

Skills building hits limelight

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The government should focus on the national skill development policy properly to raise market-driven skilled workforce for meeting the huge demand in both local and international markets, said discussants at a seminar yesterday.

They also suggested preparing a directory of manpower training institutes, maintaining communication between training providers and recipients, and facilitating financial packages to vocational training institutions and trainees.

The seminar on "bridging the gaps in market-driven skills development: stakeholders' opinion and way forward" was co-organised by Management and Resources Development Initiative (MRDI) and Swisscontact, an international NGO, at Brac Centre Inn in Dhaka.

Former director general of Directorate of Technical Education Professor M Abul Bashar presented the keynote paper.

He said, among the country's 54 million labour force, presently 2.7 million are unemployed and 1.5 million are underemployed, while 29 percent private sector firms are impeded with low



Manjurul Ahsan Bulbul, editor-in-chief and CEO of Boishakhi Television, speaks at a seminar on "bridging the gaps in market-driven skills development: stakeholders' opinions and way forward" in Dhaka yesterday. Prof M Abul Bashar, former director general of Directorate of Technical Education; Belayet Hossain, national officer of SkillMark, Devi Prasad Dahal, project manager of Swisscontact Bangladesh; and Md Shahid Hossain, adviser for planning and development of MRDI, are also seen.

labour skills or skills mismatch.

"Promising industries like leather and footwear, hospitality and tourism and shipbuilding are facing an acute shortage of skilled manpower," he said.

Francis De Silva, workplace learning and productivity consultant of International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Dhaka office, said Bangladesh should focus on hospitality and tourism sector because it has a huge potential for investment.

Bashar said low capacity of the training providers, a lack of labour market information, awareness about the value of quality training and financing

packages for the training providers are the main reasons behind the scarcity of the market-driven skilled workforce.

He made a set of recommendations to bridging the gaps in market-driven skills development.

The recommendations included organising employer oriented training programmes, sharing knowledge and management know-how between the training providers and industries, and coordinating with Bangladesh Bank to formulate affordable financial packages for the training providers.

He also stressed utilising CSR and revolving funds and creating

a training directory in close liaison with Bureau of Manpower and Employment Training.

Editor-in-chief of Boishakhi TV Manjurul Ahsan Bulbul, who moderated the seminar, urged the industrial sectors and business bodies to form a separate media communication wing to disseminate information and build good relations with the media and the industries.

Representatives of different government and private technical and vocational training institutions, various industrial sectors, business bodies and development partners also emphasised an active role of the

mass media in creating awareness about the necessity of skills training.

They also stressed the need for forming an association of the training providers.

They said proper business management and market training should be imparted to the new entrepreneurs, especially the rural women, to help flourish their enterprises.

Devi Prasad Dahal, project manager of Swisscontact, Belayet Hossain, national officer of SkillMark, and Shahid Hossain, adviser for planning and development of MRDI, also spoke at the seminar.



Toufiq M Seraj, managing director of Sheltech, and Tanvir Ahmed, director, cut a cake at the realtor's 24th anniversary celebration in Dhaka yesterday.

Indo-Bangla energy equipment fair starts May 21

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A three-day exhibition will be held in Dhaka from May 21 to May 23 to showcase energy and electrical equipment of India and Bangladesh, said an adviser to the Indian Chamber of Commerce yesterday.

The exhibition, India Investrade, an event supported by the Commerce Ministry of India, will showcase the opportunities to the business communities of both countries to accelerate the economic relations, said Nakib Ahmed at a press conference at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel.

The Indian Chamber of Commerce will organise the fair at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel.

"Large and small scale electrical equipment manufacturing industries in the energy sector will participate at the expo," Ahmed said.

The fair is important because many people do not know that Bangladesh also manufactures power equipment to a limited extent, said Abdul Matlub Ahmed, president of India-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry (IBCCI).

"India is our big neighbour. We should tap the economic potentials of a big neighbour," said Asif Ibrahim, president of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI).

The countries like South Korea is benefiting from its neighbouring country Japan and Mexico is benefiting from the USA, he said.

He said India should ease the products testing methods for importing more goods from Bangladesh to reduce the bilateral trade gap. The trade deficit



A Rouf Chowdhury, Bank Asia chairman, hands the keys of an ambulance to Abdur Rashid, vice-chairman of Anjuman Mufidul Islam, at a programme in Dhaka yesterday. Erfanuddin Ahmed, the bank's managing director, was also present.



