

# REHAB seeks advice from ministry over polls

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Leaders of Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh (REHAB) have sought guidelines from the government to remove a stalemate over an election, which was put on hold over a voter list dispute.

The biennial election to REHAB's executive council was suspended on March 25, just two days before the polls, after the election board chairman, Taufiq M Seraj, also managing director of Sheltech, resigned over the voter roll row.

Abdul Haque, director of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, took over as the new election board chairman.

REHAB leaders had urged the new board to hold the election by April 3. But the board declined to hold the election with the existing voter roll, which it said was flawed.

The voter list names both officials and shareholders of member real estate companies, but the REHAB constitution says only shareholders are allowed to vote, said officials of the real estate trade body.

In past REHAB elections, both shareholders and employees had been listed as voters.

"Now that a question has arisen, it will not be proper to hold an election with the existing list. So we have deferred the vote," Abdul Haque said.

The tenure of REHAB's present executive council ends on April 27. In line with government rules, the polls for a new executive council should take place 15 days before the committee's term ends. It means the election should be held by April 12.

REHAB sought suggestions from the commerce ministry about its next course of action on Thursday.

This year, 52 candidates in two panels -- Nabodhara and Jagaran -- are contesting the polls for a 21-member executive council.

Nasrul Hamid Bipu, MP, is leading the Nabodhara panel, while former REHAB vice president Mokkaram Hossain Khan is leading the Jagaran panel.



## New chairman for EBL

STAR BUSINESS DESK

The board of directors of Eastern Bank Ltd (EBL) yesterday elected Mohd Noor Ali as chairman, the bank said in a statement.

Ali, a postgraduate in Sociology from Dhaka University, is also the chairman and managing director of Unique Group of Companies Ltd, vice president of Korea-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry and chairman of Adarsha Degree College.

He is also a former chairman of Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies and a former director of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

## Proposal to hike CNG price upsets pump owners

UNB, Dhaka

CNG pump owners have expressed frustration over the finance minister's proposal to increase the price of compressed natural gas price.

"The CNG price proposal has disappointed us," said Zakir Hossain Noyan, secretary general of Bangladesh CNG Filling Station and Conversion Workers Owners Association, in a statement issued yesterday.

The statement came in response to the finance minister's directive to the authorities concerned in a meeting last week to move for raising CNG prices.

The statement said any rise in the CNG price, before ensuring uninterrupted gas and power supply, would devastate the sector.

If CNG price rises, it will lead to an increase in the transportation cost resulting a price hike of all commodities ultimately, the statement added.

If the motor vehicles are returned to liquid fuel following the proposed CNG price hike, it will lead to an environmental disaster, it said.

Private entrepreneurs invested around Tk 3,000 crore in the CNG sector after being encouraged by the government. Following that the sector has been playing a vital role to save Tk 10,000 crore by substituting import of liquid fuel.

The sector, employing 15,000 people, also contributes to containing air pollution.

But now many CNG station owners have become loan defaulters, as they were compelled to shut down their stations due to inadequate gas and power supply.

# Bangladesh moves to make eco-correct bricks

UNB, Dhaka

In a bid to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, Bangladesh has adopted the smokeless brick-making technology, replacing centuries-old methods.

The new technology, introduced by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Bangladesh through a development project -- Improving Kiln Efficiency in the Brick Making Industry -- will contribute \$25 million (about Tk 175 crore) for the next five years.

"The innovative technology being used to replace the existing 150 year-old system will make the brick making industry so efficient that when this is replicated across Bangladesh, we will have huge benefits for both the people and the global environment," said UNDP Bangladesh Country Director Stefan Priesner.

With the smokeless technology, the industry will operate under higher energy efficiencies, better energy control capabilities, higher rates of production and processing, all of which could reduce production costs, improve product quality, lower local pollution and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The project will take operational experience from its pilot brick kiln project, which started in 2006, and use its results to implement another 15 demonstration projects over its five-year project period.

