Managers Conference in Dhaka yesterday.

PREMIER BANK

Strike at Barapukuria coal mine continues

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Production in Barapukuria coal mine has almost come to a halt, as the local miners continued their strike for the second day yesterday.

However, around 300 Chinese miners working under a contract at the project site extracted 1200

tonnes of coal in the last 24 hours, an amount considered very meagre in terms of the daily average extraction of 4,000 tonnes when the mine functions normally.

Bangladeshi miners called an indefinite strike at the coal mine from Thursday midnight to press home their 14-point

demand that includes festival bonus and round-the-clock doctor and ambulance facilities for underground miners.

The authorities of Barapukuria Coal Mining Company Ltd (BCMCL), the Bangladeshi operator of the project, said the company is counting a Tk 3 crore loss per day because

of the suspension of coal extraction.

Meanwhile, the agitating miners turned down the request of State Minister for Land Advocate Mostafizur Rahman to join duties when he visited the coal mine area yesterday.

Later, the minister discussed the crisis with the BCMCL authorities.

Obama wants regulatory reform

AFP, Washington

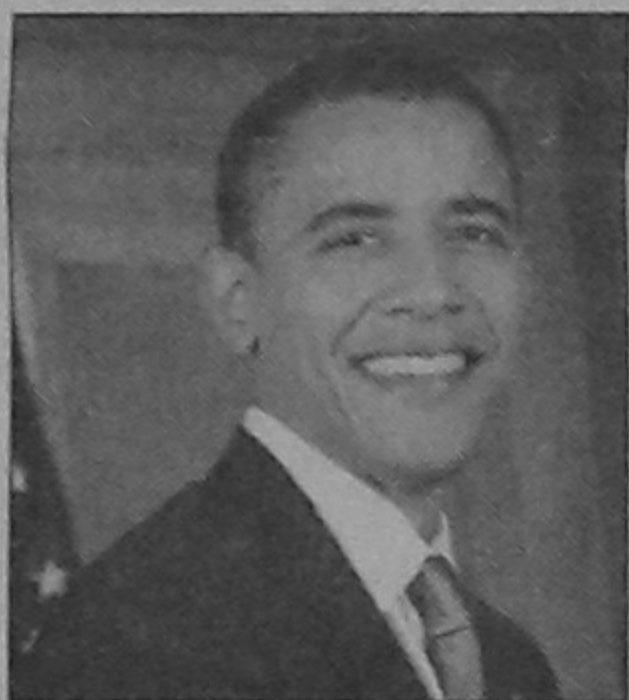
President Barack Obama wants Congress to act this year on what is billed as the most sweeping financial regulatory reform since the 1930s, despite a crush of other business, a senior aide said Friday.

Lawrence Summers, chairman of Obama's National Economic Council, also said that despite hopes for a return to economic growth in the third quarter this year, US unemployment would remain "unacceptably high" for years.

He also warned that the government would not declare premature victory and pull its billions of dollars in support funding out of the finance and banking sector too quickly.

Obama, who is set to give a major speech in New York on Monday on the next steps in his economic rescue effort, is hoping to add a transformation of the finance sector to a historic health care overhaul before the end of 2009.

"The president famously said during the campaign



that to be president you have to be able to do more than one thing at once," Summers said.

"I think that same idea applies to the 535 members of the Congress."

Summers said he was confident that the banking and financial service committees in the Senate and House of Representatives could slog through the ultra-complicated administration plans quickly enough to permit votes in 2009.

"We believe it is very important to pass financial regulatory reform this year," he said.

Popular Washington wisdom holds that Congress and the US political system can only handle one big

ticket issue at a time, so passing regulatory reform would be a challenge with Capitol Hill consumed by Obama's health care fight.

Lawmakers are also consumed with what would be an historic energy bill designed to cut global warming emissions, though doubts have surfaced in recent weeks over the timetable for passing the legislation.

Summers argued that defining new regulations for a financial industry that ran amok before the crisis was vital to underpinning the fragile recovery expected to be under way soon, and to head off future crises.

"We can no longer afford to take an approach that is institution by institution, but instead have to focus on the stability of the system," Summers told a small group of reporters.

"If an institution is so large and so interconnected that its failure poses a threat to systemic stability... it has to be the responsibility of some regulator to insure its safety and soundness."

