

WB suggests private sector participation in saving environment

BANGKOK, Jan 26 : The World Bank, saying sustainable economic growth in East Asia depended on its conservation of the environment, called on governments in the region to seek help from their private sectors for the costly task, a senior Bank official said Sunday reports Reuters.

East Asian development will increasingly be defined by environmental needs, Gadnam Kaj, the Bank's Washington-based vice president for East Asia and Pacific region, told an international conference here.

The Bank has estimated that East Asian nations might need to spend as much as 20 billion dollar a year for environment related investment in this decade.

Governments cannot do this alone; partnership with the private sector is needed, Kaj told the meeting organised by the International Herald Tribune and Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI), a private think-tank.

He said the bank is giving more funding to environmental projects, planning to support 40 such projects with a total value of 4.3 billion dollar in the next four years.

The World Bank last year gave about 10 per cent of its lending to core environment

A cosmonaut in Russia gets \$ 6 a month!

MOSCOW, Jan 26 : Prices are astronomical these days in Russia. But salaries — including for cosmonauts — are not, reports AP.

The main TV news reported Saturday that cosmonauts are considering going on strike to protest salaries equivalent to about six dollar a month.

Ground controllers, it said, plan a warning strike Monday during the docking of a Progress cargo craft with the Mir space station.

"Our renowned cosmonauts today are prepared to join the ranks of picketers and strikers," the TV said.

"One of the most prestigious jobs on Earth has become one of the lowest-paid," it said.

Cosmonauts like Yuri Gagarin, the first man in space, were among the country's greatest heroes under Soviet rule. Their flights were potent symbols both of Soviet technical prowess and personal bravery.

But the tough economic reforms imposed by Russian President Boris N Yeltsin this month after the collapse of the Soviet Union has them hurting worse than even the average factory worker.

TV said cosmonauts average about 600 rubles a month, while the average salary is 960 rubles, or about 9.60 dollar.

Its report indicated that civilian cosmonauts, primarily researchers, were considering a strike against the Energia conglomerate because of the low wage. They also could take their employer to court to force it to give them a raise, it said.

Military cosmonauts, usually the pilots of space craft, apparently would not take part.

"It won't be easy to find strike-breakers in this affair," the TV noted dryly.

Indian President proposes two years moratorium on strikes

NEW DELHI, Jan 26 : Indian President Ramaswamy Venkataraman proposed a two-year moratorium on strikes Saturday in his last public day eve speech to the nation, using the occasion to speak candidly on problems stifling growth, reports AFP.

Venkataraman said India faced an economic crisis in which it needed urgently to increase production and nothing that harmed agriculture, industry, trade, commerce, communications and banking should be "tolerated or encouraged."

"If we are to emerge from this crisis, a moratorium should be declared voluntarily at the national level for at least two years on all bandhs strikes and lockouts or any other activity...which impedes economic development," he said.

A bandh is a common

euphemism here for "shutdown" strikes called by trade unions and political organisations.

Such strikes lead to the loss of millions of working days and cost hundreds of millions of dollar in production shortfalls every year.

Trade unions opposed to economic reforms launched by the government have been threatening large-scale action to derail the process.

Venkataraman, who is due to retire from the presidency later this year, said in his nationally televised speech that a two-year moratorium on strikes was a duty which "we owe to our own children and progeny."

The 81-year-old President said increasing indiscipline, along with terrorism and communal hatred, was one of three

negative factors hurting India's growth.

"Individuals, political organisations, professional groups, trade unions take all too quickly to the path of agitation and obstruction. The result is a breakdown in public order," he said.

Venkataraman voiced concern at the growing cult of terrorism, noting violent separatist conflicts in such states as Punjab, Kashmir and Assam.

"Bullets and bombs have no place in a democracy where avenues for constitutional redress exist," he said.

"And yet public servants on duty, political figures, journalists and innocent men, women and children have been — and are being — killed and taken hostage in many parts of the country on almost a daily basis," he added.

