



ANURUP KANTI DAS
Visitors take a look at a solar rickshaw manufactured by Sun Energy Ltd at the Brands Expo, organised by The Daily Star, at MA Aziz Stadium Gymnasium in the port city yesterday.

Sun Energy shines

DWAIPAYAN BARUA, Ctg

TWO friends joined hands one and a half years back and started a firm to market solar energy systems as an alternative source of power in the port city.

Supik Anwar and Md Abdul Hamid launched the firm, Sun Energy International Ltd, in December 2010, with the help of two other friends with engineering background.

Backed by initial capital of only Tk 5 lakh, the endeavour of the determined youths managed to grab almost 90 percent of the Chittagong market.

Their small business has now grown into a Tk 1.5 crore firm.

Sun Energy joined the four-day Brand Expo, organised by The Daily Star as part of its 12-day Odommo Chattagram festival in the port city.

Supik, chief executive officer of Sun Energy, praised the initiative of The Daily Star and said businessmen got a great platform to network with other businessmen and customers through displaying their products.

The firm has brought in a number of solar home systems with capacities ranging from 10watts to 250watts with four-hour back-up. Prices range from Tk 9,500 to Tk 1.4 lakh.

The products on display also include solar modules, solar commercial systems, solar industrial systems, solar power plants, solar power irrigation pumps and billboard solar lighting systems.

Md Iqbal Chowdhury, a marketing executive, said the firm provides a complete package: solar panels, installation structures, batteries, charge controllers, inverters and cables.

"We are importing the solar panels and other equipment from China but making some equipment like inverters by ourselves," he said. "We emphasise the quality of our products to win the hearts of our customers."

The firm supplied solar home systems to a number of housing projects by realtors in parts of the port city.

A government rule opened scope for the business to flourish. It is now mandatory for new residential and commercial units to install solar home systems to supply at least 3 percent of the buildings' total energy needs.

Brand expo comes to a close today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

THE Brands Expo, a four-day exposition organised by The Daily Star, ends today in the port city. The fair that kicked off on Saturday brought together renowned brands that originated from Chittagong.

The Daily Star organised the exposition as part of its Odommo Chattagram festival, facilitating the participants to showcase their corporate activities and products to visitors at MA Aziz Stadium Gymnasium.

Leading brands joined the expo to showcase their corporate profiles, including present activities, past and future plans.

The companies highlight job opportunities and offer employment to eligible candidates at a session -- The Daily Star-Odommo Chattagram Career Fair -- supported by Prothom Alo Jobs.

At the fair, job aspirants get the opportunity to drop their curriculum vitae at the designated booths of the companies.

The companies take spot interviews to select their desired candidates. So, it brings an added advantage for the visitors to join their desired companies.

UCB, BSRM, AKS, Grameenphone, S Alam Group, Western Marine, Pushti, Eastern Bank, City Homes, Baizid Steel, Pedrollo, Agrabad Hotel, Southern University, Prothom Alo Jobs and Sun Energy participated in the exposition.



People are seen at the four-day Brands Expo that kicked off in Chittagong on Saturday. The Daily Star organised the show as part of its Odommo Chattagram festival. Renowned brands joined the exposition.



ANURUP KANTI DAS

Lamy's take on trade

ASJADUL KIBRIA

THE director general of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) believes that a multilateral trade regime is not at stake due to non-conclusion of the Doha Round.

According to Pascal Lamy, the Doha Round negotiation is a process to update the rule-book of the multilateral trade regime and WTO is working on implementing and enforcing the rules already in the book.

In an interview in Dhaka, Lamy spoke on the future of the multilateral trade regime as well as its impact on Bangladesh.

He believes that work on trade assistance, dispute settlement and other areas reflects the dynamism of the organisation.

The Doha Round was initiated in the 5th ministerial meeting of the WTO in the capital of Qatar in November 2001. It is a move to make the multilateral trade regime more rule-based. To do this, negotiations have focused on dismantling the barriers to trade.

But over the years, the gap between the developed and developing countries widened due to differences among them. In fact, there have been major disagreements on how much the US and the European Union (EU) should cut support to their farmers and to what extent developing countries, like Brazil, India, China and South Africa, should reduce import tariffs on industrial products.

Lamy acknowledges that there are some challenges to concluding the negotiation on the Doha Round. It does not, however, reflect the weakness of the multilateral trade regime, he added.

