Steps to popularise bio-gas plants taken

Star Economic Report

Education Minister Prof Badruddoza Chowdhury told the Parliament on Sunday that all efforts were being made to popularise bio-gas plants in the country.

Replying to a question from Col (Rtd) Shawkat Ali (Awami League), the Education Minister said that an experimental plant was set up at the premises of BCSIR in 1976 which was proved effective. The cost of setting up a plant came down to Tk 5000 from Tk 12,000. After further research, the cost was reduced to Tk 3,000 only, he said. Besides reducing the cost in setting up the plants, research has helped to overcome faults like leakage.

The Minister said a total of 214 bio-gas plants were set up in country's 73 upazilas during the last 11 years. Of those, 132 plants were established as part of government's energy saving project, while the rest were set up at private initiatives.

Prof Chowdhury said a total of 240 persons have been trained in setting up plants, its operations and maintenance.

To a question from Awami League member Prof MM Nazrul Islam, the Education Minister told the Parliament that construction work of the Atomic Energy Centre at Savar which began in July 1976, was completed in June 1987. He said during the last fiscal year, Taka 5,44, 95,000 was allocated for salary, research and maintenance of the centre.

Tk 65.88 cr RCC budget announced

RAJSHAHI, June 30: Mayor of Rajshahi City Corporation (RCC) Mizanur Rahman Minu yesterday announced the budget of the corporation of Taka 65,87,84,668 (sixty five crore eightyseven lakh) for the fiscal year 1991-92, reports BSS.

The Mayor announced the budget at a press conference yesterday.

Of the total revenue earning of about Taka 7 crore 43 lakh 97 thousand will come from own resources while about Taka 58 crore 43 lakh 87 thousand are expected from government's grant.

Of the total expenditure Taka about 46 crore 39 lakh will be spent for the construction of corporation building, installation of electric traffic signal system, construction and renovation of roads and drains, development of graveyards, electrification and construction of market complex.

Moderate fall in share trading

Star Economic Report

Dhaka bourse witnessed a moderate fall in trading on Sunday.

In all 2,773 shares and debentures changed hands compared with Saturday's 3,719. Traded issues valued Taka 2,82,939.00 from Saturday's Taka 3,07,886.00.

Advancers dominated transactions. And the Composite Index of Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) moved up to 320.9147 points from Saturday's 294.1167. Index is the broad indicator of price movements of all the listed stocks.

Transactions involved twentyfour stocks. Of them thirteen gained, two lost and nine remained unchanged at their previous quoted prices.

Among the gainers Al Baraka Bank and BTC advanced Taka 40.00 and Taka 25.00 to Taka 810.00 and Taka 60.00 respectively.

Aroma Tea, Islami Bank and ICB moved up Taka 4.00, Taka 3.75 and Taka 3.00 to Taka 54.00, Taka 1210.00 and Taka 100.00.

AB Bank and Green Delta Insurance advanced Taka 2.00 each to Taka 182.00 and Taka 122.00.

Oxygen, Tallu Spinning, Chittagong Cement, 5th ICB Mutual Fund, 6th ICB Mutual Fund and Bengal Food gained within the range between Taka 0.12 and Taka 1.00.

Beximco Pharma, the lone traded debenture and the shares of Beximco Pharma declined Taka 5.00 and Taka 1.00 to Taka 1550.00 and Taka 170.00 respectively.

Quoted Prices of Traded Stocks

June-30

	*FV/ML	Closing (Taka)	**Changes (Taka)
Banks			
Al Baraka Bank	1000/1	810.00	(+40.00)
AB Bank	100/5	182.00	(+2.00)
Islami Bank	1000/1	1210.00	(+3.75)
Investment			
ICB	100/5	100.00	(+3.00)
4th ICB M Fund	100/10	145.00	unchanged
5th ICB M Fund	100/10	129.00	(+1.00)
6th ICB M Fund	100/10	92.51	(+0.51)
Insurance			
Green Delta	100/10	122.00	(+2.00)
Engineering			
Howlader PVC	100/10	101.00	unchanged
Karim Pipe	100/5	115.00	unchanged
Metalex Corp	100/5	99.50	unchanged
Renwick Jajneswar	100/5	66.00	unchanged
Food & Allied			
Aroma Tea	100/5	54.00	(+4.00)
Bengal Food	100/5	150.00	(+0.33)
BTC	10/50	60.00	(+25.00)
NTC	100/5	280.00	unchanged
Fuel & Power			
Oxygen	10/50	53.12	(+0.12)
Pharma & Chem			
Beximco Pharma	100/5	170.00	(-1.00)
Paper & Printing			
Eagle Box	10/50	13.00	unchanged
Textile			
Dulamia Cotton	100/10	96.00	unchanged
Eagle Star	10/50	35.00	unchanged
Tallu Spinning	100/10	118.00	(+0.92)
Miscellaneous			
Chittagong Cement	100/5	156.92	(+0.72)
Debentures			
Beximco Pharma	1714/1	1550.00	(-5.00)