He referred to frequent

eruptions of communal violence in the overwhelmingly-Hindu country, where Sikhs and Muslims form large minorities and where religious rioting leaves hundreds dead every year.

"Innocent religious processions end up in violent eruptions. Very often, the cause for the clash is absurdly trivial and yet it leaves a trail of death and destruction in which, more often than not, women and children are the most unfortunate sufferers," he said.

Another report adds : The International Monetary Fund (IMF) loaned India four billion dollar in 1991 after the government began reforms — including plans to close loss-making state companies — to ease a crisis over the country's 71 billion dollar foreign debt.

AFTA vital for ASEAN, says Singapore PM

SINGAPORE, Jan 26 : Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong said on Saturday that a regional common market was good idea for Southeast Asia but the first step must be an ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA), reports Reuters.

In written answers to questions from the local media ahead of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) meeting starting on Monday, Goh said approving AFTA was vital to ASEAN.

"If we miss the opportunity at this summit, we will have to wait for the next one to consider something similar. That may mean missing the boat altogether, and the world will pass us by."

Asked if there was the possibility of setting up a Southeast Asian Economic Community or a single ASEAN market, Goh said, "I certainly hope so. It will be good for the region and good for Singapore. But first things first. Let us concentrate on establishing an ASEAN Free Trade Area within 15 years."

ASEAN — Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, The Philippines, Singapore and Thailand — was formed in 1967 as a loose anti-communist grouping and has had little success in the past in boosting trade among member countries.

Voluntary body opens shelter, barber shop in Poland

WARSAW, Jan 26 : Responding to a sharp rise in homelessness as Poland switches to a market economy, a voluntary organization Friday opened a shelter, barber shop and bath for longtime residents of Warsaw's main train station, reports AP.

The shelter's comes at a time when economic-related social problems are beginning to make an impression on the public.

"In the old days, one simply didn't talk about it," said Janina Olszewska, Head of the Labor Ministry Department that handles homelessness. She was referring to the communist regime that was toppled in 1989.

After two years of tough economic reforms designed to create capitalism, the social costs are being tallied.

Unemployment stands at 2.2 million, just over 11 per cent of the workforce, and Olszewska said there are 80,000 homeless people nationwide. Marek Kotanski, a well-known charity activist who organized the station shelter, said there are probably 15,000 homeless in Warsaw alone.

In the past, station regulars could wash for free at a public shower. Now, even that facility is under orders to become self-financing and costs 25,000 zlotys (2 dollar), a price few of the station's indigents can afford.

"Up to now we had nowhere to wash" said a 36-year-old woman who gave her name only as Teresa P and said she recently lost her job at the Ursus tractor plant on the capital's outskirts.

Pakistan scales down economic projections

ISLAMABAD, Jan 26 : The Pakistani government said its policies were helping the economy, but scaled down some forecasts for fiscal 1991/92 ending June 30, reports Reuters.

Finance Minister Sartaj Aziz told a news conference the budgetary situation would continue to be under pressure because of revenue shortfalls and rising expenditure.

"It may be difficult to bring down the current account deficit from 2.1 billion dollar in 1990/91 to 1.6 billion dollars in 1991/92 as planned," he said in a report reviewing the year's first six months until last December.

However, he said stock market buoyancy, a substantial increase in industrial investment, higher levels of machinery imports, improved production and stable prices indicated that the government's free market policies had started giving positive results.

"It will, however, take some time for the impact to be fully visible."

Aziz said the present production trend in agriculture, industry and other sectors showed economic growth in the current fiscal year might be better than 5.6 per cent recorded in the previous year.

But he said the possibility of exceeding a growth target of 6.7 per cent was remote.

"While efforts are being made to contain overall fiscal deficit, higher level of bank financing will be needed to finance reduction in foreign and domestic non-bank debt stock," Aziz's report said.

The external sector will come under additional pressure as remittances by Pakistanis working abroad are declining and exports are not maintaining the targeted growth. Higher level of imports this year may also contribute to enlarging the current account deficit.

