

January – December 2011

1. COURTESY CALL ON THE HON'BLE MINISTER FOR INDUSTRIES

A delegation from the Chamber, constituted by the newly elected office bearers and led by the President, Maj. Gen. Amjad Khan Chowdhury (Retd.), called on the Hon'ble Minister for Industries, Mr. Dilip Barua at his office on the 12th January 2011. The following points were submitted before the Hon'ble Minister:



- (1) Capacity building of BSTI;
- (2) Mutual Recognition Agreement with Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS);
- (3) Capital investment outside Bangladesh;
- (4) Upgrading Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) Laws;
- (5) Special Economic Zone and Private Export Processing Zone; and
- (6) Development of a nationwide industrial database.

Besides the above, discussions were held on the following:

- (1) Constant monitoring of Industrial Policy
- (2) Power & Energy for industrial growth
- (3) Labour issues
- (4) Very high call rate
- (5) Modernization of ship-breaking industry
- (6) Availability of cheaper solar panel
- (7) Co-ordination between BOI, EPB and Ministry of Industries
- (8) SME and women entrepreneurs
- (9) Deep Sea Port
- (10) Ship breaking industry

The Minister congratulated the newly elected office bearers and thanked the delegation for raising the concerns, and provided his own views on some of the issues.

2. COURTESY CALL ON THE HON'BLE MINISTER FOR COMMERCE

The newly elected office bearers of the Chamber, led by the President, Maj. Gen. Amjad Khan Chowdhury (Retd.), called on the Hon'ble Minister for



Commerce, Mr. Muhammad Faruk Khan, M.P. at his office on the 13th January 2011, and the following major points were discussed:

- (1) Formulation of FTA Policy: Regional vis-à-vis Bilateral FTA and Market access to India;
- (2) Comprehensive Trade Policy;
- (3) WTO issues;
- (4) Introduction of distributorship for edible oil and sugar;
- (5) Re-introduction of the East Bengal (Foodstuffs) Price Control and Anti-Hoarding Order, 1953;
- (6) Draft Competition Act; and
- (7) Law and order situation.

In addition to the above, discussions were held on (1) functions of the Office of the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms and (2) export of jute bags.

The Minister congratulated the newly elected office bearers and took keen interest of the concerns raised by the Chamber, and thanked the delegation for addressing those issues.

3. MEETING WITH THE HON'BLE PRIME MINISTER

A delegation from Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Dhaka (MCCI), led by its President Maj. Gen. Amjad Khan Chowdhury (retd.) called on the Hon'ble Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, M.P., at her office on a courtesy visit on the 3rd February, 2011. The Chamber President presented the Chamber's submission to the Hon'ble Prime Minister a number of important issues on trade, commerce, investment, and



employment. Then the members of the delegation had the opportunity to express their concerns.

Among others, the following important concerns of the business community were expressed:

a) **Revision of the Companies Act, 1994:** Several members of the Chamber delegation opined that several provisions under the prevailing Bangladesh Companies Act, 1994 needed revision/amendment to meet the demands of the modern business environment. For example, it was suggested by the Chamber delegation that the prevailing ceiling of Taka 40 crore for going public should be withdrawn, or relaxed in order to attract large investments, particularly from foreign sources.

b) **Capacity Building of SEC:** The Chamber delegation underscored the poor performance and frequent changes in the policy decisions by the Securities and Exchange Commission. The MCCI delegation pointed out that the professional capacity of Securities & Exchange Commission needed to be improved significantly, particularly in the areas of planning, surveillance, monitoring, and controlling of the capital market by overhauling the current structure of the management of the SEC, hiring adequate number of professionals in key positions, and by introducing efficient automation system, e.g., software etc. to improve surveillance of the bourses.

c) **Need for PPP Act and Expansion of Scope:** Members of the Chamber delegation appreciated the Government's move on the initiatives to consolidate the rules for Public Private Partnership (PPP), as a key driver for mobilizing adequate investments for various development initiatives. However, there was a need for formulating a complete set of PPP Act approved in the parliament to provide the required legal basis to the PPP initiatives to ensure continued policy support to the investors, the Chamber delegation pointed out. The Chamber also suggested that not only large

infrastructure projects, but service oriented projects in areas of healthcare, education, waste management, traffic management, climate change mitigation, etc. should also be brought under PPP initiatives.