*FV= Face Value, ML= Market Lot

**Changes= Plus signs mean gain and(-) signs losses.

Dhaka Stock Exchange

Market Profile

June - 30

134 Listed Stocks

13 Gains | 1 losers | 120 Unchanged

120 Unchanged stocks include nine traded on the day at its previous quoted prices.

DSE All Share Price Index = 320.9147

Issued Capital=Taka 5,439,680,590

Market Capitalisation = 9,170,220,069

Turnover = Taka 2,82,939.00 (Value) 2,773 (Volume).

Trade negotiations by year end

LUXEMBOURG, June 30: European Community (EC) leaders said on Saturday that completion of the troubled Uruguay Round of world trade negotiations by the end of the year was top priority requiring tough policy decision, reports Reuter.

But the final communique from their two-day summit did not mention reform of the EC's controversial common agricultural policy (CAP) which the US and other agricultural exporting countries have said is the main obstacle to an agreement in the negotiations aimed at sweeping away world trade barriers.

"The European Council (summit) considers the Uruguay Round to be the first priority in international economic relations and stresses the importance of concluding these negotiations before the end of this year."

"If a balanced agreement covering all areas is to be reached within that period important policy decisions will have to be taken without delay," the 12 leaders said in a communique.

Price Barometer: Essentials

June - 30

RICE	(Taka per kg)
Aman (Very fine)	17.00-18.00
Aman(fine)	14.75-15.75
Paijam	13.00-14.00
Ufshi	12.75-13.60
VEGETABLES	(Taka per kg)
Potato(White)	3.50-4.00
Brinjal	12.00-14.00
Lady's finger	8.00-10.00
Karolla	12.00-14.00
Lalshak	6.00-8.00
Papya	6.00-7.00
Green Banana (Four Pieces)	6.00-8.00
OTHER FOODGRAIN	(Taka per kg)
Flour	12.50-13.50
Atta	10.00-10.50
Wheat	8.00-8.50
Suzi	17.00-18.00
FISH	(Taka per kg)
Ruhi(big)	140.00-160.00
Katla(big)	100.00-120.00
Hilsha	55.00-60.00
Pangas	100.00-110.00
Shrimp(big)	80.00-90.00
Singi	80.00-90.00
Koi	90.00-100.00
PULSES	(Taka per kg)
Mash	30.00-32.00
Mashur	26.00-28.00
Moogh	27.00-28.00
Chhola	22.00-23.00
Mator	26.00-28.00
Khesari	16.00-18.00
MEAT	(Taka per kg)
Beef	Not Available
Mutton	Not Available
OIL	(Taka per Litre)
Mustard	52.00-56.00
Soyabean	37.00-37.50
Coconut(Colombo)	75.00-80.00
Vegetable Ghee	50.00-52.00
SPICES	(Taka Per kg)
Onion	15.00-16.00
Garlic	35.00-48.00
Chillies	60.00-70.00
Turmeric(Round)	52.00-60.00
" (Long)	52.00-60.00
Green chillies	16.00-20.00
Ginger	20.00-24.00
Cinnamon* (10gms)	3.00-3.50
Cardamom* (large)	3.50-4.00
Jhira (50gms)	7.00-8.00
MISCELLANEOUS	(Taka)
Ghee	220.00-240.00
Sugar	27.00-28.00
Molasses	18.00-22.00

Source : Department of Agricultural Marketing

BUDAPEST : Overall view of the final session of the Eastern Bloc trade alliance, COMECON June 28. The nine member countries signed an agreement to dissolve their alliance as according to Hungarian Minister of Economic Relations Bela Kadar this form of cooperation 'no longer relates to world economic development or to the need for change in this region.' — AFP photo

Rate of drop-outs 66 pc at primary level every year

Star Economic Report

Education Minister Dr Badruddoza Chowdhury told the Parliament on Sunday that rate of drop-outs at the primary level was 66.06 per cent every year.

