

LDC dialogue kicks off today

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A three-day international dialogue on exploring new global partnership for the least developed countries (LDC) will begin in Dhaka today.

Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), an independent think tank, will organise the discussion in partnership with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Centre.

The dialogue will also focus on the economic issues of the LDCs and find sustainable way outs, said Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, distinguished fellow of CPD.

"We consider the fourth UN conference on the LDCs that would be in Istanbul in May 2011 very significant for the least developed countries like Bangladesh. And we want to prepare an outcome document for the LDC governments before the conference," he said.

Number of LDCs has increased to 49 from 25 over the last few years, and only two countries could graduate from that list.

"Now we have to find out the reasons why only two countries could come out of the LDC status and prepare to overcome the problems."

He was speaking at a press briefing organised by CPD at its office in the capital yesterday.

Bhattacharya said the LDCs have failed to make any significant improvement in reducing poverty in the past decade.

Although most LDCs have met many of the targets set in the last conference, such as improving human development indicators, attracting foreign investments and boosting exports, the economic status remains unchanged for most of them, he said.

"One fundamental reason I see behind this is the lack of diversification in these targeted areas. For example, the export volume of Bangladesh has



Debapriya Bhattacharya, left, distinguished fellow of Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), speaks at a press conference at its office in Dhaka yesterday. Mustafizur Rahman, centre, CPD executive director, is also seen.

increased over the years, but it's mainly dependent on a single item-RMG."

"At the same time, we have received more foreign investments than before, but those mainly came for the services sector and not for industrial development," he said.

So the progress was weak and not sustainable, he added.

Bhattacharya also stressed the need to keep in mind the newer challenges the LDCs are facing now, including a fragile global economy, global warming and internal political conflicts, while preparing a charter of demands.

"We have to look for more options, such as finding more markets for our products, more employments for workers and importantly more investments to develop infrastructure and better access to technology, from the upcoming conference," he said.

"I hope this dialogue will help us do the groundwork properly

by creating awareness among the policymakers and civil society. But, the government has to do the real task --bargaining for the national interests eventually," said Bhattacharya.

Mustafizur Rahman, executive director of the CPD, said the dialogue would also focus on strengthening partnerships among the LDCs to help them reach a common goal of upgrading the economic status.

He said CPD would prepare a set of proposals in the end of the international dialogue on November 26, and send it to all the LDC governments.

"All the LDCs have to play a very significant role in the conference, where their fate would be shaped for the next decade."

Carlos E Alvarez Voullieme, deputy director of OECD Development Centre, and Anna Batyra, coordinator of Development Finance Network (DeFiNe), also spoke at the briefing.

Army not needed at Ctg port: Minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The government might withdraw the army from Chittagong port within a month after declaring that port operations are normal once again.

"A meeting of the advisory council of the port will be held in December to decide about withdrawing the army," Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said the workers' unrest at the port has ended and normalcy was restored after the workers' four chief demands were resolved.

The demands included reinstating 2,500 workers sacked by the caretaker government, giving them identity cards, timely salary payment and

assurance of job security in future.

After the advisory council meets, its recommendation on army withdrawal will be conveyed to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for final approval.

The government deployed army at the Chittagong seaport on October 13, following port workers' unrest.

The shipping minister accused the BNP of provoking the workers' unrest at the country's premier port.

He said 46 people, including some leaders the pro-BNP Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal, remain under arrest.

Shahadat Hossain Selim, the president of the Chittagong Port Berth Operator Owners Association, however, said the government should consult port users before

deciding to withdraw the army.

Port users would feel relieved if the army is kept on, he said. "The army can be kept at the port for security reasons, as the existing security of the port is inadequate," he said.

Abdus Salam Murshedy, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), said he wants a peaceful port in any form that ensures that neither exports nor imports are hampered: "Whether the government keeps or withdraws the army is not our headache. Our headache is that the port remains normal or not. We want the turnaround time be 2.5 to 3 days, as it was in the government's first 14 months."



