



Khandker Mosharrar Hossain, labour and expatriate welfare and overseas employment minister, signs a deal on economic and technology cooperation with his Kuwaiti counterpart in Kuwait City on Monday. Sheikh Hasina, prime minister, Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah, prime minister of Kuwait, were also present.

Hasina urges Kuwait to hire more Bangladeshis

UNB, Kuwait City

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Monday said there are many unexplored areas of cooperation between Bangladesh and Kuwait despite the closeness of these two brotherly nations.

"Exploring and investing in these areas would be enriching to both our countries. Our bilateral relations would reach an enviable level," she said at a banquet hosted in her honour by Kuwaiti Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah at Bayan Palace.

Hasina said Bangladesh has, for some time, been participating with manpower in Kuwait's dynamic transformation. Around 250,000 Bangladeshis are involved in Kuwait's economic activities.

"More of our gentle, law abiding

workers are waiting to follow." She requested the Kuwaiti Prime Minister to intervene to lift the stay imposed in October 2006 on recruitment, thus allowing Bangladeshi workers to serve in Kuwait's development efforts.

The prime minister said at present, Bangladesh is in excellent position to offer services of doctors, engineers, business professionals, nurses and semi-skilled and skilled workers.

Technical personnel with experience are also available in construction, civil aviation, power, water, petrochemical and gas, health and hospitality sectors.

Hasina mentioned that after establishing the diplomatic relations Kuwait has supported Bangladesh's development ventures.

"We are indeed grateful for it. However, for us to achieve our Vision

2021, we need Kuwait's brotherly support," she said.

"We need your partnership in constructing a bridge over River Padma costing US\$ 2.4 billion; BMRE of Eastern Refinery in Chittagong; procurement of 13 dredgers worth \$200 million for dredging our heavily silted rivers adversely affecting livelihood of millions of lives; rail-cum-road bridge over River Karnaphuli as well as tunnels under it; a flyover at Mouchak-Mogbazar in Dhaka worth \$70 million; two coal-fired power stations, and another two oil based stations in Chittagong."

The prime minister said Bangladesh also needed Kuwait investment in power, telecommunications, infrastructure development, ceramics, pharmaceuticals, textiles, ICT, real estate, gas and energy, leather, furniture and agro-based industries.

GP, Banglalink announce infrastructure tie-up

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Mobile operators Grameenphone and Banglalink yesterday officially announced their move to join efforts in sharing network infrastructure, aiming to take low cost services to the untapped rural market.

The two top operators signed a deal on February 1 to share their infrastructure for efficient management of resources by allowing consolidation of costs in terms of both operating expenditure and capital expenditure.

Grameenphone and Banglalink together serve 37.13 million customers out of the 52.43 million mobile subscribers.

Banglalink will be able to

extend network coverage by utilising Grameenphone's network, as per the deal. Grameenphone will decrease its network costs and channel investment to improve subscriber needs with more sophisticated services.

"Our initiative will reduce both operational costs and environment pollution," said Oddvar Hesjedal, chief executive officer of Grameenphone, at a joint programme organised by the companies at Sonargaon Hotel in Dhaka.

Grameenphone has around 12,000 base transceiver stations (BTSs), while Banglalink set up around 5,000 BTSs across the country.

There is a large untapped market in the rural areas,

which requires a cost-efficient rollout, said Ahmed Abou Doma, CEO of Banglalink. "Such an initiative will help both the companies provide affordable services to customers," he said.

Zia Ahmed, chairman of Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission, said the telecom market will get a new shape in terms of competition under the infrastructure sharing initiative.

Zakiul Islam, president of Association of Mobile Telecom Operators in Bangladesh, Raihan Shamsi, chief corporate communication officer of Grameenphone, and Shihab Ahmad, marketing director of Banglalink, were also present at the function.

Bangladesh clothing show starts in UK May 28

STAR BUSINESS DESK

GenX UK Ltd is going to organise a two-day Bangladeshi clothing show from May 28 at Hilton London Metropole in central London.

"We intend to promote Bangladeshi garment in Europe and also to bring the buyers, sellers and designers together under one roof," GenX said in a statement recently.

