

Indian firm will sell computer technology to US companies

NEW DELHI, Dec 10: The Hindustan Computer Limited (HCL), an Indian computer firm, will export the technology and sub-assemblies of its latest mini-computer to three American companies, the Indian newspaper 'Indian Express' reported today, says Xinhua.

HCL Chairman Shiv Nadar was quoted as saying that the mini-computer, dubbed the Meteor III, is the world's fastest 486-50 Megahertz chip machine. It delivers 22 million instructions per second.

The Meteor III had been developed by a 24-member research and development team of HCL at its laboratories, Nadar said, adding that it was ideally suited for applications in commercial, engineering

and scientific areas.

Noting that HCL was planning to sell 500 Meteor III machines in the first year, he said the hallmark of this mini-computer was its price and performance advantage. Though it was the fastest mini-computer, its cost was only marginally higher than the prices of other machines of its type, he added.

According to R H Naqvi, Executive Director of the Electronics and Computer Software Export Promotion Council the computer hardware industry in India is poised to boost its exports to 10,000 million rupees (392 million US dollars) by 1994-95 from the current 3,000 million rupees (117.6 million US dol-

lar).

AFP adds: Japan will give India a soft loan of 66.1 billion yen (515 million dollars) and aid worth an extra billion (eight million dollar) under an agreement signed here Monday.

Japanese Ambassador Shunji Kobayashi and Montek Singh Ahluwalia, India Economic Affairs Secretary, signed the agreement as a sequel to Tokyo's pledge at the Aial India consortium's decision in September.

Ryuichi Ishii, counsellor at the Japanese embassy, told reporters the loan would be repayable over 30 years and carry a nominal annual interest of 2.6 per cent.

The aid will be used for debt relief, financing audio-vi-

sual equipment for the Japanese language faculty in New Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University and equipment for an engineering college in western India.

Japanese loans and aid for India this year would amount to 106.6 billion yen (833 million dollars), including two emergency loans of 20.3 billion yen (158 million dollars) each in response to New Delhi's requests for help to shore up its balance of payments.

Ishii said a high-level Japanese business delegation would visit India at the end of January to discuss possible collaboration with Indian industrialists following economic liberalisation moves by New Delhi.

Thais urge WB to halt loan for dam

BANGKOK, Dec 10: Some 100 Thai university students and villagers urged World Bank officials here Monday not to help finance a controversial Dam project in Northeastern Thailand, reports AFP.

Representatives of 16 educational institutions and villagers living near the construction site of the Pak Mun Dam in the Northeastern province of Ubon Ratchathani staged the peaceful demonstration in front of the World Bank office in central Bangkok.

The Bank has been considering a 54-million-dollar loan for power projects in Thailand, part of which will go towards construction of the 136-megawatt Pak Mun Dam, which has a total estimated cost of 178 million dollar.

Worthless notes

BEIJING, Dec 9: At one time in China, a box of matches cost six billion yuan, reports AFP.

Relying heavily on currency-issues to finance its crumbling empire, the Kuomintang government in Xinjiang region circulated the largest note ever issued in China in 1949, the year communist forces took power.

The note, which was essentially worthless because of hyperinflation, can be seen in recently published photo album of obsolete currencies from western China's Xinjiang region, the official Xinhua news agency said.

The album, compiled by the Xinjiang Numismatic Society and jointly published with a Hong Kong publishing house, contains 680 photographs showing currencies dating back to 206 BC.

Quit smoking, make bucks

TOKYO, Dec 10: Smokers are snapping up cash payments of 770 dollars each from a Japanese employer to give up the habit, Mainichi newspaper said Monday, reports AFP.

The number of smokers fell from 62 to 25 in a year at Nabitus, a company employing 120 people at Sakai near Osaka, the paper said.

The number of smokers had been rising at the firm in recent years despite a monthly bonus of 23 dollars to those who gave up the habit.

So president Masayuki Hiraki opted last December for more substantial rewards, and has already paid out more than 30,000 dollars to ex-smokers.

"The money is well spent if it helps keep our people healthy", he was quoted as saying.

Cremation of rats!

JAKARTA, Dec 10: Indonesia's mainly Hindu island of Bali has held a traditional cremation ceremony for more than 120,000 rats caught in paddy fields in an effort to ward off a more serious rat plague, the Berita Buana daily said today, reports AFP.

With this ceremony, it is hoped that farmers can be encouraged to plant rice again because they would be free from the worries and fear of rat attacks," Berita Buana quoted Bali Governor Ida Bagus Mantra as saying in a written speech read out at the ceremony.