Rajiuddin Ahmed Raju, post and telecommunications minister, and Jon Fredrik Baksaas, president and chief executive of Telenor, the majority stakeholder in Grameenphone, inaugurate GPHOUSE, the newly built headquarters of the mobile phone operator, in Baridhara-Bashundhara area in Dhaka yesterday.

New business platform for Nordic countries

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Businesses of five Nordic countries in Dhaka launched a chamber yesterday to boost bilateral trade and investment between Bangladesh and the countries of Scandinavia, Iceland and Finland.

The newly formed platform, Nordic Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NCCI), also wants to promote a positive image of Bangladesh as an investment destination for the Nordic businesses, and to help improve business environment.

"The establishment of the NCCI is a manifestation of the strong business relations between Nordic countries and Bangladesh," said a statement issued, marking the launch of the trade body at The Westin Dhaka.

Commerce Minister Faruk Khan and Norwegian Minister of Environment and Development Cooperation Erik Solheim, Norwegian and Danish ambassadors and leaders of various trade bodies were also present.

The NCCI represents companies from Norway, Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Sweden that do business in Bangladesh.

It becomes the 16th bilateral trade lobby group that aims at promoting and serving the Nordic business community and providing a platform to create and safeguard new business opportunities.

"It's a good day. This chamber will help boost bilateral trade and understanding between the two regions," said Commerce Minister Faruk Khan.

The NCCI, with a 7-member executive committee, came into being at a time when two-way trade between



Commerce Minister Faruk Khan speaks at the launch of Nordic Chamber of Commerce and Industry at the Westin Dhaka yesterday. Norwegian Minister of Environment and Development Cooperation Erik Solheim is also seen.

Bangladesh and Nordic states stood at nearly \$750 million. Bangladesh favours a trade balance, according to Khan.

"There is a business-friendly climate in Bangladesh. We want to promote Nordic business here," said Norwegian minister Erik Solheim.

He stressed focusing Bangladesh's success stories.

There was a time everyone tended to focus on problems of Bangladesh. This is now shifting. They are now focusing on the success in Bangladesh, said Solheim, citing steady growth of Bangladesh economy.

In the past two decades, Bangladesh, with a population of nearly 160 million, logged 5 percent average growth and helped lift people out of poverty.

The Norwegian minister said Nordic companies are doing well here.

"We're proud of doing business

here," he said, citing Telenor, majority owner of local cellphone giant GrameenPhone.

"We believe Nordic companies will set positive business," the upbeat Solheim said.

In the statement, the NCCI said it wants to strengthen links between Nordic and local companies and social and match making events.

"We want to grow in Bangladesh," said Danish Ambassador in Bangladesh Svend Olling, adding that there are opportunities for business here.

Norwegian Ambassador Ragne Birte Lund said human resource base is unique in Bangladesh.

Among others, President of Foreign Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industry Hamim Rahmatullah and President of Bangladesh German Chamber of Commerce and Industry Saiful Islam also spoke on the occasion

German business team due today

UNB, Dhaka

German State Secretary of the Federal Foreign Office Martin Biesel, accompanied by an eight-member business delegation, arrives in Dhaka today on a three-day official visit to Bangladesh.

The visit takes place following Foreign Minister Dipu Moni's visit to Germany in early September.

A release of the German Embassy here says the visit will provide an opportunity to deepen bilateral cooperation as it comes amid signs of growing interest of German business in

Bangladesh as a trade and investment partner.

Martin Biesel is scheduled to hold talks with Commerce Minister Faruk Khan, Foreign Secretary Mijarul Quayes and other government representatives. The talks will focus on the development of the economic and political framework conditions.

Biesel will deliver a speech on the bilateral economic and political relations at a luncheon of the Bangladesh German Chamber of Commerce and Industry at the Westin Dhaka hotel today.

Dr S A Samad, chairman of the Board of Investment, is expected to speak on the occasion.

On Friday, Biesel will attend a ceremony marking the delivery of two container ships built by Western Marine Shipyard to German owner Grona Shipping GmbH in Chittagong.

Germany is the second largest export market for Bangladesh. Trade with Germany provides Bangladesh with an annual trade surplus of more than 1.9 billion euros. In 2009, the bilateral trade volume increased by more than 15 percent, reaching 2.3 billion euros.