d) Revision of Foreign Exchange Regulations Act, 1947: The Chamber delegation expressed their concerns over the outdated Foreign Exchange Regulations Act, 1947, the prevailing law of the country regulating the foreign exchange transactions. The Chamber delegation requested for making the required amendments in the Foreign Exchange Regulations Act, 1947 to allow transfer of capital account to foreign countries, at least on case to case basis, and to further relax the existing ceilings/restrictions on current account transfers. This would significantly widen the current scope of business activities from Bangladesh in the international market, allow more competitive sourcing of raw materials, and improve export performance, the Chamber delegation pointed out.

e) Approval of Draft National Skills Development Policy: The Chamber delegation appreciated the formation of the Executive Committee for the National Skills Development Council (NSDC), but expressed their concern over the delay in approval of the draft National Skills Development Policy by the Cabinet. The Chamber delegation requested that the approval of draft National Skills Development Policy should be expedited, as this Policy would serve as a guideline for improving the productivity of our labourers, and facilitate establishing the National Quality Framework for the country's standards for skills level and training institutes.

f) Dwindling Growth of Inwards Remittance and Overseas Labour Market: The delegation expressed their concern on the dwindling growth of inward remittance flow, and slow growth in the number of outward migration of workers. Decreased remittance flow will eventually have a negative effect on the country's national income, employment and savings, foreign currency reserve, and ability to make payments for our imports. The MCCI delegation urged upon the need for strengthening diplomatic efforts to maintain the existing overseas labour markets and explore new ones to sustain the growth in remittance flow.

g) Unregulated Employment of Foreigners: The Chamber Delegation expressed their concerns on the unregulated employment of foreign employees at different organizations of the country. This was negatively affecting the employability of domestic personnel with similar expertise, and causing the national exchequer to lose revenue from income tax from the undocumented earnings of foreign nationals. The Chamber delegation suggested that there should be a skill-mapping exercise conducted, and foreign employees could be employed only in specific fields where there was no local expertise available. Doing so will reduce discrimination against the domestic experts, and increase the revenue earnings of the government. The Chamber delegation opined.

h) Local Manufacture of Computers: The Chamber delegation appreciated the Government's pledge to build a digital Bangladesh by 2021. Increased availability of computers and IT equipment at a cheaper price was a requirement to achieve this objective, the Chamber pointed out. The Chamber delegation urged upon expediting the plans of Bangladesh Telephone Shilpa Sangstha to locally manufacture lap top and PCs to make computers cheaper in the local market for making IT education and use more accessible to larger number of people.

i) Organizing Trade Fairs under Private Management: The Chamber delegation underscored the need for successful Branding of Bangladesh in foreign countries. However, the quality and manner of participation in international trade fairs and expos needed to be improved up to international standards, the Chamber opined. The MCCI delegation suggested that the Government should allow the private sector to organize and participate in trade fairs under private management to improve the quality of participation.

j) Trade Capacity Building of Foreign Missions: The Chamber delegation pointed out that the capacity of our missions in foreign countries to handle the trade related issues needed to be improved. The Chamber delegation observed that many of our personnel employed in the commercial sections of our foreign missions have not been adequately trained in the issues of international trade, and there was a need for the capacity building of the personnel by training them on trade issues, and opening up trade-related information cells at our foreign missions abroad in order to promote the country's image as a capable trade partner with foreign countries.

The Hon'ble Prime Minister took keen interest on the Chamber delegation's concerns and suggestions, and thanked the delegation for addressing those issues.

4. CONSULTATION MEETING ON “COUNTRY INVESTMENT PLAN (CIP) REVIEW PROCESS: PRIVATE SECTOR”

The Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI), Dhaka in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations organized a stakeholder consultation meeting on the 6th March, 2011 at the Chamber Conference Hall, Chamber Building (5th floor), 122-124 Motijheel C/A, Dhaka. Various dignitaries including the Minister for Food and Disaster Management, diplomats, economists, representatives from development partners, members from the business community, financial institutions, think-tanks, civil society, stakeholders of agricultural sector and media personnel The Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI), Dhaka in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations organized a stakeholder consultation meeting on the 6th March, 2011 at the Chamber Conference Hall, Chamber Building (5th floor), 122-124 Motijheel C/A, Dhaka. Various dignitaries including the Minister for Food and Disaster Management, diplomats, economists, representatives from development partners, members from the business community, financial institutions, think-tanks, civil society, stakeholders of agricultural sector and media personnel were present in the meeting to discuss different aspects of the Country Investment Plan (CIP) which would entail an investment of US\$10 billion in the next 5 years to Bangladesh in areas of agriculture, food security and nutrition, and engagement of the role of private sector in the CIP.