Poland slashes social spending

WARSAW (Poland), Jan 26 : Parliament reaffirmed its commitment to painful economic reforms Saturday, approving a first quarter 1992 budget that slashes social spending in spite of growing protests against government austerity, reports UNB.

After two days of heated debate, legislators accepted the government's argument that it couldn't afford more social benefits and that further deficit spending would ignite a new round of hyperinflation.

The Sejm, or lower house, voted 195-135 with three abstentions for the plan that limits the government to a deficit of no more than 1.5 billion dollar for the first three months of the year.

The new budget will further cut government spending on schools, hospitals and pensions, while slashing subsidies for energy and fuels.

Prime Minister Jan Olszewski argued that his month-old government had no choice but to support the spending bill it inherited from the previous administration.

Olszewski has promised to review the January 1990 austerity plan, which he says has caused a depression for state industries. He has promised to issue a new plan in February to revive the state sector and reduce the 11 per cent unemployment rate.

The drastic plan to transform Poland into a Western-style market system is the most radical attempted in Eastern Europe. It has become a model for attempts to transform the former Soviet Union's economy.

The 1990 plan freed prices, capped wages and cut most government subsidies.

Foreign firms in US reap farm subsidy benefit

WASHINGTON, Jan 26 : Foreign-owned grain companies are collecting hundreds of millions of dollar in subsidies from the Agriculture Department to sell US wheat and other farm products overseas, reports AP.

The subsidies were made under the Export Enhancement Programme, which provides a bonus to private exporters who are forced to sell US agricultural products at lower rates overseas to be competitive. Both US and foreign-owned companies are eligible for the subsidies.

Since the programme's inception in 1985, 10 foreign-owned firms have collected about 1.57 billion dollar subsidies, according to USDA documents obtained by The Associated Press under the Freedom of Information Act. Other foreign-owned companies have received smaller amounts.

The top six US recipients of subsidies under the EEP programme have received nearly two billion dollar.

All told, the Agriculture Department has provided cash and commodities worth more than 4.26 billion dollar to 95 grain traders since the programme began in 1985 through mid-January, according to the USDA documents.

Officials in the grain industry and USDA say it makes no difference whether foreign or domestic companies receive the bonuses, as long as US grain is moving into international markets. The subsidies helped move nearly 14 billion dollar in US commodities.

The biggest subsidies were awarded to two US grain traders, Minneapolis-based Cargill Inc, with 800 million dollar and New York City-based Continental Grain Co, with 702 million dollar.

Next in line is the Paris-based Louis Dreyfus Corp with nearly 591 million dollar followed by Ferruzzi Trading USA Inc, a subsidiary of Italy's Ferruzzi Finanziaria SPA, with nearly 181 million dollar.

G-7 agrees to individual way of pushing up global growth

GARDEN CITY, (NY), Jan 26 : Finance ministers from the world's seven richest democracies agreed to let each country decide how to promote world economic growth while pledging to intensify cooperation, reports AP.

The Bush administration, eager to turn around the US economy before it faces voters in November, touted Saturday's meeting as a success because of the participants' commitment to spur growth.

But it failed to win a key

concession from Germany to lower its interest rates — a move the United States is seeking to spur German consumption and sell more American goods.

The German position is well known," US Treasury Secretary Nicholas Brady said. He met for breakfast with his German counterpart, Theo Waigel, to assess his position prior to the meeting at a suburban New York City hotel.

The final statement issued by the gathering made clear

that no concerted action would be taken by the seven and that the United States would turn its attention to the package of economic incentives being unveiled Tuesday in President Bush's State of the Union address.

Germany, resisting appeals from the United States and from its European neighbors, last December raised its key lending rates to their highest level since the early 1930s.

The finance ministers of the so-called G-7 — the United

States, Japan, Germany, France, Britain, Canada and Italy — met two or three times a year.

Their final four and half page statements, issued after a seven-hour meeting behind closed doors, expressed concern that world economic activity has weakened since their last meeting in the fall. But it also cited new indications of a turnaround this year.

