Ficci investment expo today

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce & Industry (Ficci) is going to celebrate 60 years of its founding anniversary and host an "Investment Expo 2023" in Dhaka today.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is likely to be present as the chief guest at the inaugural session of the two-day event at Radisson Blu Dhaka Water Garden, according to a press release.

With Bangladesh Investment Development Authority and the commerce ministry as strategic partners, the Ficci members and government stakeholders will set up 40 stalls targeting local and foreign investors.

Following the inauguration, a plenary session on "Green Value Chain" will be held where Abul Kalam Azad, co-chair of Smart Bangladesh Network and former principal secretary, will be present as chief guest.

Another plenary session will be held on the second day on "Investment Climate: Current Landscape & Mission 2041". Md Tofazzel Hossain Miah, principal secretary to the prime minister, will attend as the chief guest.

The programmes also include the launching of a research "Catalysing greater FDI for vision 2041: Priorities for building a conducive tax system in Bangladesh" and a publication "ESG Strategies and Impacts from the Members of FICCI".

Walton sets up 3.3MW solar panels

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Walton Hi-Tech Industries PLC has installed rooftop solar panels of 3.3 megawatt (MW) at its headquarters at Chandra of Gazipur with financing from Infrastructure Development Company Limited (Idcol).

The electricity generated will meet about 7.86 percent of the headquarters' demand, says a press release.

Walton Hi-Tech Industries Chairman SM Shamsul Alam and Idcol Chairman Sharifa Khan, also senior secretary to Economic Relation Division, inaugurated the project on November 11.

A view of the under-construction Matarbari deep-sea port in Moheshkhali upazila of Cox's Bazar. The country's first deep-sea port will be equipped to accommodate large mother vessels, facilitating the transshipment and transit of import-export cargo. PHOTO: COLLECTED

Moheshkhali will be a hub for logistics, energy, manufacturing

Says Jica director general for South Asia

JAGARAN CHAKMA

The Matarbari deep-sea port in Moheshkhali upazila of Cox's Bazar will transform the region into a logistics, energy and manufacturing hub by playing a significant role in facilitating cargo shipments, said a senior official of Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica).

The country's first deep-sea port will be equipped to accommodate large mother vessels, facilitating the transshipment and transit of import-export cargo, the official said.

This will lead to the establishment of diversified industrial units that will boost overall economic development.

"So, Matarbari deep-sea port will help diversify the industrial sector of Bangladesh," said Ito Teruyuki, director general for South Asia at Jica.

Teruyuki also said it would cost about $2.5 billion to complete the project for developing the Matarbari deep-sea port, which he hopes will begin commercial operations by early 2027.

Speaking in an interview with The Daily Star at his office in Dhaka, Teruyuki informed that economic zones are being set up on a fast-track basis through public and private initiative in Moheshkhali upazila.

Ito Teruyuki

"Besides, there is a masterplan for building integrated infrastructure across the region," he said while adding that Jica is supporting the government in its implementation.

And other than those for logistics and manufacturing, energy projects such as the 1,200-megawatt ultra-supercritical coal-based power plant in Matarbari union are underway as well.

"So, there is huge potential to attract foreign direct investment to the region but it first requires adequate port facilities and road connectivity," Teruyuki said.

Regarding the support they offer, Teruyuki said Jica provides concessional loans, technical training, grants and volunteers when needed.

Japan consistently remained as the largest bilateral development partner of Bangladesh since the 1980s.

Over the years, Jica has provided Bangladesh with more than $20 billion, making the country one of its top three recipients of development support worldwide.

"Bangladesh is a significant country on the priority list of JICA," he said.

Teruyuki believes Bangladesh shows great potential but it has challenges at the same time.

In this perspective, Bangladesh is given more priority by Jica in providing technical cooperation and concessional loans, he explained.

Teruyuki also said Jica's loan support has helped the country construct important infrastructure, such as the Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge, Kanchpur Bridge, Meghna Bridge, Gumti Bridge and Rupsha Bridge.

More recently, Jica supported the construction of three lines of Dhaka Metrorail, the third terminal of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, Matarbari deep-sea port, and the Bangladesh Special Economic Zone in Araihazar of Narayanganj.

At the same time, Jica emphasises on furthering the country's education, health,

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Sri Lanka seeks investors for nuclear power plants

REUTERS

Sri Lanka will call for expressions of interest (EOI) in setting up nuclear power plants, its energy minister said on Friday, as it seeks cheap electricity to support its economic recovery.

The primary source of energy in the island nation is from imported oil and coal, and hydropower. The government aims to produce 70 percent of its electricity from renewable sources by 2030 and it sees nuclear power as a low-carbon option for its energy mix. It aims to be carbon neutral by 2050.

"The government intends to include the safe use of nuclear energy as a part of the long-term generation plans," Energy Minister Kanchana Wijesekera said in a post on the X social media platform, after meeting officials from the International Atomic Energy Agency in Colombo.

The government "will call for EOIs for establishing nuclear power plants & modern technology", he said.

Media in July cited Wijesekera as saying that Sri Lanka was assessing nuclear power plant offer from Russia, United States, India and some European countries.

