Asia urged to deepen economic integration

More than 70 free-trade agreements have been concluded by the ten-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations along with China, South Korea, and Japan, with another 70 or more still being negotiated. But regional or multilateral parts are preferred for maximizing trade, minimizing distortions, and relieving the administrative burden on smaller developing countries with limited resources.

Trade between ASEAN nations has grown from US$82 billion in 2008 to US$184 billion last year, representing an average annual growth of 12 per cent and accounting for a quarter of the grouping’s total trade.

At the same time, ASEAN and three major Asian economies—China, Japan, and South Korea—are studying an extended, proposed East Asian free-trade agreement. There are also proposals to extend it to include India, Australia, and New Zealand.

Despite concerns over a ‘race to the bottom’ effect due to overlapping Asian trade agreements, Philippines senior trade undersecretary Thomas G. Aquino said the pact is crucial, as they allow countries to enter into dialogue on contentious trade issues.

“In these troubled times, the value of new and deeper FTA models is that they enlarge the menu to beyond spaghetti and noodles. They provide logical reasons, specific opportunities and productive occasions for parties to continue engaging in meaningful cooperation, ” he said.

India’s Kumar said a wider free-trade area incorporating both Asian giants, China and India, would be the best option, even though negotiations become more complex as the number of participating nations increases.

Nobel Biocare acquires BioCad and signs exclusive partnership with OptiMet

GOTHENBURG, Sweden: Nobel Biocare has signed an agreement to buy 100 per cent of BioCad Medical Inc., a leading developer of computer-aided software for prosthetics, for a total amount of EUR –26 million (US$32.5 million). With the agreement, Nobel will obtain all rights to BioCad’s trademark, brand names, innovation pipeline, R&D network, and a facility in Quebec City, Canada. Nobel will also retain the 40 employees from BioCad, a company press release states.

Recently, the company announced the signing of an exclusive partnership with OptiMet, Optical Metrology Ltd, Israel, to offer a new generation of optical scanners with impression capturing capabilities.

According to the press release, Nobel Biocare and BioCad have developed a solution to combine the leading BioCad CAD interface with Nobel Biocare’s CAM manufacturing. The new BioCad software essentially will take the restoration process from a computer-assisted design process to a more computer-automated design process, reducing and automating much of the design work done by a lab to create the digital model for a restoration.

Additional features are an intuitive user interface, new design solutions for overdentures, new design possibilities for customised abutments, crowns, bridges, wax ups and cut backs. It also comes with a comprehensive tooth library and a laser sintering production technology. The software, together with a new optical scanner, will be launched in early 2009.

According to company officials, dental materials and products will also be presented at all major industry events in early 2009 and launched thereafter.