The Chamber President Major General Amjad Khan Chowdhury (Retd.) chaired the Consultation Meeting, and it was co-chaired by Mr. Ad Spijkers, FAO Representative in Bangladesh. Five designated panelists, namely, Mr. M. Badrul Arefin, and Dr. Z. Karim of FAO, Mr. Naser Farid, DG FPMU, Mr. Ciro Fiorillio, CTA, NFPCSP and Dr. Akhter Ahmed of IFPRI presented their views on the private sector involvement in the CIP Review process. Two designated discussants, Dr. Mahabub Hossain, Executive Director, BRAC and Mr. Anjan Chowdhury, President, Bangladesh Agro-processors Association (BAPA) briefly presented their views, followed by open discussions by the participants. After the open discussions, the General Manager of Agriculture Credit Department of Bangladesh Bank (BB), Mr. SM Moniruzzaman read out a written speech on behalf of Dr. Atiur Rahman, Governor of Bangladesh Bank. Ms. Denise Rollins, USAID Mission Director addressed the audience followed by Mr. Peter Kenmore, Principal Officer, Plant Production and Protection Division, Agriculture and Consumer Protection Department, FAO HQ. The Chief Guest, Hon'ble Minister for Food and Disaster Management, Government of Bangladesh, Dr. Mohammad Abdur Razzaque then delivered his speech.

Among many important issues discussed during the Consultation Meeting, reduction of land de-fragmentation, the commercialization of agriculture under corporate structure, deregulation of various government policies to improve competitiveness, private sector investment under private public partnership (PPP) in the farming and infrastructure related to agriculture, and increased investments in Research and Development (R&D) were underscored.

5. CALL ON THE HON'BLE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

The office-bearers of the Chamber led by the Chamber President Major General Amjad Khan Chowdhury (Retd.) called on the Hon'ble Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Dipu Moni, M.P., at her office on the 9th March 2011 and discussed some important issues



including organizing a high-level discussion on “India-Bangladesh Trade: Elimination of barriers”.

The President underscored the importance of Bangladesh -India trade and the briefed the Minister on the current difficulties faced by Bangladeshi exporters to exports goods to India. He requested the Minister for organizing a high level discussion in Dhaka on Bangladesh-India trade inviting the Chief Ministers of 7 neighbouring States of India.

The Foreign Minister expressed keen interest and mentioned that she would do her best promoting Bangladesh-India and economic cooperation. She also agreed to form a joint committee headed by one of the Director-Generals from the Foreign Office to pursue the issue. She further mentioned that she would take up the event with the Minister for Commerce too.

As a follow up, a concept note was sent to the Foreign Minister and also to the Commerce Minister for their perusal.

6. MEETING WITH THE CHAIRMAN, NATIONAL BOARD OF REVENUE

A delegation from the Chamber led by its President, Major General Amjad Khan Chowdhury (Retd.) called on the Chairman of the National Board of Revenue (NBR), Dr. Nasir Uddin Ahmed, on the 8th May, 2011 to discuss the Chamber’s budget proposals for the upcoming 2011-2011 fiscal year. Other Members of the NBR, and members from the Chamber Committee, and those of the Taxation Sub-Committee were also present in the meeting.

The Chamber delegation expressed their concerns over power and electricity generation, investment, liquidity crisis, higher interest rates, inflationary pressure, increasing cost of land, capital, labour etc other infrastructural problems which may have negative impact



on the country's growth and income despite the prevailing positive signs of domestic and global demand peaking.