Dilip Barua, industries minister, launches a student banking package of Mutual Trust Bank (MTB) comprising two deposit products -- MTB Graduate and MTB Junior -- at the Buet auditorium in Dhaka on Wednesday. MTB deputy managing directors Md Hashem Chowdhury and Md Ahsan-uz Zaman were also present.

Canada keen to help tackle food crisis

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Canada is keen to help Bangladesh tackle food crisis by supplying food grains, said speakers at a seminar here yesterday.

The members of a visiting trade delegation from Canada were speaking at the seminar on 'Canadian Agriculture Products 2011' at Hotel Peninsula.

Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership (STEP), Saskatchewan Pulse Growers (SPG), Ministry of Agriculture Saskatchewan and Canadian Grain Commission jointly organised the seminar.

Deputy Minister of Ministry of Agriculture Saskatchewan in Canada Alanna Koch, Canadian High Commissioner Robert McDougall, Chittagong City Corporation (CCC) Mayor Mohammad Manjur Alam and Senior Director of STEP Tim Marshal were guests at the seminar.

Deputy Minister Alanna Koch said Saskatchewan with 53 percent of Canada's arable land is the largest Canadian trading partner of Bangladesh.

She said Bangladesh is Saskatchewan's sixth largest export market for agricultural commodities with \$357 million in export sales in 2009, while the export was mostly made up of \$132 million in yellow pea, \$180 million in lentil and \$94 million in non-durum wheat.

As the food crisis is becoming a serious concern in Bangladesh like elsewhere in the world, Canada is keen to extend its support to the country, said the Canadian deputy minister.

The Canadian high commissioner said the bilateral trade between the two countries topped \$1.4 billion last year. Robert McDougall said Saskatchewan, the most important grain producing region in Canada, produces 98 percent of the total lentil produced in the country, 80 percent of chickpeas, 80 percent of durum, 75 percent of mustard, 75 percent of dry peas and 40 percent of canola.

Bangladesh has become one of its top export destinations for wheat, peas and pulses, the envoy said.

In 2010, the total Canadian exports to Bangladesh were almost \$600 million with Saskatchewan alone exporting 52 percent of the exports or \$310 million, he added.

He hoped that the delegation would provide the local buyers and importers with an opportunity to build network with Canadian specialists and exporters of high quality agricultural commodities.

The CCC mayor termed Chittagong as the doorstep of business flows and promised to extend support from his side in increasing the bilateral trade between the two countries.

Analysts underscore export diversity

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Bangladesh should diversify its export basket and find out more destinations quickly to tap opportunities stemming from the global economic crisis that made many exporting countries uncompetitive, analysts said yesterday.

The calls came at the seminar, Export Growth: Recent Trends and Future Challenges, held at the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) in Dhaka.

The seminar, co-organised by EPB and Bangladesh Foreign Trade Institute (BFTI), came as the country's exports grew by 40.28 percent in the first eight months of the current fiscal year.

Bangladesh exported goods worth \$14.08 billion during July-February of 2010-11, up from \$10.31 billion in the same period of 2009-10, according to EPB.

EPB Vice Chairman Jalal Ahmed said the country's exports have fared well in the current fiscal year. "We have the potential to grow further in future. Now, we have to determine our future course of direction."

He said there is a six-billion-dollar gap between the country's exports and imports, which has to be bridged for the sake of the security of exports.

Ahmed said Bangladesh relies too much on only a few products such as knit and woven wear, jute and shrimps. "There are many other sectors which are doing well. We have to diversify our product basket."

In his presentation, BFTI Chief Executive MA Taslim said Bangladesh's exports are highly concentrated on knitwear and woven garments, which account for more than 77 of total overseas sales.

"We suffer similar limitations and trends as regards our export destinations too, as North America and European Union together import 80 percent of our merchandise. The share will go up further if Turkey joins the European Union."

"We have reasons to be concerned on this score, as we cannot be immune if any country or a group of countries of those blocks is affected. We, therefore, need a coordinated policy," Taslim said.

The analyst said many countries have lost markets due to the global recession. "We have gained at the cost of others. We are doing well in North America and European Union, but there is no reason why we can not do the same in other countries," he added.

Taslim said rising wages would erode the competitive strength of China as the preferred import source, and new market opportunities exist in Japan, Australia, India, China and Russia. "Besides, manufacturers from Turkey and China are also looking for relocation in low wage countries."