The WTO chief said immediately after the global financial crisis, there was a wave of concern to reinforce

the protectionist regime. "But we did not see a significant rise in protectionism finally due to a rule-based multilateral trade regime," he explained.

Drawing evidence from the benefits of the multilateral trade openness, Lamy said least developed countries, like Bangladesh, have immensely benefited as they get duty-free and quota-free access to the most developed as well as developing countries.

"There has been quite a lot of progress in this area as countries like China and India provide tariff-free access," Lamy said. "It was not possible without WTO."

The WTO chief viewed that 10 years ago, developed countries strongly pushed for negotiations to open-up the trade regime. At that time, developing countries opposed this. "But now, the developing countries are pushing to conclude the negotiations as they know they will be benefited," Lamy added. This is a sign of moving with the rule-based multilateral trade regime.

Under the Doha negotiations, WTO member countries, except the LDCs, have to make a series of commitments on removing the trade barriers for each other by taking several measures, like tariff cuts within a stipulated period of time. Once they all agree to do so, the round will be complete.

Lamy explained how gradual liberalisation of the trade regime by developed countries helps the poor countries. "The relaxation of the rules of origin from two-stage to one-stage actually has boosted the export of the ready-made garments to Europe," he added.

When asked whether the BRICS-alliance would contribute to conclude the Doha negotiation, Lamy said that it is too soon to say. He said although countries like Brazil,



Pascal Lamy

India and South Africa are active participants on the Doha Development Agenda negotiations with the United States of America and European Union, they are very different in their interests and economic structure.

Currently, BRICS account for 26 percent of the world's landmass and 42 percent of the global population and 40 percent of the global GDP (\$18.486 trillion). These countries have accounted for over 50 percent global economic growth in the last decade. Intra-BRICS trade is growing at an average of 28 percent annually and currently stands at about \$230 billion. In the latest BRICS summit that took place in the Indian capital last month, the alliance vowed to set up a new development bank.

Lamy also said that the bound tariff rates of the BRCIS are diverse among themselves: 40 percent for India, 9 percent for China, 7.5 percent for Russia, 20 percent for South Africa and 35 percent for Brazil.

The bound tariff rate is the maximum rate of tariff committed by a member country of the WTO to apply while importing from other countries. Developed countries usually charge the bound rates while most developing countries have bound the rates somewhat higher than the actual rates charged. Thus, the bound rates serve as ceilings and the actual rate is known as the applied rate.

"The agriculture subsidy is a major area of difference between developed and developing countries in negotiations," Lamy said.

"But a systematic rise of global food price has already reduced the role of trade distorting subsidies as price and subsidy inversely linked. So the opportunity to rebalance the issue has increased."

Lamy, however, pointed out that an interesting phenomenon has also emerged here. "So far, we have concentrated on import restrictions, not on export restrictions. Now, export restrictions have become an issue and we have to work on it."

Lamy stressed continuous negotiations to gain from one another. He said one cannot send blue helmets to the Capitol Hill to force US Congressmen to reduce cotton subsidies as the issue has a huge political consequence in their country. "So, the only way is negotiation."

Regarding the Bangladesh opportunity in the multilateral trade regime, Lamy said trade openness has brought huge benefits for the country. "Just look at the growth of exports of the country," he said. "Look at the contribution of the exports to the economy."

The WTO director general, however, pointed out that Bangladesh's export basket is not diversified as it is heavily concentrated on garments. The export destination is also mainly concentrated on USA and Europe.

He said it is good that Bangladesh has made a strong consolidation on the apparel industry but it needs to focus on other potential sectors, he said.

As labour costs in China are increasing, investment is going in other areas like Vietnam and it would also come to Bangladesh, he feels.

Lamy also stressed on geographical proximity to expanding the export market.

To tap the potential of the global supply chain on different products, Lamy suggests improving the physical infrastructure and efficiency of the Chittagong Port.

As global trade in services contributes significantly to the economies of many countries, Lamy thinks Bangladesh also has an opportunity in service trade. "The service sector is contributing significantly to the country's GDP and Bangladesh is exporting manpower. The annual income from manpower exports is more than \$10 billion."

Lamy also praises Bangladesh's advancement in telecommunications and asks for more effort in this area.

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