Brick making is one of the largest sources of greenhouse gas emissions in Bangladesh, where it is estimated to be on the order of six

million tonnes of carbon dioxide annually. Such high levels of emissions are a result of the use of outdated technologies and sub-standard fuels, such as high sulphur coal, tires and wood energy in kilns.

"The problem here is that the traditional technologies of manufacturing bricks are heavily polluting the environment and in light of the economic growth in Bangladesh, there is a huge pressure to manufacture more and more bricks," said Priesner.

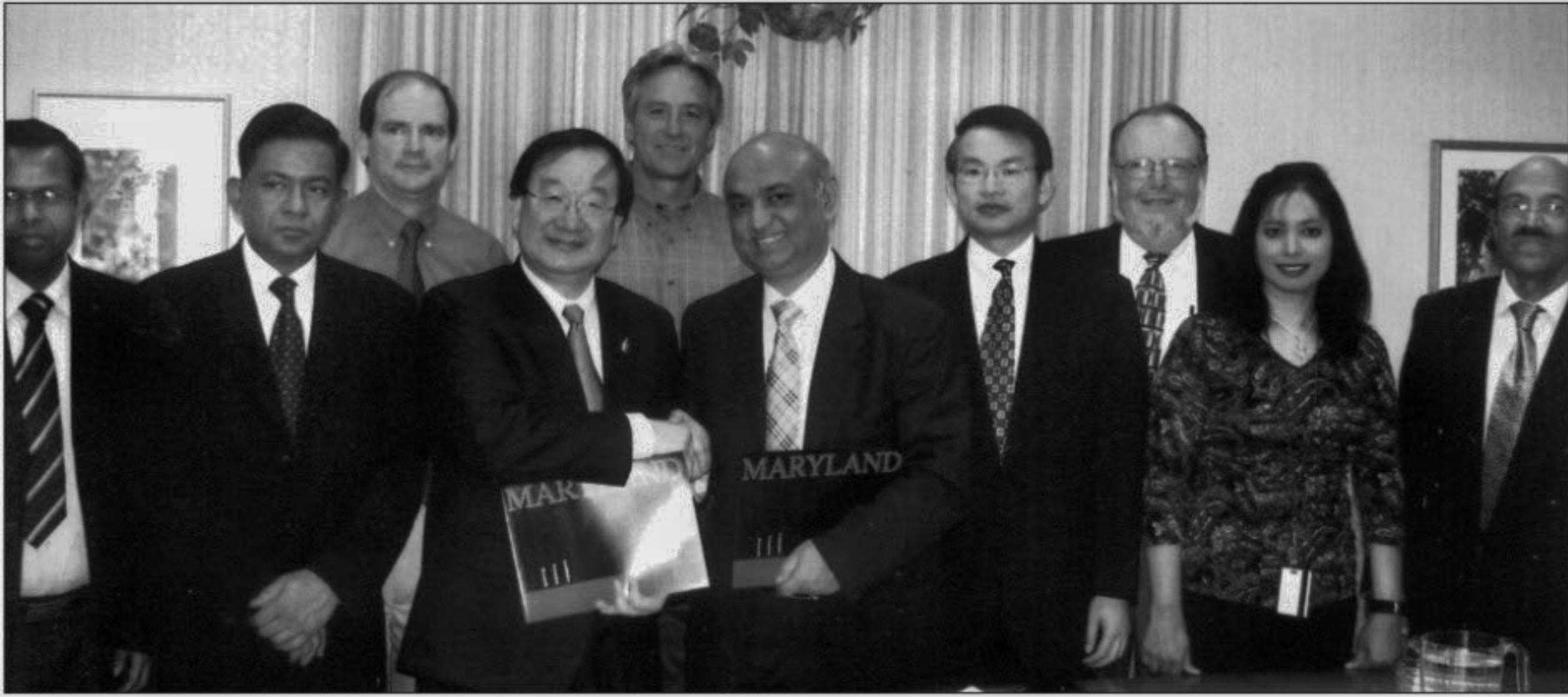
"The impact of this initiative will be that communities and workers' health will be protected by not being exposed to such pollution and land will be freed up in a densely populated Bangladesh."

