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Districts in Focus



Visitors check out costume jewellery pieces at Chittagong International Trade Fair at Railway Polo Ground recently.

ANURUP KANTI DAS

CITF: a success story

fair as the prices are reasonable and the other facilities seem to impress them all, she added.

Faisal Islam, a senior officer of a private bank, said they get a chance to make an evaluation of various products at this fair. To attract consumers, sellers also offer attractive packages that are not otherwise available in the market, he added.

The salespersons at various stalls told The Daily Star that though it was a challenge for them, they have been participating successfully here. Crossing the barriers of competition, their products have gained the confidence of the consumers.

Local traders believe that participation of the foreign countries has created an environment of competition, which makes them bring in good quality products for the customers, they added.

However, despite preparations of all sorts this year, the fair is struggling to attract consumers. The tenure for the fair is halfway gone and it is frustrating for the participating organisations, said Akhter Hossain from Pakistan.

Every year they see people coming in crowds at the fair, but this year, visitor turnover

has been low, he added.

The fair organising committee officials said people are more interested in watching the World Cup matches this year. This is why there are thin crowds at the fair, they added. They hope the fair would gain momentum when the matches are over.

Though the fair is being held for nineteen consecutive years, the CCCI has to rent the Railway Polo Ground every year for this purpose. Their attempts to have a venue of their own have failed.

The CCCI sought allotment of a piece of land for the fair, said Chowdhury of the chamber. They urged the government to designate a permanent place for the fair. The government even assured of an arrangement soon, he added.

They also plan to arrange indoor fairs at the site under construction for the World Trade Centre of CCCI, throughout the year. They would organise item specific fairs in different sectors at the World Trade Centre. They hope this would create a business friendly atmosphere in the port city and address the space scarcity to host such exhibitions.

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PRABIR BARUA CHOWDHURY, Chittagong

THE Chittagong International Trade Fair (CITF) steps into its nineteenth year this year. Since its inception in 1993, the fair has traced a long track, studded with stories of private entrepreneurship success.

In 1993, the Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) organised the first Chittagong Industrial Goods Fair, a five-day event from January 6 to 10 at MA Aziz Stadium gymnasium (former CJKP gymnasium). This fair was originally scheduled to be held in 1992.

The first fair saw 37 different business organisations participating, with 36 stalls. About 15,000 people visited the fair.

Inspired by the success of the first fair, CCCI organised the event again at the same venue for six days from November 23 to 27, in the same year. At the second fair, 68

different business organisations participated with 48 stalls. The number of visitors increased to at least 25,000.

Seeing the success of the two initial fairs held in the same year, CCCI decided to raise it to international level. In the year 1994, CCCI renamed it to Chittagong International Trade Fair (CITF).

With the fair's expansion, it was shifted to the Railway Polo Ground in its seventh year in 1998. From that time, the fair has been contributing much to the business activities of Chittagong as well as the whole country.

Although it was called an international fair, it was not until 1997 when five countries - China, India, Pakistan, United Arab Emirates and Bhutan -- joined.

At the new site, CITF saw major changes in its structure and looks, as traders, industrialists and manufacturers from various corners of Bangladesh and foreign countries thronged the fair with their products.

Organisers as well as the sellers and buyers treat it as a trading hub. To ensure better participation of foreign countries at the fair, CCCI selects a foreign nation as its partner every year. For the eighth time this year, Thailand has been participating at the expo as a partner country.

Secretary and Chief Executive of CCCI Osman Gani Chowdhury said the fair has opened up an era of open market for many participants. It has offered them a chance to explore business possibilities, worldwide. The fair attracts foreign investors and persuades local traders to develop their products, Chowdhury added.

Since inception, around 30 countries have participated in the fair, Gani said.

Akhter Hossain, director of the Pakistan pavilion at the fair, said they have been participating in the event for 15 years with great fascination. Through these kinds of exhibitions, he said they could exchange

knowledge and business experience.

Maleeha Khanam, a housewife in Khulshi area, said like other city residents, she always waits eagerly for this fair. For the last eight to ten years, she and her family have been buying essential items from the



ANURUP KANTI DAS

Big participation, plans and hopes

PRABIR BARUA CHOWDHURY, Chittagong

IN its nineteenth year, the Chittagong International Trade Fair has pulled in a growing number of visitors. More and more local and international participants are signing up, bringing in better products and services for customers.

Morshed Murad Ibrahim, president of Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI), speaks to The Daily Star on the sidelines of the Chittagong International Trade Fair (CITF) in an interview to share his take on the success.

What does this fair target to achieve?

Our ultimate target is to promote local products to international markets. At the same time, we are trying to build a business friendly atmosphere here. This is the era of open markets. The market is open for all. In a competitive market, one does not get much time for preparation. I believe a fair like CITF has been giving the opportunity to every one to evaluate their products against others. It is true for local as well as the foreign traders. They can use it as a way to build their business.

What benefit will local traders get from CITF?



Morshed Murad Ibrahim

With the CITF, local traders get a chance to interact with the foreign entrepreneurs to widen trade connectivity. They would also get an opportunity to showcase their products to the local and foreign consumers.

How do you define the success of CITF?

It is the success of CITF that it is being held every year since inception. Only in the first year, due to some official problems, we had to arrange 1992's fair in 1993. In the same year, we also maintained the schedule and arranged the fair from 23 to 28 November.

Who bears the fair's establishment costs?

From the beginning, the chamber is bearing the cost of the fair. And, we are investing the total money that comes from the fair in the World Trade Centre.

How many foreign countries have participated in the CITF?

From the first fair to this one, 30 foreign countries have been participating here. Every year, we also select one country as a partner. We have selected Thailand as the partner country this year.

From when have the foreign countries been participating?

Traders from foreign countries have been participating here since the year 1997. Participation of foreign traders in the fair has increased year-on-year.

How are the foreign traders responding to CITF?

I think the CITF has already marked a good position for itself in the minds of the foreigners. Participating in the fair, they got an idea of local businesses here, which will inspire them to invest here. We also opened a website about the fair, where anyone can get necessary information. All of these are making a good impression about us among the business community of the world. This is very important to attract

foreign investment in the country.

Do you have any plans of a fixed place for the fair?

We already sought to the government a permanent place for the fair. The government also assured that we would be given a land to make a permanent structure for the fair. I hope, if we get the land, we will bring about radical changes to the fair. Not having a particular place, we cannot take it to big dome. We want to add here all kinds of international facilities that are available at trade fairs in developed countries.

What is the specialty of this year's fair?

At this year's fair, we are giving foreigners the privilege to come here and watch the ICC World Cup Cricket matches. To grab their attention, we decorated the fair with different World Cup items. Not only these, we also invited foreign delegates from different countries here to give a message of the fair as well as our country.

Do you have any plans to arrange an indoor fair here?

To arrange an indoor fair, we have already earmarked the space at the World Trade Centre, which is now under construction. This will make a year-long connection between the consumers and traders.

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