

### Americans ready to fight 'Michelangelo'

NEW YORK, Mar 5: Like a mugger hiding in the closet, the Michelangelo virus is lurking in personal computers across the United States awaiting Friday's trigger date. Companies, government agencies and schools are taking precautions, but experts said Wednesday not every computer can be examined in time and the invader will do some damage, reports AP. "We can't go out and inspect every PC (personal computer) on every desk," said Andy Myers, a spokesman for American Telephone and Telegraph Co, which has a quarter of a million personal computers. The phone company said it discovered a few infected PCs after distributing special software to employees that can detect and destroy the virus. Others believe the media attention in recent days has blown the problem out of proportion. "You're more likely to spill a cup of coffee on your keyboard than to get this virus," said Peter Tippett, chairman of Certus International Inc, a maker of anti-virus software. "There's definitely hysteria," said Marlene Guntow, a computer analyst at the University of Chicago. "We get people that call up and are absolutely panicked, after talking to them for a while we find out they have a Macintosh (computer) and aren't affected at all." The virus has been found sitting dormant inside IBM-type personal computers awaiting the PC's internal clock to reach March 6, the birthday of the Italian Renaissance artist. Once the computer is turned on that day, the virus can destroy programs and data on the computer's hard disk. Viruses are rogue pieces of computer software devised by pranksters. They can enter a PC through software contained on a diskette or transmitted to the computer over the phone from a computer "bulletin board" or other source. A survey of 300 major businesses taken by Dataquest Inc, a high-tech market research firm, found the infection rate for all computer viruses rose from 5.5 per cent at the end of 1991 to 18.2 per cent at the end of January. Some companies and organizations that are extremely cautious about what software is used in their PCs believe they will be spared a Michelangelo attack. "Cross my fingers, say a few prayers - I think we'll come through this one clean," said Debra Kristopson, chief computer executive for the Stouffer hotel chain. But others believe they will be victims despite safeguards. "We're trying to gear up for the worst so we can deal with it if it happens," said the University of Chicago's Guntow. Already, numerous companies, schools and governments have reported discovery of the virus on some computers. Among them are the state of Nevada, the US Agriculture Department and the San Jose (Calif) Mercury News newspaper. Estimates of how many of the 50 million PCs in North America are infected range from a few thousand to millions.

### Japan again top donor

TOKYO, Mar 5: Japan has very likely reclaimed its position as the world's most generous provider of foreign aid, overtaking the US as senior Japanese aid official said, reports Reuters. Isao Kubota, Managing Director at the government Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund (OECF), told Reuters that, based on the first batch of Japanese Official Development Assistance (ODA) figures for calendar 1991, Tokyo's foreign aid increased sharply for the year, likely overtaking that of the US. "It is fairly safe to say that Japanese ODA was the world's largest in 1991," Kubota said. He based his prediction on a sharp increase in aid handed out by OECF, which disburses about 47 per cent of Japan's total ODA. He said ODA mounted out by the OECF increased 34 per cent in calendar 1991 to 5.8 billion dollar. US officials in Tokyo said that American aid figures for 1991 were not available yet, but analysts said the cash-strapped US was unlikely to have increased its aid much last year. Although the aid distributed by Japan's other major aid body, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), will not be finally computed for over a month, Kubota said JICA was also likely to report sharply higher aid disbursements. Higher aid numbers should mean that Japan will reclaim its title as the world's top aid donor which it first won in 1989, but lost to the US in 1990. Japan, which contributed 9.24 billion dollar in 1990 was bested by the US which contributed more than 10 billion. Japan is aiming to increase the amount of its ODA, to reach about double the present level to 0.7 per cent of Gross National Product over five years from April 1992.

### Malaysian-US trade soars by 15 pc

KUALA LUMPUR, Mar 5: Trade between Malaysia and the United States rose sharply by 15 per cent to 10 billion dollar last year and boosted the trade deficit in Malaysia's favour, the US embassy said Wednesday, reports AP. Malaysian imports from the United States rose 15 per cent to 3.9 billion dollar from 3.4 billion dollar in 1990, while exports also rose by 15 per cent to 6.1 billion dollar.

### Business briefs

**Kyrgyz, Uzbek plea for WB seat:** Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan have applied for membership in the World Bank, the largest source of aid to developing countries, the lending agency announced Thursday, reports Xinhua from Washington. Kyrgyzstan's application was submitted on February 28 by President Askar Akayev. Uzbekistan's application was submitted on February 21 by President Islam Karimov.