The Chamber president urged for the removal of uncertainties about continuation of tax holiday in the upcoming budget. MCCI also suggested further lowering of corporate income tax and reduction of the disparity between rates of corporate taxes for different industrial sectors, and withdrawal of supplementary tax on the import of raw materials and non-luxury items to boost domestic-market oriented industrial growth.

The Chamber delegation handed over a complete set of Chamber's budget proposal for the year 2011-12. The NBR Chairman took note of the Chambers' views and thanked for addressing the issues.

7. COURTESY VISIT BY CONFEDERATION OF INDIAN INDUSTRY (CII) DELEGATION

A delegation of the business leaders from the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) paid a courtesy visit to the Chamber on the 8th May, 2011 and the Chamber President Major General Amjad Khan Chowdhury (Retd.) received them at the Chamber Conference Hall.



The Chamber President underscored the importance of the bilateral trade between India and Bangladesh, and emphasized equitable trade between the two countries to reduce the existing trade imbalance. He expressed his hope that the regional transportation network would soon pave way for trade creation in near future. He further stressed that trade cooperation should not be effected by political relationship, and the business community of the two countries should utilized every available opportunity to promote bilateral trade. The President in his welcome speech raised, among others, the following key issues:

- a) Strengthening CII-MCCI relationship
- b) Reviving the CII-MCCI Joint Task-Force to consider trade related issues
- c) Organising a meeting in Dhaka by MCCI inviting Chamber leaders of neighbouring States (7 sisters) of India to address Bangladesh-India trade issues
- d) Visit to CII by a delegation from MCCI at a convenient time later during the year.

The members of the Indian delegation thanked the Chamber for hosting the meeting, and assured of continued cooperation between CII and the Chamber.

8. DISCUSSION MEETING ON “MIDDLE EAST AND JAPAN CRISES: POSSIBLE IMPACT ON BANGLADESH ECONOMY”

The Chamber organized a discussion meeting on “Middle East and Japan Crises: Possible Impact on Bangladesh Economy” at the Chamber Conference Hall on the 16th May, 2011. A keynote paper titled, “Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and Japan Crises: Evidence from Macroeconomic Review and Call Reports”, prepared by Mr. Mamun Rashid and his team was presented at the session. Various dignitaries including the Minister for Finance, the Minister for Labour & Employment and Expatriate Welfare, diplomats, representatives from different Chambers and business community, economists, financial institutions, think-tanks, civil society and media were present at the session. The event was well covered by media both print and electronic.

The keynote presentation by Mr. Rashid suggested a number of recommendations for the government and other stakeholders. The discussants and participants of the session agreed on a number of short-, mid-, and long-term recommendations, which are as follows:



Short Term:

- The government should work together with the private sector to resolve the crisis, especially rehabilitation of the returnees.
- Commercial banks in liaison with NGO and corporate sector should come up with assistance plans for the returnees under CSR or other modes.
- Steps should be taken to up-skill the returnees and get them employed in the private sector on priority basis.

Mid Term:

- The government should train up the workers to acclimatize them with new market demand, before sending them to the new destinations in Europe or Latin America.
- Reduce migration cost to a rational level.
- The newly established Expatriate Welfare Bank should come up with a few new products suited to finance the cost of migration.
- Establish a research wing as in the Philippines and India for conducting market research and analysis for expatriates.
- Establish adequate number of technical training centers and provide quality training in line with the needs of overseas labor markets.

Long Term:

- Recruiting agencies should be made subject to more strict regulations.
- Overall, the country's branding along with right negotiations requires extensive diplomatic effort and success along with policy continuity and skills development.

9. COURTESY MEETING WITH THE INDIAN HIGH COMMISSIONER

The Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh, H.E. Mr. Rajeet Mitter paid a courtesy visit to the Chamber to meet the members on the 23rd May 2011, and he was received by the Chamber President Major General Amjad Khan Chowdhury (Retd.) at the Chamber Conference Hall. The issues of bilateral trade and economic cooperation were discussed in the meeting. Among other issues, the concerns of the Bangladeshi Business Community over hurdles of obtaining a visa, and the prevailing Non-Tariff Barriers to trade were addressed.



The High Commissioner was found very much updated on these issues, and he thanked the Chamber for inviting him and responded very positively by mentioning the pro-active steps being taken at his office to resolve those issues.