Elaborate cremation towers to accommodate the 120, 312 dead rats were burned during a ritual ceremony similar to that accorded to human corpses, with priests and offerings of food and flowers, at a beach in Tabanan in the southern part of central Bali on Saturday, Berita Buana said.



Chinese Minister of State for Family Planning Commission Madame Peng Pei Yun at the Design Centre of Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC) Tuesday. BSCIC Chairman Mr Moniruzzaman Chowdhury was present.

Malaysia imposes levy on foreign workers

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 10: Malaysia has announced levies ranging from 360 dollar (133 US) to 500 dollar (185 US) which employers will have to pay the government for hiring each foreign worker, reports AFP.

Deputy Home Minister Megat Junid Ayob said the annual levies would be enforced from June 30 next year, the deadline for employers to register their foreign workers, mostly illegal Indonesian and Filipino immigrants, with the government.

The government announced recently that it would allow tens of thousands of illegal immigrants to take jobs in the plantation and construction sectors and as housemaids to beat an acute labour shortage that it fears could restrict growth.

Junid said late Monday that employers would have to pay 360 dollar (133 US) for a maid, 420 dollar (156 US) for a plantation labourer and 500 dollar (185 US) for a construction worker.

He said that a foreign worker would in future be allowed to stay in Malaysia for a

maximum period of five years compared to three years at present to ensure that labour shortages do not arise again.

Deputy Prime Minister Ghafar Baba said over the weekend that the government might also allow foreigners to take up jobs in restaurants and hotels if a study underway showed a shortage of such workers.

Official sources say that the government could also lift a ban on foreigners taking jobs in the manufacturing industry if companies could prove that they were unable to find workers.

"They however are likely to be put through a stringent test because we do not want foreigners to force wages down or deny Malaysians work," a senior official said.

Junid said that the government would tighten rules for hiring foreign workers after the June 30 deadline.

Employers would have to show that they had advertised vacancies in newspapers, posted notices in public places and sought help from the manpower department before they would be allowed to hire

foreigners, he said.

Junid said that the government would extend work permits for foreigners classified as professionals or those with equity in local companies from the current 10 to 12 years.

But, he said, the extensions would first have to be approved by the Prime Minister.

Malaysia's unemployment rate fell below six per cent this year, according to official statistics. The World Bank estimates the number of jobs at only 3.5 per cent of the workforce.

Tens of thousands of Indonesians, Filipinos and smaller numbers of Thais, Burmese, Bangladeshis, Indians and Sri Lankans have been drawn to Malaysia by a sustained economic boom.

Officials say that the labour shortage has coincided with several years of rapid Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth estimated at 8.6 per cent this year and a projected 8.5 per cent for 1992.

Malaysia's economy grew by close to 10 per cent last year, according to official figures.

Ecu may rival US dollar

MAASTRICHT (Netherlands), Dec 10: Whatever the emotional cost of abandoning the German mark, the French franc, the Greek drachma, or even the British pound, the savings could be enormous.

Pragmatism, rather than sentimentality, is driving most European Community nations toward a single currency with a drab-sounding name, the Ecu. However, their creation holds the potential for rivaling the dollar and yen in power.

On Monday, EC leaders began their two-day summit by moving toward agreement on a plan to introduce a single currency by 1999. The currency proposal is part of a drive toward monetary union and closer political union of the wealthy 12-nation trading bloc, reports AP.

Germany and other strong European nations hope a single currency will help turn the community into an economic powerhouse alongside the United States and Japan.

The poorer members, Spain, Portugal, Ireland and Greece, hope they will be better positioned to benefit from their richer partners.

Analysts say the European Currency Unit — or Ecu for short — could eventually rival the dollar as the world's most prized currency.

"It's very difficult to estimate but it could certainly be a threat to the dollar," said Olaf Sleypen, researcher at the Maastricht-based European Institute of Public Administration.

Two countries, Britain and Denmark, have grave reservations about the single currency

and have demanded special rights to decide later in the decade whether to join in.

Denmark wants to hold a referendum on whether to abandon its kroner.

Britain, which says the final decision must be put to its parliament, fears it will diminish national sovereignty.

A single currency would mean community-dictated limits on key matters such as interest rates and the size of a nation's budget deficit.

"We are not, in my view,

entitled ever to give away those (national) responsibilities or to give away the people's rights, which is what a single currency would mean," former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher said recently.