Banking: Taking advantage of digitalisation

MAMUN RASHID

With rapid technology transformation across the globe, traditional brick-and-mortar banks are transitioning into agile, client-centric firms that are utilising cutting-edge technologies to offer customised financial solutions.

Banks in Bangladesh is no exception, having already begun its transition into the digital domain. Though the Covid catalysed the banking industry's digital transition, the pace of innovation shows no signs of abating even as the pandemic's hold loosens. Over 72 lakh people used Internet banking in FY23, up by 221 percent from the pre-pandemic period in FY19.

Banking industry has started to implement several cutting-edge technologies to transform the financial landscape. With the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML), banks are now able to assess customer behaviour, provide customised banking services, and identify potential fraud patterns. Chatbots powered by AI provide round-the-clock customer service, answer questions, and help with financial advice.

Accurate credit scoring models are being developed by ML algorithms, which leverage data from mobile phones, electricity bills, and social media to assess creditworthiness. This not only reduces default risk but also opens up credit access to formerly underserved communities.

Blockchain is accelerating international payments, eliminating fraud, and lowering transaction costs. E-KYC onboarding has reduced onboarding costs by five to ten times and revolutionised the account opening process.

According to Bangladesh Bank, 23 banks had fully implemented digital e-KYC onboarding by FY22, while 18 had done so to some extent. As a result, the onboarding process that previously took 4-5 days, now requires only 4-5 minutes.

Implementing middleware and automating back offices have changed the game by improving efficiency and reducing error rates. These technological advancements not only boost productivity but pave the way for a banking experience that is more responsive and seamless.

The future of banking in Bangladesh goes beyond simply adopting these new technologies. By focusing on customer centricity and fostering innovation, banks are building the groundwork for a financial landscape that is more secure, efficient, and inclusive. Mobile banking and agent banking networks are making financial services more accessible to the previously underbanked and unbanked population.

Banks are increasingly presenting themselves as trusted advisors, offering comprehensive wealth management solutions that include investment planning, risk management, personalised advisory services, and digital platforms, as people and families reevaluate their financial priorities. The future of banking is being shaped by this move toward a holistic approach to financial well-being, with the changing expectations of clientele.

A recent analysis from PwC and the Association of Bankers, Bangladesh (ABB) found that in the past three years, 86 percent of surveyed banks have focused significantly on process redesign and digitisation in retail banking, followed by corporate banking and SME. From a value chain standpoint, customer acquisition is the area in which Bangladesh's CXOs have invested the maximum time and effort to bring about digitisation.

Furthering all these digital transformations, Bangladesh Bank's recently launched digital banking guidelines and the decision to issue digital banking licences is a significant step forward in aligning the country's banking sector with the future of banking. By careful implementation and monitoring of these initiatives, Bangladesh is poised to transform finance from a mere service into a transformative experience tailored to the aspirations of its citizens. Who will be the winner or loser, only future will tell us.

The writer is an economic analyst.

US chip curbs trip up China's AI-hungry tech giants

AFP, *Shanghai*

US restrictions on advanced computer chips are forcing China's tech giants to rethink their ambitious AI-powered projects, analysts say.

E-commerce titan Alibaba on Thursday became the latest Chinese firm to admit to feeling the bite of US sanctions, as it abandoned a plan to spin off its multi-billion-dollar cloud computing arm.

It followed gaming giant Tencent's acknowledgement this week that its ability to sell advanced cloud services has been hit by the restrictions, which were introduced by Washington last year to prevent China's access to cutting-edge chips.

"What this (Alibaba) episode tells us is that US restrictions of chip supply to Chinese tech firms will have the potential of disrupting consequential business decisions," Ni Tao, founder of the Chinese robotics and automation portal cnrobopedia.com, told AFP.

"This is a rude awakening that they will have to speed up adjustment of their operations to offset the blow of a chip crunch, which will only become more acute going forward."

Washington has said the export controls are a national security measure, aimed at cutting off China's access to advanced chips critical to the development of AI tech as well as cutting-edge weapons such as hypersonic missiles and stealth fighter jets.

Beijing has dismissed these concerns, with President Xi Jinping telling US President Joe Biden this week that such actions "seriously hurt China's legitimate interests".

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Customers buy fruits from a street vendor in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany. Food and more expensive services were the main drivers of consumer price growth in the eurozone in October. PHOTO: AFP/FILE

Eurozone inflation slows

REUTERS, *Brussels*

More expensive services and food were the main drivers of consumer price growth in the euro zone in October, data showed on Friday, as the EU's statistics office confirmed year-on-year inflation slowed sharply.

Eurostat said consumer inflation in the 20 countries using the euro decelerated to 2.9 percent year-on-year in October from 4.3 percent in September after prices rose 0.1 percent month-on-month.

Price rises in the services sectors, the biggest part of the euro zone economy, added 1.97 percentage points to the final year-on-year number and more expensive food, alcohol and tobacco added another 1.48 percentage points.

A sharp fall in energy prices subtracted 1.45 points from the final number while non-energy industrial goods added another 0.9 percentage points.