Economic forecasts are for average worldwide growth of about two per cent this year, up one per cent from 1991.

Looters emptying state farms in Albania

KAMZE (Albania), Jan 26 : Albania's state farms, built to feed a communist state, are crumbling amid democratic reforms, plundered by hungry looters and unable to feed their own livestock, reports Reuters.

Agriculture ministry officials say stables and cowsheds are being destroyed and cattle systematically stolen from farms across the country.

At Kamze, some 10 km north of the capital Tirana, crowds of people tore down an empty barn and carried off the bricks to build for themselves.

"Every day we find cows are missing, while the remaining ones are starving due to lack of fodder," said livestock expert Pina Zhidro.

During the past four decades of communist rule, state farms covered 200,000 hectares, a quarter of all Albania's arable land.

Under hardline Stalinist leader Enver Hoxha, who died in 1985, the farms were the main source of food for cities.

But democratic reforms introduced in the last year have allowed workers their own private stock for the first time in decades.

Albania's already shaky

supply system has virtually collapsed and theft and cattle rustling are flourishing.

Far from being able to supply any food for overpopulated cities, the farms can hardly support their own existence.

Animal fodder is stolen by people who are now allowed to breed their own cattle, and for many months the cities have been forced to rely on foreign aid for basic food supplies.

Poor administration has led to other difficulties.

In Kamze, a lack of housing for farm workers has become so acute that many families have occupied farm offices and forced out the farm managers.

Others have moved into empty stables, cementing the floods and dividing the buildings into rooms.

As the farms grind to a halt, 30 per cent of farm labourers are already unemployed.

But farming officials insist state farms could still play a vital role in feeding Albania's three million people and also interest foreign investors.

"We are doing our best to preserve state farms and are trying to convince people here that the farms must remain," said Deputy Agriculture Minister Kastriot Koshaj.

Use of computers in information management underscored

Information Minister Nazmul Huda Saturday stressed the need for proper utilisation of computer science in information management in the mass media, reports BSS.

He was addressing as the chief guest at the certificate awarding ceremony of the training course titled "Basic Elements of Computer and Programming" at the National Institute for Mass Communication (NIMCO) in Dhaka Saturday.

The NIMCO organised the course with 27 participants who received certificates on the concluding day Saturday at the function.

The Information Minister said utilisation of science and technology was now fast spreading all over the world.

He hoped that the participants of the course would be able to put in their due contribution in advancing Bangladesh Television technologically.

Comprehensive utilisation of computer in the programmes will enhance the overall standard of Bangladesh Television," he observed.

The Information Minister said the Government had already taken effective steps for expanding the television network all over the country.



Retiring Vice-Chairman of the Export Promotion Bureau, Abu Sayeed Choudhury, paid a farewell call on the President, Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Dhaka, M Morshed Khan and the Secretary-General, C K Hyder on Sunday.

Computer service export can fetch Tk 20,000 cr a year

Bangladesh can earn Tk 20,000 crore a year by exporting computer services, said a computer expert in Dhaka Saturday, reports UNB.

Dr Nusrat S Retina told a press conference, at the National Press Club that the country could also create employment opportunities by exporting computer data entry and software development services.

Computer World, a monthly journal on computer technology, arranged the press conference to apprise the people of the country's business potentials in this sector.

Dr Nusrat, who is now doing research on computers in the United States, said currently computer services have markets of 50,000 crore US dollars. If Bangladesh can fetch a fraction of the work its economy will get tremendous boost, he added.

He criticised the government's continued indifference to the growth of this potential sector.

Business briefs

Food festival in Macao : The first international food festival in Macao opened Sunday, reports Xinhua from Macao.

On sale were various kinds of alcoholic drinks, sweets, canned food, fruit, frozen meat and sea food provided by the United States, Singapore, Britain, Japan, Thailand, Malaysia and the regions of Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Pak rupee gains : The State (central) Bank of Pakistan adjusted the rupee to 24.6500/24.7733 to the dollar from 24.6800/24.8034 fixed on January 16, reports Reuters from Karachi (Pakistan).