Ecu bills and coins would bear the community symbol of 12 gold stars in a circle. On the reverse side, community nations could keep national symbols — the silhouette of Britain's Queen Elizabeth II, for example.

But Dutch Queen Beatrix is not worried.

"On my part, I assure you that I am prepared to make a contribution by sacrificing my head on our coinage to the Ecu," she said Monday, hosting a lunch for the community leaders.

Like the Dutch queen, most community leaders regard the economic advantages as paramount.

The current Ecu is now largely an accounting unit.



MAASTRICHT: French President Francois Mitterrand (L) shaking hand with German Chancellor Helmut Kohl at the EC summit Monday. —AFP photo

US waste cleanup to cost \$ 750b

WASHINGTON, Dec 10: The tab for cleaning up America's hazardous wastes is almost certain to exceed 750 billion dollar over the next 30 years, and it could go much higher, a private assessment says, according to AP.

Researchers at the University of Tennessee for the first time have attempted to estimate the total cost of all the hazardous waste cleanup efforts facing the nation — from removing radioactive sludge at nuclear weapons plants to cleaning soil around leaking underground tanks at corner service stations.

"This is looking at the whole elephant," said Milton Russell, a professor of economics and a waste management specialist. "Others have looked at the leg or the trunk."

The researchers estimated in a report presented Monday that the total costs could range from about 500 billion dollar if only basic control and cleanup measures are taken to an "upper bound" estimate of as much as 1.2 trillion dollar over

three decades.

A "best guess" estimate was given as about 750 billion dollar over the 30 years, or about equal to the total amount of money American society spent on all environmental activities — including air pollution controls — in the 1980s.

Even with those expenditures, said the researchers, some contaminated sites likely will not be returned to pristine condition and will have to be restricted from public use.

Russell, who directed the study, acknowledged the cost figures "just boggle the mind" and "represent a massive commitment of the nation's resources."

The report covered costs for all of the hazardous waste cleanup tasks facing the nation, including the cleanup of the government's nuclear weapons facilities, toxic waste sites under the Superfund programme and hazardous industrial pollution found in thousands of smaller sites.

The findings are likely to be examined closely by members

of Congress next year as they debate extensions on several key environmental control laws such as those on waste disposal and the Superfund cleanup programme.

Nearly one-third of the total cleanup bill — at least 240 billion dollar — is expected to stem from the Energy Department's cleanup of radioactive and

toxic wastes at nuclear weapons production sites, the researchers said.

They said the cost of these efforts also are the most difficult to predict because even the technology that will be used in many cases does not yet exist.

Other cleanup costs highlighted in the report were: an estimated 67 billion dollar for dealing with pollution from underground petroleum storage tanks; 30 billion dollar for other Defense Department hazardous wastes; and 30 billion dollar for other state and private cleanup programmes.

The Energy Department had estimated as recently as 1988 that its cleanup of weapons facilities would be no more than 110 billion dollar and probably considerably less.

But researchers said the cleanup of more than 37,000 hazardous industrial sites and landfills under the federal Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, or RCRA, are likely to rival the cost of the DOE cleanup effort.

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Chinese trade team in Baltics

BEIJING, Dec 10: A high-level trade delegation left here for the Baltic states Monday, hoping to sign commercial contracts, the China daily said, reports AFP.

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EC will bypass Moscow to send food aid

MAASTRICHT (Netherlands), Dec 10: The European Community will renege 500 million Ecu (650 million US dollar) in credit guarantees for food aid previously agreed for the Soviet Union, Belgian Finance Minister Philippe Maystadt said on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

The decision was taken after Ukraine, Byelorussia and Russia decided on Sunday to create a commonwealth which effectively put an end to the

Soviet Union.

"We are not questioning the principle of granting this aid, but we have decided to reassess the mechanisms to implement it," Maystadt told reporters at a briefing during the EC summit on political and economic union.

The credit guarantees were agreed in detail two weeks ago between the EC and officials of the former Soviet Union.

Maystadt said the guarantees would still be available,

but would now be provided, in part, directly to the cities where the food aid is needed instead of being distributed by Moscow as was stipulated in the original agreement.

The individual republics wanting to benefit from the guarantees would have to make commitments to honour their obligations to repay their share of the total external debt of the former Soviet Union, Maystadt said.

US arms export to Third World nations on the rise

STOCKHOLM, Dec 10: While there has been a general downward trend in arms trade over recent years, the statistics then to hide the reality by concentrating on large-scale weaponry and ignoring the booming trade that goes on in smaller arms, says IPS in a commentary.