The project will also undertake activities to remove existing policy, institutional, technical, informational and financial barriers that have inhibited the use of efficient technologies and practices in the past.

Estimates indicate that in Bangladesh, it takes about 23 tonnes of coal to produce 100,000 bricks, whereas in China, it takes only 7.8 tonnes to eight tonnes.

Equally alarming is the use of wood energy in the kilns. Studies carried out in the 1980s identified brickfields as a major cause of deforestation in Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Brick Makers Association estimates that even today, 25 percent of the fuel used in kilns are still from wood.

Growth of the brick industry has been estimated at 5.3 percent over the last decade; this growth trend is likely to continue over the next decade.



Dr Cheng-I Wei, dean for the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources of University of Maryland, USA, and Syed Mahmudul Huq, chairman of Bangladesh Shrimp and Fish Foundation, exchange documents after signing a cooperation agreement in Washington DC recently. The university and the foundation will work together for the development of quality shrimps production in Bangladesh.

# Fish Foundation teams up with Maryland University

BSS, Dhaka

The University of Maryland, USA, and Bangladesh Shrimp and Fish Foundation (BSFF) have signed a cooperation agreement for the development of production and import of quality shrimps.

CD Mote Jr, president of the university, and Syed Mahmudul Huq, chairman of BSFF, signed the agreement during a visit by a Bangladesh delegation to the USA last week.

"It's a tripartite cooperation agreement between the government, private entrepreneurs and the academics to enhance both the quality and the quantity of country's shrimp productions," Huq told the news agency yesterday on his return from the US.

The present agreement would provide for, among others, joint research and training activities, exchange of scholars and experts for seminars, conferences and research activities, added Huq.

Dr Cheng-IWei, dean for the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources of

the university, acknowledged the agreement.

Three aspects such as food safety, environmental sustainability and social responsibility, which are the pressing demands from shrimp importers, would be mitigated under the deal.

"If we can maintain its food quality, no other country could compete with us in this vitally important export trades," he said.

Under the agreement, Joint Institute for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition (JIFSAN), a joint initiative of US Food and Drug Administration and University of Maryland and BSFF have already initiated a training of trainers program for the implementation of "Good Aquaculture Practices" throughout Bangladesh.

This training would ensure food safety, environmental sustainability and social responsibility both in terms of human and labour rights.

Besides, both JIFSAN and BSFF have reached an understanding to set up a JIFSAN-BSFF Aquaculture and Aquatic Food Safety Centre as an affiliate of

Fishery Products Business Promotion Council under Public Private Partnership.

This would work as a network of training institutes in the region with a goal to build capacity of both foreign regulators and manufacturers in the use of international best practices in food safety management to better assure the safety of the food supply chain in the region.

In Bangladesh, fisheries constitute the second most important source of foreign exchange where shrimp alone earned \$ 445.41million in fiscal 2007-2008, making a 3.15 percent contribution to national exports and over 45 percent contribution to total export from all agro-based primary commodities.

By 2015, shrimp and prawn are expected to make up to 164,000 tonnes against the estimated current production of 90,000 tonnes, where the country's fisheries road map projects export earnings of \$1.1 billion from shrimp and prawn and \$0.1 billion from fish.

The US is the single largest importer of shrimp from Bangladesh.

# Bumpy road ahead for Asean integration

AFP, Singapore

Flaws in Asean's economic integration plans are being exposed as some members struggle to adapt to a massive free-trade deal with China, and the US and EU opt to pursue pacts with individual states.

Grand plans for the establishment of an Asean Economic Community (AEC) by 2015 are likely to be a key topic when leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations hold their annual summit next week in Vietnam's capital Hanoi.

But wide development gaps within the region, entrenched domestic interests and the perennial distraction of Myanmar's failure to embrace democracy continue to weigh down the group's activities and global ties, analysts say.