"We cannot have a viable

private sector financial system in which failure is not a possibility. Our financial system will not be fail safe until it is safe for failure," he said.

Obama's speech on Monday at historic Federal Hall on Wall Street will come on the anniversary of the collapse of 158-year-old Lehman Brothers, which shook confidence in the US financial system and set off a global panic.

His proposals for greater regulation would give the Federal Reserve expanded powers to oversee regulation on all finance firms or banks that pose a significant systemic risk to the wider financial infrastructure.

They would introduce new discipline and transparency into financial markets and would enable investors to better ride out the failure of one or more large financial institutions.

The reforms will include the creation of a Consumer Financial Protection Agency to shield Americans from the extremes of credit, savings and mortgage markets.

Russia urges G20 to reconstruct global financial system

AFP, Moscow

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev urged major economies to press ahead with reforms to overhaul the world's financial system, suggesting some countries were more interested in preserving the status quo.

"It's very important that the world community, the largest economies, take further steps to reform, to reconstruct the international financial system," he said Friday in televised remarks ahead of an upcoming G20 summit in Pittsburgh.

"I have a feeling that not all are seeking to do it. There is a desire to mothball it, say that everything will be fine, it's nobody's fault and everything will be fine later," he said in the Kazakh city of Astana.

"We need the fundamental reconstruction of the world financial system."

Dollar partly recoups losses

AFP, New York

The dollar recovered some of its losses but ended mixed Friday after data showing improvement in US consumer sentiment helped the greenback move up from a nine-month low on the euro.

The single European currency fetched 1.4573 dollars at 2100 GMT, against 1.4583 late Thursday in New York. The euro had earlier surged to a nine-month high of 1.4634 dollars.

The US currency fell to 90.64 yen, down from 91.74.

Analysts attributed the market action to lower "risk aversion," with investors -- confident in prospects for the global economy -- emboldened to invest in riskier assets, such as mining assets or the euro.

But the dollar managed to firm during the course of trade Friday, boosted by news that the University of Michigan consumer confidence index had risen in the first part of September after two months of decline. The

index rose to a better-than-expected 70.2 points.

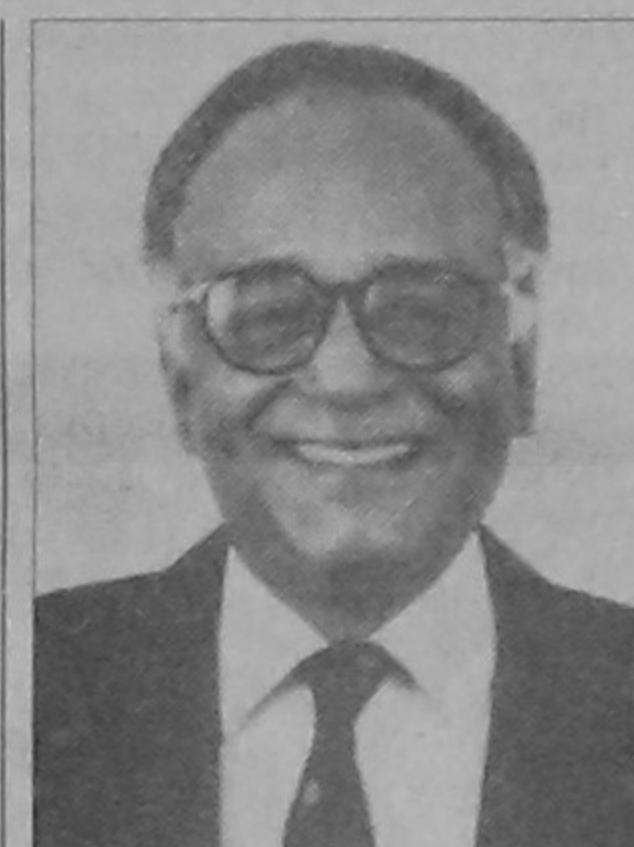
"It has been a tough day for the US dollar but the stronger-than-expected consumer confidence report has helped the greenback recover," said Kathy Lien at Global Forex Trading.

"The dollar is finally rising on good data but it remains to be seen whether the drivers for the currency market has really changed from risk appetite to economic fundamentals."