The Bank gave no reason for the rupee's appreciation. But one currency dealer said the adjustment followed the dollar's fall on foreign exchange markets.

China cuts cigarette production : China cuts cigarette production in 1991, although profits were up on the previous year following a spate of factory closures and the slashing of unmarketable brands, a government official said, reports AFP from Beijing.

Production fell 4.4 per cent to 31 million crates, while profits and taxes handed over to the state rose four per cent to 28 billion yuan (five billion dollar), the Director of the State Tobacco Monopoly Bureau, Jiang Ming, was quoted as saying by the Xinhua news agency late Saturday.

Yugoslav dinar devalued : Yugoslavia's devalued its currency, the dinar, by 80 per cent Saturday, reports AFP from Belgrade.

The Yugoslav information ministry, in a statement released by the Tanjug news agency, said the new official rate for the dinar was 65 dinar to one German mark, compared with the previous rate of 13 dinar to one mark.

Bush pleased after Japanese Speaker retracts comments

WASHINGTON, Jan 26 : President George Bush said here he was pleased that a Japanese politician had retracted comments critical of US workers and that Japan had reaffirmed a pledge to purchase more American car products, reports Reuters.

Yushio Sakurachi, Speaker of the lower house of Japan's parliament, made headlines across the United States by describing US workers on Monday as lazy. He said on Tuesday he regretted his remarks might have caused "misunderstanding."

Sakurachi, a veteran politician of Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party, also denied a report that he called

the United States "Japan's subcontractor" and that he claimed 30 per cent of the US workforce was illiterate.

"I was pleased with the correction," Bush told reporters, "I was not pleased with the statements that challenge the ability of American workers. I have fully confidence in the American workers' competence, their ability."

Bush also said comments from Japan on Wednesday were a reaffirmation of its pledge to increase the purchase of US car parts to 19 billion dollar in fiscal 1994 from nine billion dollar in 1990.

The President obtained the promise during his trip to Tokyo earlier this month. Since then, questions have

arisen about how firm the commitment is.

The overriding theme of Bush's visit was to press Japan to slash its huge trade surplus with the United States, which hit 38.45 billion dollar last year.

Some three-quarters of that surplus stemmed from the sale of Japanese cars and car parts in the United States.

After days of talks, Bush and Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa announced that Japan's five big car manufacturers had "voluntarily" set targets to buy more cars and parts from Detroit.

The five carmakers Toyota, Nissan, Honda, Mazda and Mitsubishi — separately announced plans to boost

their Japanese sales of cars produced by Detroit to some 20,000 by 1994. These plans were not included in the official documents.

Confusion arose over whether these figures represented firm pledges or just expressions of intent.

In a television interview of Monday, Prime Minister Miyazawa was asked whether Japan would face a backlash in American if it failed to live up to the trade "action plan."

He replied that the plan was merely a forecast of the volume of imports Japanese companies would aim to buy.

His words brought cries of protest in the United States. US House of Representatives

majority leader Richard Gephardt wrote to Bush that Miyazawa had "disavowed" the President's declaration that there had been an agreement.

A Japanese official went some way to clearing up the confusion on Wednesday.

And asked whether the US-Japan "action plan" on car trade was a "promise" or a "target", he replied: "The figures for auto-related purchases? They're targets, of course."

Later on Wednesday, Bush attended a signing ceremony formalising one of the main achievements of the visit to Tokyo, an agreement opening Japan's lucrative public sector market for computer goods and services.

US Trade Representative Carla Hills said American computer industry executives believe their share of the Japanese public sector computer market could grow from virtually nothing to 5.5 billion dollar by 1995.

This would translate to 110,000 new American jobs under the formula the government uses.

Bush used the ceremony as a platform to reverse the public impression that his trip to Japan was a failure.

"It's just one of the highlights of our Asia trip," he said of the computer pact. "It illustrates a success that we had been fighting for America, for American jobs, and for our own future, for America's future."