**Vietnam produces record coffee:** Vietnam's coffee harvest for 1991-92 was a record 90,000 tonnes which will allow the country to double exports this year, the Vietnam-Hebdo magazine said, reports AP from Hanoi. In a recent report the french-language weekly, said the union of Vietnam coffee growers expected to export nearly 40,000 tonnes this year, double the 1990 figure.

**Ukraine warns to halt gas to Turkmen:** Ukraine is threatening to close a natural gas pipeline through its territory and block lucrative exports to the West following a price dispute with Turkmenistan, news reports said Wednesday, reports AP from Moscow. Turkmenistan accuses Ukraine of backing away from a Feb. 21 agreement to buy 28.4 billion cubic meters of gas at 800 roubles (8.88 dollar at current exchange rates) per 1,000 cubic meters. That's 25 times more than the previous rate of 34 roubles (37 cent) per 1,000 cubic meters charged by Turkmenistan, but still only a fraction of world prices or even prices charged by Russia for its gas.

**France to continue ban on Iraq:** The government said Wednesday it had no plans to ease the trade embargo with Iraq despite confirmation by the two state-owned oil companies that they were discussing future deals with Baghdad, reports AP from Paris. The issue was raised Wednesday by the satirical weekly, Le Canard Enchaîné, which reported that the French oil companies Total and Elf Aquitaine were negotiating discreetly with Baghdad for future oil production contracts in Iraq.

**Manila settles bribery lawsuit:** The Philippines government has settled a lawsuit against Westinghouse Electric Corp, and another company accused of bribing the late President Ferdinand Marcos to secure a lucrative contract, reports AP from Newark, Delaware. The settlement cancels a federal jury trial set to start Thursday. The Philippines government claimed Westinghouse and Burns and Roe Enterprises Inc of New Jersey channeled 17.3 million dollar in bribes to Marcos to get to build a 2.3 billion dollar nuclear power plant. The plant was built but never used.

# Delhi wants greater EC investment, market access

NEW DELHI, Mar 5: India on Wednesday urged the European Community (EC) to boost bilateral trade ties and said recent economic reforms here would make Indo-European joint ventures profitable, reports AP. Minister of State for External Affairs Madhavsinh Solanki told a visiting EC delegation that joint ventures would benefit from measures taken by India to make its economy competitive in the world market. "While the EC and India have traditionally enjoyed friendly relations, the existing level of our commercial and economic exchanges are far from the potential that exists," Solanki told the high-powered delegation. "European capital and technology combined with India's skilled low-cost manpower, a large domestic market and a dynamic private sector could give rise to joint ventures," he added.

British Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Mark Lennox-Boyd, Portuguese Minister of External Affairs Joao de Deus Pinheiro and Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs Hans Vanden Broek arrived here Wednesday for two days of official talks aimed at cementing bilateral ties. The arrival of the three EC leaders coincided with a two-day official visit here by European Commissioner Abel Matutes. Indian leaders and the visiting EC delegations will meet later for further talks, officials said. Solanki said the EC should give a clear signal that the Community would continue to strive for an open, fair and transparent multilateral trading system, in a reference to New Delhi's fears of greater protectionism within the Community. "Europe is seen to be increasingly Eurocentric, preoccupied with developments within the continent, with investment flows and technology likely to move towards Eastern Europe, which has closer cultural and historical ties with the EC countries," he said. Indian Minister of State for Commerce Palaniappan Chidambaram urged the Community to provide greater market access to Indian products, especially textiles, and said India's exports to the EC constituted less than one per cent of the Community's total imports. "The EC is one of India's major trading partners and it accounts for 25 per cent of India's total exports, while 33 to 38 per cent of India's imports come from the EC," Chidambaram said at the inaugural ceremony of the forum which was set up as a platform for discussions on European investments here. The minister said that during the first nine months of the 1991-1992 fiscal year which ends March 31, India exported goods worth 2.6 billion dollar to the European market, but its imports from the EC were around 3.4 billion dollar. "There is excellent scope for boosting exports of Indian engineering goods in view of their cost effectiveness," the Commerce Minister said. The last high-level talks between India and the EC were held in 1989 with follow-up discussions a year later in Brussels.