Replying to a question of Nurul Islam Moni (Independent-Burguna), the Minister said the financial inability, illiteracy of the guardians and their lack of awareness about importance of education were largely responsible for such a huge number of drop-outs at primary level.

He said absence of congenial atmosphere and inadequacy of the infrastructural facilities were also the reasons for the drop-out of students at the primary level.

The Minister also said that nearly 1.15 crore children get admission into the primary schools every year. This is about 78 per cent of the total school-going children.

He said renovation, construction and repair of the primary schools and improvement in the tubewell and toilet facilities with financial assistance from different donor countries were being made to check the drop-outs.

The Education Minister told the Parliament that the Government was also supplying various education implements including free text books to discourage drop-outs.

He said all concerned officials including those at the field level are active to inspire the guardians. He also said there is a provision of appointing women teachers at the rate of 60 per cent at present in the teachers' recruitment rule.

Besides, he said the implementation of the Compulsory Primary Education from January 1 next year is under process.

In reply to a supplementary, the Minister said establishment of the necessary infrastructure for Compulsory Primary Education in the country is not possible in a short time. He said some funds have also been placed.

Terming the drop-out of students at the primary level as a socio-political problem, he said it has to be faced unitedly.

In reply to another supplementary, he said it was true that smooth supervision was not being made and the teachers in the primary schools are also not attending classes in time.

He said we all, irrespective of party affiliations and opinion, would have to be conscious of our responsibility to find a solution to the problem.

BSS adds : Prof Chowdhury said there were about 3,000 kindergarten schools, including 546 registered ones.

He told Rashed Khan Menon (WP- Bakerganj) during the question hour in Parliament that it had not yet been possible bring under the government control different affairs, including administration, of the kindergarten schools.

The Eduction Minister informed Sheikh Shawkat Ali (Jamaat- Satkhira) that at present there are 207 government colleges 299 government high schools and three government madrasas in the country.

EC pledges to give aid to USSR

LUXEMBOURG, June 30: The European Community (EC) pledged on Saturday to provide its share of any international aid package to the Soviet Union but said it first wanted to see substantial economic changes, reports Reuter.

In a communique released after a two-day summit, EC leaders said they fully supported Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev in his efforts to speed up reforms and integrate the Soviet Union into the global economy.

The summit decided, in the words of French President Francois Mitterrand, not to abandon Gorbachev to his fate.

But the leaders also told Gorbachev not to expect at bank cheque when he meets leaders of the Group of Seven major industrial nations after their summit in London next month.

The summit "considers that a substantial programme for reorganising and modernising the economy is necessary," the statement said.

EC leaders discussed the Soviet Union over dinner on Friday.

Asian currencies gain against U S dollar

HONG KONG, June 30 : Most Asia-Pacific currencies had a moderately good week against the U S dollar after a Group of Seven G-7 finance ministers' meeting put the brakes, at least temporarily, on the strengthening Greenback, reports AFP.

The Hong Kong dollar, Indonesian rupiah and Malaysia ringgit all lost ground, however.

Japanese yen : The yen surged to a one-month high of 137.70 yen Friday before closing out the week at 138.15 yen to the dollar, up from 139.05 yen a week earlier.

After opening lower at 139.65 yen, it hit the week's low of 139.78 yen on Monday as investors appeared uncertain whether the G-7 industrialised nations would carry out concerted intervention on foreign exchange markets, as their finance ministers indicated in a weekend statement.

Australian dollar : The Australian dollar edged up slightly during the week, closing at 76.75 U S cents compared to last week's finish of 76.50 U S cents.

It ended at 59.7 on the trade-weighted index, up marginally from last week's 59.6.

One bank said the Australian dollar was expected to continue trading in the new range, or perhaps slightly higher.

Hong Kong dollar : The Hong Kong dollar lost ground against its U S counterpart. It closed at 7.7460-7.7480, after finishing at 7.7210-7, 7220 the previous Friday.

The effective exchange rate index was 114.3, after closing at 114.6 the week before.