10. HIGH PROFILE DISCUSSION ON “ASIA 2050 AND BANGLADESH”

MCCI organized a High Profile Discussion Session on the theme, “Asia 2050 and Bangladesh” on the 26th May, 2011 at the Westin Hotel, Dhaka, to discuss the future growth prospect of Bangladesh in the Year 2050 in the context of a report published



lately by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), titled, “Asia 2050: Realizing the Asian Century”. The ADB report identified 7 Asian economies, dubbed as Asia -7 countries, as engines of Asia’s re-emergence by 2050. Dr. Atiur Rahman, Governor of Bangladesh Bank was the keynote speaker, and Dr. Gowher Rizvi, Special Adviser (International Affairs) to the Hon’ble Prime Minister was present as the Chief Guest at the event. Eminent citizens including the leaders of the business community, past presidents of the Chamber, presidents and chairmen of major trade bodies, diplomats, economists, and media personnel were among the guests invited by the Chamber President Major General Amjad Khan Chowdhury (Retd.).

Dr. Atiur Rahman, the Governor of Bangladesh Bank and an eminent economist made a keynote presentation highlighting, among others, the following key issues:

- Key macro-economic performance trends and forecasts;
- Recent socio-economic achievements;
- Position of Bangladesh in various global rankings;
- International recognitions;
- Key policy agenda of the current government;
- Economic and investment opportunities;
- Potential growth sectors;
- Likely reasons why Bangladesh was not included among Asia-7 countries;
- The government’s pledge of Vision 2021;
- The futuristic Vision 2030 of a leading trade body;
- Challenges for transformation; and
- Vision for 2050.

The Adviser (International Affairs) to the Hon’ble Prime Minister, Dr. Gowher Rizvi, in his brief

address, singled out the need for improving democratic practices and strengthening the democratic institutions as the most pressing need in order to achieve a balanced and inclusive socio-economic growth in the long-run.

The session, participated by distinguishes business leaders and eminent citizens, was very lively and the discussions were thought-provoking. The significant points of unanimous agreement during the session were about policy continuity, strengthening of democratic practices and institutions, accountability to people, cooperation with the private sector, and regional cooperation.

11. VISIT BY THE THAI BUSINESS DELEGATION

A business delegation from Thailand, led by Mrs. Atchuka Sibunnuang, Secretary General of Thai Board of Investment, and coordinated by Mr. Mingpant Chayavichitslip, President of Thai Bangladesh Business Council, paid a courtesy visit to the Chamber, and was received by the Chamber President Major General Amjad Khan Chowdhury (Retd.) at the Chamber Conference Hall on the 20th June, 2011. During the discussions that followed, the Chamber President expressed his appreciation of the Thai success stories in developing their agro-processing industries and in attracting large amount of foreign investment in their country. The Chamber expressed hopes of greater support from Thailand in concluding the regional agreement under the “Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation” (BIMSTEC). The Chamber also expressed its commitment to renew the relationship between the MCCI.



The Thai delegation appreciated the Chamber’s concerns, and expressed their commitment to continuing cooperation with the Chamber.

12. MCCI-ADB JOINT SEMINAR ON ‘PROSPERITY AND GROWTH THROUGH REGIONAL COOPERATION’

The Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI), Dhaka and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) jointly organized a seminar on ‘Prosperity and Growth through Regional Cooperation’ on the 28th July, 2011 at Pan-Pacific Sonargaon Hotel, Dhaka. Various dignitaries including the Minister for Foreign Affairs, diplomats, economists, representatives

from development partners, members from the business community, financial institutions, think-tanks, civil society, and media personnel were present in the seminar and participated in the discussion.