The fact remains that the great powers continue to produce arms in numbers that can only be justified by export, that overcapacity of production and arsenals are not being decreased, that no working mechanisms of conflict resolution are in place in many parts of the world and that economic imbalances continue to fuel the fire of regional and subregional conflicts and thus the need for arms.

With the exception of 1987, a peak year, the value of the global arms trade has been in general decline since the mid-1980's. The downward trend

is visible in both the value of new agreements signed and the value of arms delivered, and it can be seen in both the developing and the industrialised world.

According to figures released by the United States Congressional Research Service in August 1991, the value of new arms agreements with developing countries turned sharply upwards again in 1990, increasing by 18 per cent from US dollar 34 billion to US dollar 41.3 billion.

This increase was largely the consequence of a massive increase in the value of new orders for US weapons, which more than doubled between 1989 and 1990.

For other major suppliers—the Soviet Union, France, the United Kingdom and Germany—the downward trend in the value of new contracts noted for most of the 1980's continued in 1990.

arms market is usually measured in dollar or some other kind of economic indicator, measuring the arms market in this way means that the debate is dominated by the trade in sophisticated, new weapons.

Many combat aircraft, major warships and submarines are now so expensive that the transfer of even relatively small numbers can have a dramatic impact on the overall value of the arms trade. The fact that fewer countries can afford the latest generation of major weapons does not imply shortage or reduction in the demand for other types of weapons.

In 1990, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute recorded over 30 major armed conflicts and noted that over 100 smaller conflicts were being waged throughout the world. The majority of these conflicts were not interstate wars, but were being fought within countries. One or

more parties to the conflict was likely to be receiving external assistance of some kind often of arms transfers.

The arms transferred were of different kind from those normally recorded by the various statistical agencies around the world. The primary weapons in use are often small, portable infantry weapons.

Assault rifles machine guns rocket-propelled grenades small-calibre artillery and mortars and so on. Much of this weaponry has been obtained from the enormous arsenals built during decades of continuous fighting in Afghanistan, Central America, Lebanon, and South-East Asia.

At the same time, this kind of low-technology equipment is in production in dozens of countries around the world.

In the 1990's a new potential problem has emerged. In the wake of successful conventional arms control, there is a

widespread fear that weapons no longer considered necessary in Europe may now be added to this global stockpile.

The danger is particularly acute among members of the former Warsaw treaty organisation, where economic difficulties make it even more tempting to realise financial returns on equipment which otherwise will have to be physically destroyed.

It is against this background that the issue of arms transfer control has become a more important element of the arms control debate.

In the 1980's arms control initiatives reflected several developments: Growing concern about the links between the illegal arms trade, international drugs trafficking and organised crime, pressure for a greater effort to adopt an arms embargo on either or both Iraq and Iran between 1980 and 1988, and finally, in the context of the improving US-

Soviet relationship, the US attempts to raise the profile of selected aspects of the arms in some cases, adopt for the first time, arms export regulations, there have been a significant number of multi-lateral arms export control initiatives launched in 1990.

These initiatives include efforts by many countries to establish a register of the arms trade to be maintained by the United Nations, proposals for which will be placed before the UN General Assembly this month, and efforts by the European Community to make arms export control an explicit element of a future treaty on European political union.

These arms control initiatives are in an early stage, and many technical problems are associated with effective arms trade regulation. The unsolved problems include defining which technologies should be subject to control, how to ver-

ify that arms were delivered to the stated end users, how to monitor company activity and how to track the physical movement of goods.

However, the primary obstacles to arms trade control are not so much technical as political and before any effective export control regime can be brought into operation, some key political problems must be addressed.

The most important of these are the continued use of arms transfers by major powers to support their foreign and security policy, the failure to establish working mechanisms for regional conflict resolution and security building in many parts of the world and the growth of new arms production capacities and the failure to reduce existing overcapacity.

The complexity of these issues underlines several aspects of the global arms trade. First, there is no single country or

single organisation that can address the problems of regulating the arms trade. Rather, there is a global responsibility to take action.

Second, there is little point in viewing arms from the political context in which they are deployed. The absence of effective political mechanisms for peaceful conflict resolution sustains the demand for arms, and failures in economic development act as a powerful obstacle to reducing arms production capacities.

The first two years of the 1990's have seen fundamental changes in the international political environment. These changes create the potential for historic breakthroughs in arms control and disarmament. It is now for all responsible political authorities around the globe to ask themselves what contribution they are prepared to make to effect change for the better.