The show aims to enhance the trade and investment relationship between Bangladesh and European countries that will let the exhibitors do face-to-face target marketing for Bangladeshi and EU companies to explore new markets and establishing potential sales leads, the statement added.

It will also work to prove the efficiency and competence of human resources in Bangladesh and show the evidence of product and service quality of Bangladesh, which is second to none.

Many participants from the readymade garments sector, textile producers, knitwear manufacturers, garments agencies, exporters, fashion houses and logistic companies will take part in the event.

For more information, one can visit the organiser's official site -- genxtd.co.uk or call +880171 320 1520.

India's Ambani group denies bid for Liverpool

AFP, New Delhi

India's wealthiest man Mukesh Ambani denied Tuesday a British newspaper report that he was in a race to take over Liverpool football club.

But another Indian businessman reportedly in the running for the Merseyside club appeared more circumspect.

The Times of London reported that Ambani, the world's seventh-richest man, was one of two tycoons from the subcontinent competing to purchase a stake in Liverpool.

Gas crisis to be solved by 2012

Energy roundtable told

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The present gas crisis will hopefully come to an end within 2012, as the government has taken multi-dimensional measures to improve the situation, the Petrobangla boss said yesterday.

The country now reels under an acute gas shortage, especially the industrial sector, despite saving measures like rationing.

Hussain Mansur, chairman of the state-owned oil and gas exploration corporation Petrobangla, said as part of the drive for improvement, the government took initiatives to discover new gas fields.

"However, we must increase the price of gas to efficiently use the natural resource," Mansur told a roundtable on 'Energy Efficiency Roadmap' as a designated discussant at the Cirdap auditorium.

He suggested the government enhance the usage of coal for power production to meet the ever-growing demand for energy.

The Energy and Power Magazine organised the roundtable where Professor Ijaz Hossain of the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) presented the keynote paper. Industrialists, trade association leaders, government high-ups, private sector entrepreneurs and researchers were also present to share

their experiences.

Industries Minister Dilip Barua attended the roundtable as chief guest. Energy and Power Magazine Editor Mollah Amzad Hossain moderated the discussion.

State-owned Power Development Board Chairman ASM Alamgir Kabir said the power situation cannot be solved overnight, as the production of electricity depends on many other things.

He said as per the government's action plan, production of gas-based electricity will be slashed to 50 percent within 2020, as it has been emphasising efficient use of energy.

"But we need to increase electricity prices to enhance efficient use by the consumers," the PDB boss said.

Bangladesh Chamber of Industries President Shahedul Islam Helal urged the government to reduce the prices of furnace oil and diesel oil as it is failing to maintain an adequate supply of gas and electricity to run industrial units.

As a special guest, Abul Kalam Azad, secretary to the Power Division, said after a long struggle, the ministry has set up a separate Power Efficiency Cell to ensure better power management.

Saiful Huque of the Renewable Energy Research Centre of Dhaka University said the country could save 1,000 megawatts of electricity a day through efficient usage of power.

Secretary general of the Bangladesh

Textile Mills Association GKM Tawfique Hasan expressed his concern saying that the production level in the country's textile sector declined to 50 percent, as the entrepreneurs are failing to utilise their full capacity because of the gas and power constraints.

Bangladesh Steel Mills Owners Association Secretary General Mohammad Bashirullah asked the government to amend the age-old electricity act and increase the severity of punishment for power pilferage.

In a keynote paper, Ijaz Hossain recommended that the government fix the price of energy properly, control energy pilferage, ensure a regulatory framework and set minimum standards for some energy consuming devices.

Barua underscored the need for alternative sources of energy, as the country is mainly dependent on gas for producing power. "At present, 86 percent of power is being produced from natural gas."

He said the industries ministry agreed in principle that state-owned sugar mills will be run by sugarcane bagasse to save electricity.

Power Division Additional Secretary Tapash Kumar Roy, members of the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission Khandker Mukhlesur Rahman and Salahuddin Ahmed, Khorshedul Islam of GTZ and Mahbubur Rahman of Buet also spoke on the occasion.



Bangladesh General Insurance Company Ltd organised its annual conference 2010 for marketing executives in Dhaka on Monday. Towhid Samad, chairman, and AK Azizul Huq Chaudhuri, managing director of the company, were present.