At the outset, the Chamber President Major General Amjad Khan Chowdhury (Retd.) greeted all and delivered his welcome speech, followed by the opening remarks by Mr. Thevakumar Kandiah, Country Director, Bangladesh Resident Mission, ADB. Then Mr. Sultan Hafeez Rahman, Director General, South Asia Department, ADB said a few words on his keynote paper before going through detailed presentation. The Chamber President then requested Dr. Abid Hossain of ADB to act as the moderator. Mr. Hirogama Yamaguchi of ADB delivered the first presentation on 'Regional Connectivity in the South Asia', followed by another one titled, 'Trade Facilitation: Broad Concepts and the Case of South Asia', jointly presented by Mr. Cuong Minh Nguyen and Ms. Sona Shrestha, South Asia Department, ADB. The next presentation 'South Asia Regional Cooperation: Energy' was delivered by Mr. Priyantha D. C. Wijayatunga, Senior Energy Specialist, South Asia Department, ADB. In the meantime, the Chief Guest, Dr. Dipu Moni, M.P., the hon'ble Minister for Foreign Affairs had arrived and took the chair and Dr. Sultan Hafeez Rahman delivered his main presentation on 'ADB's Regional Cooperation Programme in Central, South and East Asia'. After this presentation, Mr. Kamran T. Rahman, MCCI Committee Member, presented his keynote paper on 'Role of Bangladesh Private Sector in Enhancing Regional Cooperation in South Asia'. Then Mr. Florian A. Albuero from Center for the Advancement of Trade Integration and Facilitation to delivered his presentation on 'Cross Border Trade Experiences and Best Practices'. A lively 'Question and Answer' (Q & A) session was held afterwards, followed by the valuable speech of the Chief Guest.

The Chief Guest, the Hon'ble Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Dipu Moni, M.P., thanked the MCCI and the ADB for organizing such an important event, thanked the participants for their inputs, and articulated her observations on the issues raised by the session participants.

The speakers and participants agreed on the following major issues:

- Economic integration and cooperation among South Asian countries should be conceived

under a regional framework so that the natural and environmental resources, facilities and opportunities could be optimally utilized for the benefit of all countries in the region.

- Regional cooperation would help Bangladesh and other South Asian countries to forge a huge regional market and enable them to participate effectively in wider Asian integration.
- South Asia was the fastest growing economic region in the world at the moment. This region had great opportunity, quite similar to ASEAN and SAFTA, but its transport networks were still fragmented due to lack of cooperation, which needed improvement.
- South Asia had been slow in promoting regional cooperation. As a result, the region had missed out on major opportunities; it was about time to become proactive and reverse the course.
- Improvement in Trade Facilitation Services is an important part of regional cooperation in order to increase transparency and reduce risk and uncertainty in cross-border trades.
- Private sector has a major role to play in shaping up modes and areas of regional cooperation and economic integration.
- The Asian Highway routes in the proposed regional trade transit routes.
- The cost and benefits of the transit and the associated security concern arising from trans-border transportation of goods should be carefully assessed and addressed.
- The transit fees should be in line with the international rules and regulations.
- Regional connectivity may not yield the desired trade benefits without the removal of Non-Tariff Barriers.
- Technology can help inter-government/agency coordination in relation to transborder trade issues.

13. MCCI-TARIFF COMMISSION JOINT DISCUSSION SESSION ON ‘DRAFT DIRECT SALES ACT, 2011’

A discussion session was jointly arranged by and Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Dhaka (MCCI) and Bangladesh Tariff commission (BTC) at the Chamber Conference Hall on the 1st August 2011 to discuss “Draft Direct Sales Act 2011”. The Hon’ble Minister for Commerce Lt. Col. (Retd.) Muhammad Faruk Khan, M.P., addressed the seminar as the chief guest while Chairman of Parliamentary Standing Committee on the ministry Mr. A.B.M. Abul Qasem, M.P., was present as the special guest. At the outset, the Chamber President Maj. Gen. Amjad Khan Chowdhury (Retd.) delivered a brief welcome speech, and the Chairman of Bangladesh Tariff Commission, Dr. Md. Mozibur Rahman moderated the session. The Commerce Secretary Mr. Md. Ghulam Hussain presented the keynote paper on the draft law, and four designated panelists discussed the salient features of the draft and pointed out the areas where improvement may be needed. A lively Open Discussion session that followed suit was participated by prominent businessmen, economists, bureaucrats, representatives from companies engaged in ‘direct sales’ activities, i.e., multi-level marketing for various products, and media personnel.