The Hong Kong dollar has been pegged at about 7.80 to the U S dollar since 1983.

Indonesian rupiah : The Indonesian currency fell for a second straight week to close at 1,953 rupiah to the U S dollar, against 1,952 rupiah a week earlier and 1,951 rupiah the week before that.

Malaysian ringgit : The Malaysian ringgit closed at 2.7852 against the Greenback, slightly weaker than its 2.7830 level the previous week.

The ringgit opened Monday at 2.7875 and was traded between 2.7895 that day and 2.7783 on Thursday.

Dealers said the central bank intervened in the market Wednesday and Thursday to absolutely no effect.

The Malaysian currency was weakened by alack of corporate demand and a generally slack market, dealers said.

New Zealand dollar : The New Zealand dollar closed up on the week at 57.70 U S cents, compared to the previous week's 57.60 cents.

Dealers said Kiwi was rising as buyers, mainly foreign, regained confidence after some recent drops.

It also gained strength on reports Friday that Moody's credit rating agency was not planning any immediate re-rating. One dealer said people were still buying the currency amid speculation over the government's July 30 budget.

Philippine peso : The Philippine peso gained more strength, climbing from 27.785 to the U S dollar the previous week to 27.75 peso's on Thursday, where it remained to close Friday.

Singapore dollar : The Singapore dollar gained against the U S currency to close the week at 1.7685, compared to the previous week's 1.7760.

The OCBC bank's trade-weighted index for the Singapore dollar stood at 134.96, compared to last Friday's 134.72. The index is calculate against the currencies of Singapore's top 12 trade partners.

South Korean won : South Korea's currency gained marginally against the U S dollar, closing at 725.20, up from 726.40 a week ago. Average daily trading was in the neighbourhood of 300 million dollars.

Taiwan dollar : The Taiwan currency picked up steam to close at 27.1095 to the U S dollar, up from the previous week's finish of 27.179.

After opening Monday at 27.15, the local currency, on the back of the island's thriving export activities, steadily gained momentum on light trading, market dealers said.

Thai baht : The Thai baht closed against the U S dollar at a mid-rate of 25.71, up from 26.09 a week earlier, a Bangkok Bank official said. Heavy selling was responsible for the movement, as the dollar slipped four stang at the beginning of the week.

Gold & Silver

June - 30

Gold	(Taka for 11.66 grams)
Tejabi	6,000.00
Gutnea	6,300.00
Silver	200.00

Source: Department of Agricultural Marketing

Hides & Skin

(Wet/Salted)

June - 30

(Taka per100 pieces)

Cow			
Calf	20,000.00	—	25,000.00
Light	40,000.00	—	42,000.00
Medium	45,000.00	—	50,000.00
Heavy	55,000.00	—	60,000.00
Very heavy	80,000.00	—	85,000.00
Rejected	3,000.00	—	3,500.00
Goat			
Big & heavy	8,500.00	—	9,000.00
Light & Medium	4,200.00	—	4,600.00
Rejected	2,000.00	—	2,200.00
Sheep	8,000.00	—	9,000.00
Buffalo	60,000.00	--	65,000.00

Source: Department of Agricultural Marketing

Subdued trading in Indian stock markets

BOMBAY, June 30: Indian stock markets reacted with subdued trading throughout the week to bold central government pronouncements on a radical restructuring of the economy, reports AFP.

The Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) sensitivity index closed 92.6 points lower at 1269.1 and the BSE national index lost 34.6 points, to 628.8.

Market analysts described it as a moment of reckoning after the new national government announced Monday that it would soon unveil what promises to be the most radical series of measures to restructure the country's economy in many years.

From the statements of both Finance Minister Manmohan Singh and Premier PV Narasimha Rao, this would mean freeing the economy from government controls, selling off public sector assets and streamlining rules to make it easier for multinationals to invest in India and hold majority shareholdings in companies.

There was also talk of lowering tariffs for imports and imposing higher taxes on industry to raise government revenues, but observers said it was unclear how these would affect industry in the short term.

The prices fell in a week when three of India's largest private sector companies — Tata Engineering, Tata Steel and Reliance Industries — all announced moderately good results for the financial year ending last March, in what was expected to be a bad year for industry.

Tata Engineering edged out Tata Steel as India's largest private sector company, notching up sales of 1.3 billion Dollars, up 32 per cent from last year. Before tax profits jumped 58 per cent to 117 million Dollars.

