

Star BUSINESS

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Dollar hits five-month peak

AFP, New York

Dollar hit a five-month high against the yen in Asian trade Monday as the market largely overlooked an upbeat Japanese business sentiment survey and opted to wait for US data instead, dealers said.

The dollar peaked at 118.39 yen, the highest level since mid-April, before easing back to 118.30 in Tokyo afternoon trade, up from 118.03 in New York late Friday.

The euro was at 1.2674 dollars after 1.2668 and at 149.92 yen from 149.57.

Dealers said that while the Bank of Japan's Tankan report showed that the Japanese economy was healthy, the outlook remains more cautious, leaving uncertainty about when the central bank will raise interest rates again.

Sentiment among large manufacturers increased to 24 in September from 21 in June, the report showed, well above the 21 level expected by the market.

"Although the Tankan survey is positive and shows no major weakness in Japanese growth, it's not waiting the yen much as traders wait for news on the US economy," said Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi UFJ chief analyst Osamu Takashima.

With a US economic slowdown expected to put the brakes on Japan's recovery, the major manufacturers remained somewhat cautious about the outlook, forecasting a drop in the index back down to 21 by December.

"The market is focused on whether the BoJ will raise interest rates again this year but that will depend also on the outlook for US economic growth," Takashima said.

Another clutch of US economic indicators is due this week including Institute for Supply Management surveys on US manufacturing Monday and services Wednesday, as well as a key monthly labour market report on Friday.

US Federal Reserve chairman Ben Bernanke is scheduled to give a speech on savings to the Economics Club of Washington on Wednesday amid growing expectations that the next move in US interest rates may be down.

Nokia signs licence deal with Trimble

REUTERS, Helsinki

The world's top handset maker Nokia unveiled a patent-licensing deal with navigation technology firm Trimble Navigation on Monday.

Finnish-based Nokia said it will receive exclusive rights to use Trimble's patents in wireless consumer products and services and can also sublicense rights to the Trimble patents to others.

The online edition of the Wall Street Journal had flagged the deal earlier on Monday.

The companies did not disclose the financial terms of the agreement, but said it would not be material to either firm's revenue or income.

Trimble, based in Sunnyvale, California, has more than 700 patents in technology that pinpoints users' locations, typically by communicating with positioning satellites or by measuring distances from cellphone towers.

BAT Bangladesh receives EHS Gold Merit Award

British American Tobacco Bangladesh has recently received BAT plc's highest level recognition for excellence in the area of environment, health and safety (EHS), says a press release.

The tobacco company has received EHS Gold Merit Award from the top management of BAT plc. Earlier, the company received eight "Zero Accident Awards" in the past years from BAT plc.

This award comes as recognition of five years (2001-2005) of accident-free operations in the company's Green Leaf Threshing Plant in Kushtia and its leaf growing areas around the country.

Changes in DSE listing rules on cards

SARWAR A CHOWDHURY

Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) looks set to bring about some changes in its listing regulations in order to develop further the capital market.

The bourse has already made a primary draft on the changes now under review, sources said.

The DSE is likely to define specifically a company's eligibility for being listed on the stock exchanges as the present regulations lack in such a clear definition.

There is also no clear instruction for de-listing of a company in the listing regulations. If the changes are made, it will be possible to ascertain in which cases a company will be identified for being de-listed.

Following the commencement of Central Depository Bangladesh Limited (CDBL), some operational changes are made in the bourses, but the changes are yet to be covered by the DSE Listing Regulations.

The DSE plans inclusion of the criteria of the SEC corporate governance guidelines, issued early this year by the capital market watchdog.

The premier bourse also plans to set criteria for listing new venture or green-field companies.

"We need another two or three meetings to complete the review. And we are hopeful we can submit the final draft on the changes to the Securities and Exchange Commission in the next month for its

approval," said DSE Chief Executive Officer Salahuddin Ahmed Khan.

He said the DSE took the initiative to upgrade the listing regulations as all the above factors are already in practice in the bourses of the neighbouring countries.

With the updates of the listing regulations, it will help smooth the listing and de-listing process besides encouraging the companies, especially the new ventures, to get listed on the stock exchanges, the DSE CEO said.

"It will also help the market in developing further and protecting the investors' interests as well," he added.

Emergency fund for Indian workers in KSA planned

PTI, Dubai

The Indian Embassy in Saudi Arabia is mulling setting up an emergency fund for medical treatment of Indians working in the unorganised sectors in the Kingdom.

Ambassador MOH Farooq has promised to seek the permission of the Indian government to divert part of the funds of the embassy for these workers, according to the Federation of the Kerala Associations in Saudi Arabia (FOKASA).

The aim is to create a fund amounting to 250,000 Saudi Riyals (SR), which will be administered by the Indian embassy, with contributions coming from the embassy's welfare section, Indian expatriates and fund-raising campaigns through cultural programmes, said FOKASA.

R Muraleedharan, convener of FOKASA, told a news conference about the blueprint of a medical treatment plan for thousands of Indian workers in the unorganised sector like livestock farms, camel owners and other establishments with a workforce of 10 employees or less.