"All of this provides Bangladesh an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for rapid industrial expansion, which will pave the way for the country to achieve 10 percent economic growth. We cannot afford to miss the boat," he said.

The BFTI chief said countries such as Vietnam, India, Pakistan and Cambodia are all vying to become sources for imports. The buyers are also shopping around to find out suitable markets. "We have to project our comparative advantages in the global arena," he said.

Taslim said the government must address challenges in the areas of infrastructure, roads, port and power under public-private partnership.

He urged the garment factory owners to take steps to develop skills of their workers, establish corporate culture, train up mid-level management, and increase labour productivity.

Commerce Minister Faruk Khan said the government is working to prepare a 10-year comprehensive trade policy, which will focus on ways to boost exports and trade.

He said although Bangladesh sold over two billion dollars worth of goods

and services more in international markets than the target in the current fiscal year until February, there are opportunities and capacities to sell more.

Bangladesh Tariff Commission Chairman Mujibur Rahman said the cost of fund should come down to facilitate exports.

Commerce Secretary Md Ghulam Hussain said Bangladesh could not afford to act slowly to explore and settle on grabbing opportunities emerging from the financial crunch, as they might not be there forever.

"We do not have much time. We not only have to retain the existing market share, but also diversify product baskets and markets."

He said Bangladesh has a number of trade related policies, but they lack legal status. "We need to prepare a comprehensive trade regime that will cover policies in the areas of trade, tariff and financial management."

The secretary criticised Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association and Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association for not doing enough to take up programmes to develop skills of the sector's mid-level officials and workers.

Asif Ibrahim, president of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said opportunities might slip out if Bangladesh fails to fix infrastructure bottlenecks soon. "The traffic congestion on Dhaka-Chittagong highway has to be addressed immediately. We have to revamp Mongla port."

Ibrahim said the interest rates do not give a good signal to the business community. He said Bangladesh has to look at India and China as future export destinations.

Saiful Islam, chairman of Western Marine Shipyard, said the cost of fund had come down to 11 percent, but suddenly it has shot up to 15-16 percent. "Accessing fund has also become difficult due to the recent development in the stockmarket."

Tea takes hit from rainless days

IQBAL SIDDIQUEE, Sylhet

A lack of timely rains has delayed tipping of tealeaves in gardens of Sylhet, affecting the potential output of the crop. The producers are eagerly awaiting a good shower, which is necessary for the sensitive crop now.

The plants cannot be fertilised as the topsoil cover has dried up and hardened during the months of dry weather.

Dr Mainuddin Ahmed, principal scientific officer of the Bangladesh Tea Board, said: "Almost all teagardens could not start tipping due to a lack of rainfall."

"Normally the tea producing regions get a brief shower in the last week of February or in the first week of March, which is very important for the crop," he added.

In Sylhet, 14mm rainfall has been recorded since January while it was 88mm for the same period last year. Mohammad Shajahan, manager of Somonbagh Tea estate, said: "Tea plants need some irrigation around this time. We could not start irrigation as the natural water sources have already dried up. Fertilisation is also being delayed due to the lack of moisture in the soils."

"If this situation continues for a few more days, there may be outbreaks of harmful insects such as the red spider on the tea plants as fertilisation and pest control would be delayed," he added.

Only at Habibnagar Tea Estate of M Ahmed Tea & Lands Company in Jaintapur upazila of Sylhet, they started tipping two days ago.

Humayun Kabir, The manager of the garden and vice-chairman of the circle chapter of Bangladesh Tea association, said: "We somehow started tipping as there is limited scope for irrigation in our gardens. However, the small water reservoirs are drying up fast."

"Tea needs uniform rain and sun especially during March to October," he added.

The Sylhet region is home to 138 of the total 160 tea gardens. Tea production stood at 59.24 million kilograms in 2009 and 59.99 million kilograms in 2010 with the highest ever production of 60.14 million kilograms in 2006. Currently, almost

EXIM Bank gets new AMD

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Mohammed Haider Ali Miah has recently been promoted as the additional managing director (AMD) of the Export Import Bank of Bangladesh Ltd (EXIM), said a statement.

Prior to this promotion, he was the deputy managing director of the bank and performed his duty as head of various departments such as corporate banking, human resources division, information technology, law and recovery division, merchant banking division, credit card division and public relations division.

Miah started his banking career as a probationary