Tata Steel saw its sales rise by nine per cent to 1.1 billion Dollars, and profits jump by 27 per cent to 180 million Dollars.

Reliance Industries' sales rose by 13 per cent to 1.05 billion Dollars. Its profits rose by 14 per cent, to 243 million Dollars.

Exchange Rates

June - 30

SELLING AND BUYING RATES, offered by Commercials Banks, for Bank Cheques, (BCs) and Overseas Drafts (ODs)

One Unit of Foreign Currencies (FCs) for Taka

FCs	Selling	Buying
US Dollar	35.9226	35.4432
UK Pound Sterling	58.2330	57.5223
German Deutsche Marj	19.8467	19.5711
French Franc	5.8553	5.7753
Saudi Riyal	9.6101	9.4819
Dutch Guilders	17.6221	17.3741
Pakistan Rupee (AMU*)	1.4731	1.4591
Singapore Dollar	20.3355	20.0641
UAE Dirham	9.8141	9.6831
Kuwait Dinar	Not available	
Indian Rupee AMU	1.6936	1.6773
S. Kroner	5.4961	5.4211

*AMU-Asian Monetary Union

SECONDARY EXCHANGE MARKET

Wage Earners Fund/ Export Performance Benefit (XPB)	Buying	Fund Selling
US Dollar	36.48	36.53
UK Pound Sterling	59.15	59.20
Saudi Riyal	9.76	9.89
UAE Dirham	9.97	10.02

* The rates of Pound Sterling are decided every day, based on the cross-rates of New York market

Source: Sonali Bank

Japan reluctant to discuss new aid for USSR

NIIGATA (Japan), June 30: Japanese Premier Toshiki Kaifu said on Saturday he was reluctant to discuss new aid for the Soviet Union at next month's summit in London of the Group of Seven G-7 industrialised democracies, reports Reuter.

"Pouring water into a bottomless barrel is useless," Kaifu told 500 representatives of Niigata, the main port city on the Japan sea coast, northwest of Tokyo.

The International Monetary Fund and other global financial institutions have concluded that the Soviet economy needed transfer of technology and intellectual support before aid could come from western donor countries, Kaifu said.

Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev has been invited as a guest to the July 15-17 London summit of the G-7 Japan, the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Canada and Italy.

Kaifu brushed aside fears from the citizens' representatives that Japan may fall behind in helping Moscow.

Call to review Malaysian investment policy

KUALA LUMPUR, June 30: A leading critic of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad attacked the government's liberal investment and labour policies, warning they would return Malaysians to the colonial era, reports AFP.

Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, a former trade minister who narrowly lost a bid to unseat Dr Mahathir four years ago, said foreign investors were exploiting some 1.5 million cheap foreign workers to maximise profits with no gains for locals.

He said a concession allowing foreigners to retain 100 per cent of equity in projects amounted to abandonment of the government's pledge to help Bumputras, mostly ethnic Malays, build a 30 per cent stake in the corporate sector.

The government pledge to transfer 30 per cent of corporate wealth to indigenous Malaysians was made in 1970 under a new economic policy (NEP) framed after face riots to help Bumputras catch up with wealtheir ethnic Chinese.

Malaysia's growth soared on the back of a flood of foreign investments from countries like Japan and Taiwan after some of the NEP's harsher provisions were suspended

Raw Jute

June - 30

Kutcha bales

FOB * Narayanganj/Daulatpur

Varieties (Tk. per 100 Kg)	White	Tossa	Meshta
Medium	1313	1420	1125
Bot.* (B)	1259	1367	1098
Bot. (C)	1125	1206	1045
Bot. (X)	991	1045	857

* FOB = Freight on board

* Bot. = Bottom

Pucca bales Varieties	FOB (Ready)*	FOB (Sight)**
Bangla	Tk. per	$ per
White	bale*	MT*
BW SPL.	3350	555
BWA	3250	530
BWB	3100	480
BWC	2700	430
BWD	2400	380
BWE	2000	350
Bangla Tossa		
BT SPL.	3400	565
BTA	3350	540
BTB	3200	490
BTC	2750	440
BTD	2450	390
BTE	2100	360
White Rejection (WRS)/ Tossa Rejection (TRS) :		
Habijabi, Cut Ropes		
BWR	1700	290
BWH	1350	220
BTR	1800	300
BTH	1450	230
BCR	1300	230
White/Tossa : Cutting		
BWCA	1500	235
BWCB	1350	220
BTCA	1650	250
BTCB	1550	235
Meshta		
Spl.	1950	355
A	1900	345
B	1800	330
C	1690	295
SPL Cuttings	1000	175
Ord. Cuttings	900	170
SMR	1125	200