He said that since these employees do not earn more than SR 600 a month, they find it difficult to bear the cost of treatment when they fall sick. Muraleedharan said the fund would target poor Indian workers facing medical emergency. The association has also entered into an agreement with some polyclinics for the treatment of workers.

In case an employee is in need of long-term treatment which requires his hospitalisation, the beneficiary will be paid SR 2,000 towards air fare to enable him to undergo treatment in his home state in India, said Muraleedharan.

Hanoi to slash import tax on medicines

XINHUA, Hanoi

Vietnam will gradually slash import taxes on pharmaceuticals to an average of 2.5 percent within five years after its accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) from current 0-15 percent local newspaper Vietnam News reported Monday.

Specifically, 47 pharmaceutical categories which currently bear tariffs of 10-15 percent will see lower import taxes, the paper quoted sources from the Drug Administration of Vietnam under the Health Ministry.

Besides tax cut in pharmaceuticals, average import duties on cosmetics are expected to decrease to 17.9 percent by the time the country fulfills all of its WTO commitments from current 44 percent.

Foreign-invested enterprises and affiliates of international ones in Vietnam will be permitted to directly import and export pharmaceuticals.

Now, some 60 percent of pharmaceuticals available in the Vietnamese market are imports, mainly from China, France, South Korea, India, Britain, and the United States.

China's foreign loans stand at \$298b by June

XINHUA, Beijing

China's outstanding foreign loans had reached 297.944 billion US dollars by the end of June, up 6.01 percent or 16.899 billion US dollars over the end of last year, according to a press release of the State Administration of Foreign Exchange.

Outstanding short-term loans that should be serviced within a year were valued at 166.294 billion US dollars, representing an increase of 10.151 billion US dollars, or 6.50 percent, over the end of last year.

Outstanding loans for long and medium terms in contrast stood at 131.650 billion US dollars, up 5.40 percent for an increase of 6.748 billion US dollars over the end of 2005.

Limited access to market, tech hinders women entrepreneurship: Butenis

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Lack of confidence among the women entrepreneurs is the key limitation for the development of women entrepreneurship in Bangladesh, Patricia A. Butenis, US Ambassador in Bangladesh said yesterday in Dhaka.

"Limited access to market and technology, poor training and business development services and gender biased inherent rules are among other hindrances to developing women entrepreneurship in Bangladesh," Butenis said addressing a seminar on 'Fair Participation and Marketing' at the sideline of the 3rd Asian Women Entrepreneur Eid Fair 2006 as chief guest.

The fair entered its second day yesterday. Held at the National Shooting Federation auditorium at Gulshan, it will continue until October 6.

Women Entrepreneurs

Association of Bangladesh (Weab) and Pakistan High Commission in Dhaka are jointly organising the fair with Bank Alfalah Limited being the lead sponsor and JOBS Bangladesh the supporter.

The ambassador said US Agency for International Development and Government of Bangladesh at the end of this calendar year will launch a new project named 'Poverty Reduction by Increasing Competitiveness of the Enterprises' to improve integration of the small and medium enterprises, including women entrepreneurs, in some selected areas.

The project will help the businesswomen improve their performances in order to effectively compete in the market, she added.

Butenis said the women entrepreneurs gather at the fair to promote regional cooperation and see how important it is to allow women to overcome obstacles to their proper

participation in the economy.

Weab president Nasreen Awal Mintoos presided over the seminar where Pakistan High Commissioner Alamgir Babar and Commercial Secretary Roubina Taufiq Shah of the high commission spoke.

Nasreen said her association has initiated a move to establish a fully women-run commercial bank in the country to provide dedicated service to the women entrepreneurs.

She also informed the seminar that the Weab is working to establish a training centre for developing skills of the youth women.

Two other seminars on 'Finance and Managing Growth', and 'Promoting Regional Women Entrepreneurship' will be held tomorrow and Thursday



PHOTO: BRAC BANK
Brac Bank Ltd distributed 100 wheelchairs among the war-maimed freedom fighters at a function at Bangabhaban in Dhaka recently. President Iajuddin Ahmed, State Minister for Liberation War Affairs Rezaul Karim, Chief Operations Officer of the bank Kaiser Tamiz, among others, were present on the occasion.

Abe sets 2.2pc growth target over 10 years

AFP, Tokyo

Japan's new Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said Monday his government was targeting economic growth of at least 2.2 percent over the next decade, emphasizing the need for innovation to achieve a steady expansion.

"I will do my best to realize stable economic growth with innovation and an open mind, which will bring vitality to the Japanese economy," Abe, who was elected the nation's youngest post-war premier last week, told parliament.

In July, the government of then prime minister Junichiro Koizumi raised its forecast for gross domestic product (GDP) growth for the year to March 2007 to 2.1 percent from an earlier estimate of 1.9 percent.

On a nominal basis, or before adjustments for changes in prices, the government had forecast growth of 2.2 percent for the same period, faster than the 2.0 percent pace previously predicted.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) said last month that the world's second-largest economy was set to grow by 2.7 percent in 2006, up from 2.6 percent in 2005, before slowing to 2.1 percent in 2007.