A number of valuable recommendations were made during the discussion session. Some of which are as follows:

- Any 'Pyramid' like sales scheme should be prohibited by the law;
- The provision for depositing 50% of the paid-up capital should be withdrawn;
- Penal measures for violations should be in proportion to the offence committed, with more emphasis on financial penalty rather than jail terms;
- Effective regulatory framework for fair competition should be ensured;
- Over-regulation by the Government should not restrict business;
- Service-sector may be excluded from 'direct sales' activities to minimize the scope of fraudulence;
- 'Direct sales' business opportunities should not be limited only to companies limited by shares, but all types of business entities, including partnership and proprietorship firms should be able to undertake such activities;
- The net contribution of the 'direct sales' companies to the national economy should be studied;
- Instead of introducing a separate authority, the implementation of the new law could be the existing authority responsible for protection of consumers' rights, with the required modification of laws; and
- The proposed law should be finalized without delay after following the proper procedure of enactment.

14. DISCUSSION ON “HIGHER EDUCATION & SKILLS DEVELOPMENT”

MCCI organized a discussion session titled, “Higher Education vis-à-vis Skills Development: Exploration of Appropriateness” at the Chamber Conference Hall, on Wednesday, the 23rd November, 2011. The Education Minister Mr. Nurul Islam Nahid, M.P. attended the discussion session as the Chief Guest and Professor A.K. Azad Chowdhury, Chairman, University Grants Commission presented the keynote paper. Dr. Osman Faruque, the immediate past minister for education was also present at the session. Technical experts from International Labour Organization (ILO), vice-chancellors and faculty members of various public and private universities, diplomats, representatives from different Chambers and business community, economists, industries, civil society and media were present at the session.

The Chamber President Maj. Gen. Amjad Khan Chowdhury (Retd.) chaired the meeting. The Chairman of University Grants Commission, in his keynote presentation demonstrated a positive correlation between a country's economic growth and enrollment in tertiary education. He also showed the comparative analysis of various developing and developed countries on their respective GDP growth, expenditure on education, and percentage of population enrolled in

various level of education to make his case.



Many valuable observations, suggestions and recommendations were made by the participants during the discussion, some of which are as under:



- Effective regulation was required in order to maintain the quality of education and administration of private universities;
- Severe politicization of public universities was identified as the main reason for degradation of quality standards of once reputed public universities of our country;

- Some kind of accreditation system should be developed for all public and private universities in Bangladesh;
- Our education system and its quality standards needed to be overhauled to meet the present and future demands to fit ourselves in the global knowledge-based society and economy; improvement should start in the foundation, i.e., in primary and secondary education including the technical education, and then move towards the tertiary education;

The Education Minister appreciated and thanked the Chamber for organizing such a discussion session on this important issue. He said that his ministry has initiated reforms in primary and secondary education, but reforms in tertiary education were yet to be addressed. He further said that the right kind of quality education system should be developed which is flexible in nature and in line with the national needs and development objectives and conducive to foster ethical and human values amongst the future generations.

15. MEETING WITH THE HONORARY CONSUL GENERALS/CONSULS

At the request of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the Chamber hosted a dinner on the 14th December, 2011 at the Chamber Conference Hall in honour of the Honorary Consul Generals/Honorary Consuls of Bangladesh in various countries. They were visiting Bangladesh at that time as the Ministry's guest on a Familiarization Program. Nineteen Honorary Consul Generals/Honorary Consuls, some of them with their spouses, attended the event and discussed the issues of mutual business interest between Bangladesh and their respective countries.



The guests thanked the Chamber for hosting the dinner and appreciated the Chamber's role in

areas of trade and commerce.

16. DISCUSSION WITH GENERAL MEMBERS AND ANNUAL DINNER

The Chamber organized a discussion session with the general members on Chamber matters at Pan Pacific Sonargaon hotel on the 17th December 2011, where all the member-firms were invited. This was in line with the suggestions received from some of the members to increase interaction with the general members. The Chamber President Maj. Gen. Amjad Khan Chowdhury (Retd.) chaired the session where a lively discussion was held among the members on the Chamber matters.



Some of the recommendations made are as under:

- The Chamber should continue to play a pro-active role in formulating various policy matters of national importance;
- The Chamber's research abilities should be further strengthened;
- Full use of ICT should be encouraged; and
- Setting up of Chamber's Trade and Investment Facilitation Center should be expedited.



Thereafter the members joined the annual dinner event where the Hon'ble Minister for Industries Mr. Dilip Barua was present as the guest of honor.