John Kicklighter, currency strategist at Forex Capital Markets, said it was unclear how far the optimism will carry.

"We have seen the trend in risk appetite extend its advance and the dollar inversely maintain its bearish trajectory," he said.

"Fear continues to dissipate and the demand for yield is steadily growing. However, you can't point out these bullish signs without also noticing the fading momentum behind the advance."



Sonali Bank's new chairman takes over

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Quazi Baharul Islam has taken over as chairman of Sonali Bank Ltd, says a press release.

Islam, a postgraduate in Political Science from Dhaka University, served as managing director and chief executive officer in various public and private banks. He is also former general manager of Sonali Bank, UK operations.

He also received advanced training in banking and development finance from USA, UK and West Germany.

End of a textile era as Jacquard loom in Europe closes

AFP, Warsaw

The rhythmic clickety-clack of 19th century hand looms will soon be silenced when what is thought to be the last Jacquard workshop in Europe closes in a few weeks and another traditional art disappears.

Film-makers, theatres and interior designers have been keeping the LAD Jacquard fabric workshop in Warsaw alive but the economic crisis has hit all of them very hard.

"We're in a very difficult economic situation and in a few weeks this, the oldest working Jacquard manufacturer in Europe, will become history," Dariusz Makowski, owner of the workshop told AFP.

Makowski is pessimistic that public subsidies can be found.

Invented by Frenchman Joseph Marie Jacquard in the French city of Lyon around 1800, the Jacquard loom was the first to weave complicated patterns. It revolutionised textile manufacturing and paved the way for the mechanised modern textile industry.

"It allowed fabrics with beautiful

intricate designs to be produced much faster and at a much lower cost," explained Makowski.

"In fact in the 1820s it sparked a labour movement by weavers in Lyon, a great social revolution and the rise of the weavers' Solidarity union in 1823-25 -- much, much sooner than in Poland," he remarked of the rise of Poland's historic Solidarity union led by Nobel Prize winner Lech Walesa in 1980.

The Jacquard technique spread across Europe in the 1800s and by the 1840s large manufacturing facilities weaving Jacquard fabrics and rare laces were set up in Poland. But soon machine-operated Jacquard looms replaced their hand-operated ancestors.

"In 1926 they (the hand-loom) became the property of the Warsaw Fine Arts academy and later the LAD artists' co-operative was created. We are their successors," Makowski said.

"This is the only remaining working cooperative of the famous ones such as Bauhaus in Germany or the Arts and Crafts Society in London," he added with pride.

Fifteen years ago he bought 12 19th century wooden Jacquard looms and an inventory of 509 antique Jacquard patterns from the LAD cooperative which folded in post-communist Poland's difficult adaptation to the market economy.

Today, the workshop is located in a ramshackle greenhouse in Warsaw's sprawling Royal Lazienki park.

The revolutionary Jacquard loom was the first to use special punch-hole cards using a binary code to make fabric patterns using a steering mechanism on the top of the loom.

"The machine on top of the loom can be likened to a computer while the punch-card is like a kind of primitive computer program or disc," explained veteran weaver Mariola Nowakowska, 54, who has been working on looms for 30 years.

"The machine reads the punch-card and really you could say it's a kind of a proto-computer," she added.

A weaver on a Jacquard hand loom must be physically fit to pump its heavy wooden pedal day-in, day-

out and have the patience of a saint to make sure each of several thousand fine threads is in its rightful place, Nowakowska said.

But the effort is rewarded by the special quality of the product.

"On hand looms fabrics are naturally more supple and light than mechanically made ones as we compact the weave by hand and we don't have as much strength as the motor running a machine," Nowakowska said.

An experienced weaver can produce up to two meters (six feet) of Jacquard cloth per day, but Nowakowska is one of the last possessing the skill to deftly operate a Jacquard loom.

"Essentially, this craft has disappeared. We are just two weavers here and young people just aren't interested in learning. It's hard, complicated work. Perhaps there will be someone willing to learn, if not, it will become a museum," Nowakowska said with a hint of sadness.



A Polish weaver works on a 19th century hand-loom in Warsaw. The rhythmic clickety-clack of 19th century hand looms will soon be silenced when what is thought to be the last Jacquard workshop in Europe closes in a few weeks and another traditional art disappears.