Abe meanwhile called on the Bank of Japan to maintain an easy monetary policy amid intense speculation about when the central bank will next lift interest rates.

"The government and the Bank of Japan will form a united front to achieve sustainable growth led by the private sector," he said.

"We hope that the (Bank of Japan) will continue to support the economy from a monetary point of view," added Abe, who has made clear previously that he believes the central bank should move cautiously on raising rates.

The Bank of Japan policy board voted unanimously on July 14 to lift the benchmark rate of borrowing to 0.25 percent amid signs the Japanese economy is recovering.

The central bank had kept interest rates at zero since 2001 in a bid to defeat Japan's long scourge of deflation and stimulate the economy.

Jamuna Bank declares 1.5pc cash, 25pc stock dividends

Jamuna Bank Ltd has declared a 1.5 per cent cash dividend and a 25 per cent stock dividend for its shareholders for the year 2005.

The dividends were announced at the fifth annual general meeting (AGM) of the bank held on Thursday in Dhaka, says a press release.

Chairman of the bank Fazlur Rahman presided over the AGM, which was also attended by directors and other senior officials.



PHOTO: JAMUNA BANK
The fifth annual general meeting (AGM) of Jamuna Bank Ltd was held on Thursday in Dhaka. Chairman of the bank Fazlur Rahman presided over the AGM, which was attended, among others, by directors and senior officials.



PHOTO: STAR
Patricia A Butenis, US ambassador to Bangladesh, takes a closer look at a clothing product yesterday at a stall at the six-day Asian Eid fair that began Sunday on the National Shooting Federation premises at Gulshan in Dhaka.

Thai business leaders want revamp

ANN/ THE NATION

While Thailand waits for an interim government, businessmen say they want the temporary economic advisers chosen by the coup leaders to restructure government economic agencies to function along the lines of those under the Office of the US Trade Representative (USTR).

Pornsilp Patcharintanakul, deputy secretary of the Board of Trade of Thailand, said the Trade Negotiations Department, the Thai Trade Representatives Office, the National Bureau of Agricultural Commodity and Food Standards, and the Thai Industrial Standards Institute needed to be restructured.

The responsibilities of these organisations are unclear, he said, and both Thai and foreign businessmen are confused as to which

agencies they should contact.

Pornsilp wants the agencies to be restructured in the same form as those overseen by the USTR, which he said made it clear exactly whom businessmen need to contact for any given operation.

He added that the chamber had proposed a string of suggestions to the administration to ensure its economic policies encouraged the country's economic growth.

The chamber's annual meeting is being held in Nakhon Ratchasima from Nov 10-12.

More than 200 representatives from all 76 provinces will attend.

The agenda will include how to develop a self-sufficient economy, how to drive Thai competitiveness in the context of globalisation and cooperation on provincial economic development.

EU to harden airline pricing rules

AFP, Brussels

The EU announced on Monday that it is stopping airlines from agreeing prices among themselves for passengers buying a single ticket for a journey within the bloc on different flights and carriers.

The European Commission, the EU's executive arm, will scrap the so-called IATA "passenger tariff conferences" and impose normal competition rules.

EU Competition Commissioner Neelie Kroes said there were not sufficient assurances that the present exemptions "continue to benefit passengers on journeys within the EU".

For flights in and out of the EU, the price agreement system will

remain in place for the time being and its continuation depends on proving benefit to customers, said Kroes.

At present, under EU competition rules from 1993, air carriers are allowed to agree on prices for journeys where passengers are said to be 'interlining' that is jumping from airline to airline within a journey.

To facilitate this practice, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) operates a so-called passenger tariff conference that reduces price competition but allows passengers to fly on one ticket with several carriers.

The IATA is a trade association representing some 260 airlines worldwide.

Commercial Bank of Ceylon 'best bank in Lanka'

Commercial Bank of Ceylon, Sri Lanka's leading private sector bank, has again been recognised as the 'Best Bank' in the island country by Global Finance, one of the top financial publications in the USA, says a press release.

In its latest annual survey of the Best Emerging Market Banks of the world, the Global Finance magazine has rated the Commercial Bank of Ceylon as the 'Best Bank in Sri Lanka' for the eighth consecutive year.

An in-depth evaluation of the bank's performance over the past year, including capital strengths, asset growth, profitability, strategic relationships, customer service, competitive pricing and innovative products, led the Global Finance editors and analysts, as well as corporate executives and banking consultants to select this bank as the best out of all local banks.

Established in 1969, the Commercial Bank of Ceylon began its operations in Bangladesh in 2003 and expanded to five fully-fledged branches and two booths.

Manufacturing index falls in US

AFP, Washington

US manufacturing grew at a cooler pace in September but still reflected steady overall growth, a survey by the Institute of Supply Management showed Monday.

The widely tracked ISM index of national industrial activity eased to a weaker-than-anticipated 52.9 percent in September from 54.5 percent in July.

Any reading over 50 indicates growth, so the report suggests continuing growth in the industrial economy despite the decline in the headline number.