The integration concept goes beyond freeing up trade -- it also includes physical connectivity through better rail and air links and the unhampered movement of people and capital in the 10-member bloc.

But soon after a giant free-trade agreement (FTA) between Asean and China went into effect this year, the region's biggest member, Indonesia,

under pressure from domestic industries, said it wanted some terms renegotiated.

The European Union had also ditched earlier plans to negotiate an FTA collectively with Asean, and instead launched separate talks with individual countries -- an option also favoured by the United States.

Hank Lim, a senior research fellow with the Singapore Institute of International Affairs (SIIA), said the main reason the EU and the US do not want to negotiate a regional pact is the group's vastly differing levels of economic development.

"It is impossible to negotiate a high-quality FTA with the Asean 10 collectively," Lim told AFP.

Alongside Indonesia and Vietnam, Asean's eclectic membership also includes Singapore, whose 35,000 US dollar per capita income and gleaming skyscrapers are a stark contrast to poverty-ridden Laos and largely agricultural Cambodia.

The group's other members are Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand -- making a collection of emerging democracies and monarchies, and a military dictatorship in the form of Myanmar.

Diplomatic sources also admit that negotiating individual trade deals will allow Western countries to avoid the awkwardness involved in doing deals with a group that has international pariah Myanmar in its ranks.

Former Asean secretary-general Rodolfo Severino said that tearing down tariff barriers on intra-Asean trade is on track, at least on paper.

But he said in an opinion piece published in Singapore's Straits Times newspaper last week that there are other things that need to be done for integration to be broad-based and effective.

These include the "building of transportation and telecommunications infrastructure and the dismantling of the political, economic and technical obstacles to the efficient flow of goods, services, people and ideas across the region."

He expressed hope that the leaders meeting in Vietnam "will give impetus" to the integration process.

Ernest Bower, a Southeast Asia specialist with the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, said Asean's target of establishing an economic community by 2015 is a "stretch goal".

## New committee chiefs for Mercantile Bank



Md Shahabuddin Alam



Morshed Alam

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Md Shahabuddin Alam and Morshed Alam have been elected as chairmen of the executive committee and audit committee respectively of Mercantile Bank Limited, the bank said in a statement yesterday.

The election took place after the re-constitution of the bank's board.

A post-graduate in management, Md Shahabuddin Alam is a sponsor of Mercantile Bank and the managing director of SA Group of Industries.

He is also the vice chairman of Bangladesh Vegetable Oil Refiners and Vanaspati Manufacturers Association.

Morshed Alam is also a sponsor of the bank and the founder chairman of Bengal Group of Industries. A business graduate, he is the chairman of RTV and vice chairman of Dosh General Insurance Company Limited.

## Children to fly Emirates free

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Emirates Airlines has launched its 'Kids Go Free' campaign in Bangladesh, the airline said in a statement yesterday.

The worldwide campaign, which is from May 14 to September 30, offers two children under the age of 16 to enjoy free flights on Emirates, tourist visa, accommodation, meals, rides on the Dubai metro, airport transfers, and access to numerous attractions in Dubai when accompanied by two paying adults.

Emirates has partnered with Dubai Tourism and Commerce Marketing, over 80 hotels, Dubai Mall, the Department of Residency, and local destination management companies, to offer families even more incentives and savings when they spend their summer in Dubai.

The airline operates 17 flights a week between Dhaka and Dubai.



Azam J Chowdhury, chairman, and M Ehsanul Haque, managing director of Prime Bank, attend a deal signing ceremony between Prime Bank Foundation and Arvind Eye Care System in Dhaka on Friday. The foundation will set up Prime Bank Eye Hospital in the capital for which Arvind Eye Care will be the technical assistance and management partner. Iqbal Anwar, chief executive officer of Prime Bank Foundation, and RD Thulasiraj, executive director of LAICO-Arvind Eye Care System, signed the deal.