Qatar opens Shipyard

AFP, Doha

Gas-rich Qatar on Tuesday inaugurated the first phase of a 2.8-billion-dollar ship repair yard in partnership with Singapore's Keppel Offshore and Marine.

Qatar's Energy and Industry Minister Abdullah bin Hamad al-Attiyah said the project will be used to "repair and maintain ships for Qatar, other countries of the world, and even aircraft carriers and oil tankers."

The shipyard is a joint venture in which Qatar Gas Transport Co (QGTC), also known as Nakilat, owns 80 percent and Keppel the other 20 percent.

The project aims to be completed in 2013, said Nakilat managing director Mohammed Ghannam.

It is located in the industrial area of Ras Laffan in northern Qatar, near the liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals used by QGTC which has a fleet of 54 tankers.

Qatar holds the world's third-largest natural gas

E-bidding in January



Director General of Central Procurement Technical Unit (CPTU) Amulya Kumar Debnath speaks at the launch of an awareness campaign on public procurement rules in Dhaka yesterday. Communications Minister Syed Abul Hossain, Planning Minister AK Khandker, and Food and Disaster Management Minister Muhammad Abdur Razzaque are also seen.

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The government will introduce an online tendering process by the end of January to ensure transparency and accountability in public procurement.

"We will introduce e-tendering initially for 17 offices of four government entities," said Planning Minister AK Khandker yesterday.

The government entities are Local Government Engineering Department, Roads and Highways Department, Rural Electrification Board and Water Development Board agencies under the Public Procurement Reform Project (PPRP)-II.

In the first phase, tender invitation, processing and making contracts with the bidders will be carried out online, the minister said at the launch of an awareness campaign on public procurement rules at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in Dhaka.

The Central Procurement Technical Unit

(CPTU) of Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division of the planning ministry organised the campaign in collaboration with Bangladesh Centre for Communication Programs (BCCP).

The purpose of the campaign is to create an enabling environment so that the procuring entities and the tenderers are aware of the public procurement rules (PPR), and to help them change their mindset, said Mohammad Shahjahan, director of BCCP.

The CPTU is implementing the PPRP-II supported by the World Bank. Work is going on to build capacity of the stakeholders in the public procurement process, improve procurement management and introduce electronic government procurement (e-GP).

Food and Disaster Management Minister Muhammad Abdur Razzaque, Communications Minister Syed Abul Hossain and acting country director of World Bank Zahid Hussain also spoke at the inaugural session.

Bumper T-aman output expected in the south

BSS, Jessore

Farmers in 10 districts of the south-western region are now upbeat on bumper production of transplanted aman (T-aman) paddy this season.

According to the Department of Agriculture Extension, blooming period of the crop has now ended and the early variety aman paddy fields are ready for harvest.

Farmers said paddy plants grew well in a favourable climatic condition.

They expect harvesting the crop from the second week of Bangla

month of Agrahayan in full swing.

The DAE officials said 7,64,175 hectares were brought under aman cultivation with a production of target 18,33,512 tonnes of rice.

Of the total, 1,37,600 hectares with the production target of 3,50,760 tonnes were brought under cultivation in Jessore, 29,700 hectares for 69,900 tonnes in Narail, 47,300 hectares for 1,19,910 tonnes in Magura, 90,100 hectares for 2,32,340 tonnes in Jhenaidah, 75,500 hectares for 1,94,200 tonnes in Kushtia, 24,900 hectares for 63,770 tonnes in Meherpur, 47,100 hectares for

1,20,810 tonnes in Chuadanga, 1,00,500 hectares for 2,21,530 tonnes in Khulna, 1,07,475 hectares for 2,74,572 tonnes in Satkhira and 1,04,000 hectares for 1,85,720 tonnes in Bagerhat district.

Mohammad Bazlul Haque Mia, DAE's additional director for Jessore region, attributed the bumper output to favourable climatic condition and adequate supply of necessary fertilisers and pesticides.

Bangladesh Krishi Bank, other state and private banks had disbursed adequate crop loans to make the paddy cultivation a complete success in the region.