* FOB ready = Narayanganj

** FOB sight = Chittagong/ Mongla Ports. Indicative Price at which sales may be considered for EPC registration.

The $ prices are exclusive of any selling commision. O. D. (Sight nontraditional/applicable to export bills). One $ = Tk. 35.4956)

* MT = Metric Ton

Imports/arrivals of Kutcha bales at Narayanganj were five to six thousand mounds while at Daulatpur at four to five thousands mounds. (One manund is equal to 37.32417 KGs.)

Source : Bangladesh Jute Association

Snippets

Malaysia to amend Trading Act

KUALA LUMPUR, June 30: The Kuala Lumpur Commodity Exchange (KLCE) will continue its plan to introduce a stock index for futures and other finance instruments, exchange Chairman Syed M A Alhady said Saturday, reports AFP.

He said in his 1990 annual report that the exchange would work closely with the relevant authorities to amend the 1985 commodities trading act and ensure successful implementation.

The exchange had participated in the drafting of amendments to extend coverage of the act to include intangible commodities, he added.

Romanian currency to be convertible

BUCHAREST, June 30: Romania's currency, the Leu, will be made convertible within three months Prime Minister Petre Roman said Saturday, reports AFP.

The Leu's official rate stands at 60 Lei for a Dollar but at close to 200 Lei to the Dollar in inter-bank trading.

The new exchange rate against the Dollar will be fixed between these two rates, "well below" the 200 Lei mark, the Prime Minister said.

"The merger of the two rates of the national currency and the introduction of convertibility will be effective within three months", he said.

Tea prices fall in Colombo

COLOMBO, June 30: Prices fell sharply following a drop in quality at this week's Colombo tea auction where a record 7.3 million kilograms (16.06 million pounds) were offered, brokers here said, reports AFP.

Most of the tea on offer was produced during west weather, resulting in an overall drop in quality braking firm John Keels Ltd. said.

Western high grown teas fell by as much as 10 Rupees (25 cents) while off grades and dusts attracted good demand at lower prices John Keels said, adding that the firm had noted a worldwide drop in buying.

North Sea oil output declines

LONDON, June 30: The effects of maintenance and safety work cut north sea oil production to its lowest level in two years in May, according to economists at Royal Bank of Scotland, reports AFP.

May output was down by nearly nine per cent on the previous month and its daily value of 16.2 million Pounds was down by approximately half from last September, when the Gulf crisis sent prices to a peak of just under 40 Dollars a barrel.

Bank cradit services reintroduced in Iran

TEHERAN, June 30: Iran has decided to reintroduce credit services "its banks to offset what it said has been the excessive use of cash since the Islamic revolution of 1979, Teheran radio reported Friday, says AFP.

Citing the central bank's governor, Mohammad Hussein Adeli, the radio said that "transactions will be carried out through registered securities, bankers' checks and credit cards."

The system of cash distribution in banking institutions, which required, regular deliveries given the need for large amounts of banknotes, will be curtailed and it will henceforth be impossible to withdraw large sums, it said.

Cuban sugar harvest falls short of plan

HAVANA, June 30: Cuba's sugar harvest has fallen short of the government's plans hampered by shortages of fuel and heavy rain in April, the official Communist Party daily Granma said, reports AFP.

Cuba had planned on a harvest of eight million tonnes of sugar its principal export and earner of hard currency, but experts believe this year's harvest will amount to only about seven million tonnes.

EC-Japan accord on joint declaration

BRUSSELS, June 30: The European Community (EC) and Japan have reached broad agreement on a joint declaration extending political and cultural ties but France is pressing for a greater commitment from Tokyo to open its markets, reports Reuter.

"There's a large agreement," an EC official said on Friday.

He added France's stand was now the only factor threatening a planned signature when Japanese Premier Toshiki Kaifu visits the Hague after the London economic summit of the world's seven richest countries in July.