

Impact of SARS, uncertain global recovery

ADB trims Asian growth forecast to 5.3pc for '03

REUTERS, Manila

The Asian Development Bank said yesterday it cut its growth forecast for the region this year to 5.3 per cent from the 5.6 per cent it expected in December.

But assuming the deadly virus can be brought under control swiftly with minimal damage to tourism, Asian economies -- excluding Japan -- should grow at a faster rate of 5.9 per cent in 2004, the Manila-based bank said in a regional outlook.

economic weaknesses in the industrial countries and uncertainties relating to the conflict in Iraq and the recent outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), the bank said.

"If the epidemic is not brought under control by about mid-May the economic impact on developing Asia will be much broader and deeper."

In line with ADB's revised growth projections, the World Bank last week downgraded its 2003 economic growth forecast for East Asia -- which excludes Japan -- to 5.0 per cent from an earlier 5.5 per cent.

Beyond the immediate impact on

tourism and business travel, China, Hong Kong and Singapore -- three of the worst-hit areas -- are suffering from SARS as scared residents stay away from restaurants, movie theatres and other crowded places.

Citigroup and JP Morgan expect the Chinese economy to shrink in the second quarter, Fitch Ratings has cut its outlook on Hong Kong to negative and Japanese car maker Toyota Motor Corp 7203.T plans to pull staff out of China.

The ADB said China's voracious appetite for imports will continue to drive the region but Beijing must push financial reforms that meet interna-

tional standards and keep a lid on a growing budget deficit.

"Strong economic performance is expected to continue, though growth will slow slightly in 2003-2004," the report said of the world's most populous nation.

"Many challenges remain, including slow growth in rural incomes, the need to create jobs and an enabling environment for the private sector, growing disparities between the coastal and interior provinces, and financial sector weaknesses."

Despite anaemic growth in Japan, the euro area and the United States --

Afghanistan heading for 10pc growth: ADB

AFP, Kabul

Afghanistan is heading for economic growth of more than 10 per cent this year and next year, provided security improves, the Asian Development Bank said in a report released Monday.

In its Asian Development Outlook 2003 report, the bank said "annual economic growth in 2003-2004 could be well above 10 per cent with inflation kept in reasonable check."

The bank did not give an official growth forecast "as economic statistics for the country are virtually non-existent."

Achieving 10 per cent growth "depends crucially on improving the security situation, the government's commitment to sound economic management, and continued donor support for reconstruction," it said in

its annual look at economic trends in the Asia-Pacific region.

Nearly 18 months after the Taliban was toppled, remnants of the militia and its al-Qaeda allies continue to launch regular attacks on government and foreign targets. Two US servicemen were killed in a firefight Friday near the Pakistani border.

President Hamid Karzai is also facing problems as he tries to extend the influence of the central government beyond Kabul to the provinces, which are still largely controlled by warlords and militias.

The banks said strong growth would be supported by new inward investment, an influx of skills and entrepreneurship as large numbers of Afghans return to their country.

Japanese firms brace for adverse SARS impact

AFP, Tokyo

As many as 70 per cent of major Japanese corporations are concerned that a protracted outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) will hurt their earnings in the current fiscal year to March 2004, according to the findings of a newspaper survey Monday.

Some 5.3 per cent of the respondents said they already expect SARS to hurt their earnings, while another 62.6 per

cent predicted a negative impact if the SARS outbreak lasts much longer, according to a survey by the Nihon Keizai Shimbun newspaper.

Some 25 per cent of the respondents said they now have fewer business negotiations due to the outbreak of SARS, while more than 10 per cent reported falling sales, it said.

While 47.7 per cent have not seen any changes in sales and production,

10.3 per cent of the companies reported a drop in sales, it said.

And 8.6 per cent said they have suspended operations at some of their factories, reduced output or temporarily halted sales and service activities in these areas, it said.

Airlines, travel agencies and retailers operating in other Asian countries are being hit hard by the spread of SARS, the Nihon Keizai said.

Shippers' Council holds AGM

The twenty-first annual general meeting of the Shippers' Council of Bangladesh was held in Dhaka on Saturday, says a press release.

Faruber Anwar, chairman of the Council, presided over the meeting.

The meeting reviewed Bangladesh's trade, transport, shipping and port-related problems in the context of present world situation.

It also discussed measures taken to maintain its inter-action with shippers' councils of the region and shipping related international organisations like Federation of ASEAN Shippers' Council, ASCOBIPS, UNCTAD and ESCAP.

The meeting also reviewed the activities and performances of the Council during the year.

Besides, the meeting examined the measures for further enhancing its services to the shippers and exporters.

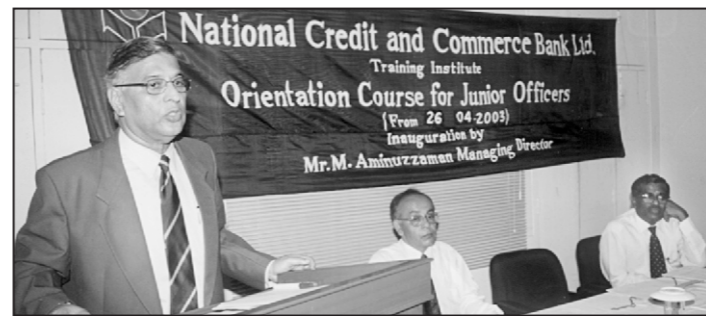


PHOTO: NCCBL

M Aminuzzaman, managing director of National Credit and Commerce Bank Limited, speaks at the inauguration of an orientation course for the bank's junior officers in Dhaka on Saturday. Md Omar Choudhury, director (Training), and Md Nurul Amin, senior executive vice-president of the bank, were also present.

CURRENCY

Table with columns: Selling, Currency, Buying. Includes exchange rates for various currencies against US dollar.



PHOTO: SHIPPERS' COUNCIL

Members of the Shippers' Council of Bangladesh pose for a photograph at the Council's annual general meeting held in Dhaka on Saturday.

SHIPPING

Chittagong port

Berthing position and performance of vessels as on 28/4/2003.

Table with columns: Berth No, Name of vessels, Cargo, L Port call, Local agent, Date of arrival, Leaving, Import disch.

Vessels due at outer anchorage Date: 28/4/2003

Table with columns: Name of vessels, Date of arrival, L Port call, Local agent, Cargo, Loading port.

Tanker due

Table with columns: Tanker name, Date, Location, Agent.

Outside Port Limit

Table with columns: Barge/Captain, P Cargo, Location, Agent, Date.

Movement of vessels for: 28/4/2003

Table with columns: Vessel name, Outgoing, Incoming, Shifting.

The above are shipping position and performance of vessels of Chittagong Port as per berthing sheet of CPA supplied by HRC Family, Dhaka.

STOCK