ICT market needs financial help to grow

Says BASIS official on eve of software expo

BSS, Dhaka

The ICT market size is expected to be \$500 million from existing \$300 million if young information technology professionals get banking support for their working orders, experts said.

"Our young IT professionals have vast technical know-how but they have no access to finance that is a major snag to the sector's further growth," said MA Mubin Khan, director of Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS).

Khan said Bangladesh has now over 15,000 IT professionals in its software and IT-enabled services (ITES). As per the successful track-records, 150 IT companies have been engaged in export market for software

outsourcing.

On the eve of the five-day software and information technology display that begins today, the BASIS director, also in-charge of BASIS' national events committee, hoped the association would be able to project Bangladesh's software and services as exportable to visitors from home and abroad.

The IT professionals have left a mark on the world market by exporting software and IT services to 30 countries, including the US, UK, Japan, Canada, Denmark, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Malaysia, South Korea and Germany, he added.

Listing the government's bold steps including tax exemption by 2011 and setting up ICT parks in six divisions, Khan said initially

two makeshift IT parks will be built on rented buildings to meet buyers' demand.

Bangladesh is considered one of the major outsourcing destinations in the region as the country's IT programmers' charge relatively less than India, Philippines and Vietnam, he said citing an example that Bangladesh's IT programmers' cost is 50 percent less than that of India.

Bangladesh's ICT industry has advanced a lot but it is unfortunate that no IT park was set up in the last 10 years while two IT parks were established in the Indian state of Kolkata alone.

"The country's private banks had sanctioned huge loans to the different sectors except the IT sector," he said adding that the banks had

never provided Tk 100 crore to the sector as test case.

To propel the sector's growth, Khan put forward a set of recommendations including giving working capital for promising young IT professionals, spending at least 5 percent of GDP to the sector and setting up IT desks in foreign missions abroad.

M Rafiqul Islam, an outsourcing, said India's turnover of the IT industry now stood at \$34 billion. The amount is much lower in Bangladesh although its software and IT-enabled products are as good as India, he said.

The reason is, Indian IT professionals get adequate financial support and necessary infrastructure facilities, said Islam, also the managing director of Global Web Outsourcing.



Dilip Barua, industries minister, attends the launching ceremony of X Monica, a new brand tiles from X Ceramics, in Dhaka recently. Mahin Mazhar, managing director of X Ceramics and Index Companies, is also seen.

Alarm spreads over Europe's massive deficits

AFP, Brussels

The swelling public deficits in Portugal, Spain and Greece have plunged the eurozone into the biggest crisis in its 11-year life, presaging years of belt-tightening, analysts warn.

It is a vicious financial circle; the more fears over deficits and debts grow, the harder it becomes for the troubled eurozone nations to borrow money to stay afloat.

With 16 EU nations now using the euro the problems are resonating throughout bloc. The euro fell below 1.36 dollars on Friday, its lowest level in over eight months.

One risk is the "free loader" effect, said Patrick Artus, leading economist with Natixis.

That happens when other countries are forced to come to the aid of an ailing eurozone member "to avoid a default risk that would be very dangerous for the euro zone as a whole."

On the other hand if financial markets are not convinced that countries facing problems will be bailed out there will be a rise in risk premiums or worse.

National governments are doing all they can to keep the financial vultures at bay.

Spain and Portugal are particularly keen not to be tarred with the same brush as Greece, which has debts over 294 billion euros (412 billion dollars) and a 12.7-percent deficit, far beyond EU limits of three percent of output for eurozone members.

But the investors are jittery. The Ibx-35 index of most traded Spanish stocks closed down 1.35 percent on Friday after plunging nearly six percent on Thursday amid growing concerns over the state of the economy.

Investors have no "objective" reason to worry about the state of Spanish public finances, Spain's secretary of state for the economy Jose Manuel Campa assured.



Barrister Shafiq Ahmed, law minister, hands over the Best Business Award in the airline sector of Bangladesh to Tasbirul Ahmed Choudhury, chairman and managing director of United Airways (BD) Ltd, at the Business Express Award 2009 in Dhaka recently.