Another report adds: Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor S Venkatarayanan pledged minimum central bank intervention in India's new free foreign exchange market. "I have given up 60 per cent of my powers," he told a news conference, referring to the government's decision to make the rupee partially convertible and allow exporters to trade up to 60 per cent of their foreign currency earnings. The central bank will buy the remaining 40 per cent of foreign current earnings at its official rate. "If the market is to work, I don't think we should intervene with this (remaining) 40 per cent," Venkatarayanan added. "Our reserves have to be built up. We don't want to use reserves for controlling any market volatility which is a very short-term thing," Venkatarayanan added. "We find (the market rate) is stabilising around 29 to 30," he said. "We expect that as time goes on, the volatility will be much less than what was feared."

### Gold bond scheme to be launched May 1

## Indians hold 6,343 tonnes of gold

NEW DELHI, Mar 5: India set May 1 the launch date for a gold bond scheme that it hopes will tap private gold holdings as part of a budget package aimed at eroding its black economy, reports Reuters. Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor S Venkatarayanan announced the date but said details were still being worked out. Gold prices tumbled to 4,250 rupee per 10 grams in the Bombay bullion market from 4,857 before last Saturday's budget legalised private gold imports, allowed partial rupee convertibility and announced the bond scheme. "Prices should come down even further," Venkatarayanan told a news conference. The Bombay Bullion Association estimates the total amount of gold held by Indians at 6,343 tonnes. Other estimates put it as high as 10,000 tonnes. The 1992-93 (April/March) budget allowed exporters to trade 60 per cent of their earnings freely and ended the massively violated ban on private gold imports, allowing Indian travellers and expatriates to import five kilos of gold each at a modest duty. Finance Minister Manmohan Singh said Indians would be able to get five to seven year gold bonds, to be liquidated by either a return of the gold or its equivalent value.

makers joined the House's majority Democrats and abandoned the president's plan. Bush's package would curtail the growth of popular programmes like Medicare and slash more than 21 billion dollar in new taxes on people ranging from recreational boaters to securities brokers — which many legislators are reluctant to support in an election year. Both the Democratic and Bush budgets call for 1.5 trillion dollar in spending and bear near-record deficits of about 330 billion dollar. Only this year's shortfall, expected to reach 400 billion dollar, would be worse. Bush proposed holding actual military spending to 291.6 billion dollar next year, 4.8 billion dollar less than previously planned. Democrats would practically double that reduction, lowering defence spending to 287.2 billion dollar. Meanwhile, a Reuters report adds: The Bush Administration supports giving US oil and gas producers some tax relief to spur domestic drilling. US Treasury Secretary Nicholas Brady says. In a letter circulated on Wednesday on Capitol Hill, Brady said President George Bush recognises the oil industry is suffering and would benefit from changes to the alternative minimum tax. Brady wrote the letter prior to the US Senate Finance Committee's approval of a bill on Tuesday that would provide some tax relief for oil producers.

### US business optimism of recovery on rise

WASHINGTON, Mar 5: Consumer confidence may be low, but business optimism about the US economy is on the rise, according to a survey by the US Chamber of Commerce, reports Reuters. The group said on Wednesday that business optimism about the near-term economic outlook nearly tripled from December to February. Of some 7,924 businesses responding to the group's latest nationwide survey 47.4 per cent said they believed the economy was headed for recovery. That was up dramatically from December when only 17.6 per cent believed the economy would improve within the next six months. As a result, the chamber's business confidence index rose to 59.1 in February, up from 39.3 in December. The Conference Board, a New York-based research group, said last week its consumer confidence index fell to its lowest level since 1974.

### Dollar's ride continues

NEW YORK, Mar 5: The dollar continued its dramatic rally, closing at the highest level against the mark since Oct 31, reports Reuters. The dollar ended off its peaks and dealers said there could be some stabilisation before the dollar tries to extend its gains. They said the dollar's rally has been based on prospects for an improving US economy and any pullback would be limited. "Buy dollar on dips is the theme in this market," said Earl Johnson of Harris Trust and Savings Bank. The dollar ended at 1.6680/87 mark up from 1.6598/08 at the open. It ended unchanged at 131.60/70 yen. Dealers said the dollar was continuing to benefit from positive US economic data issues earlier in the week, including leading indicators, new home sales and purchasing managers survey. "If (the dollar) will probably stabilise until Friday," said Jay Tucker, of First Boston Corp. "There's nothing to trade on tomorrow (Thursday) except initial claims." Others agreed the dollar would consolidate until US payroll data for Friday is released Friday at 0830 EST/1330 GMT. Expectations have been building that these numbers will also show an improving trend.

# House rejects Bush's budget

WASHINGTON, Mar 5: The House on Wednesday night overwhelmingly rejected President Bush's 1993 budget, setting the stage for passage of a Democratic plan that would divert post-Cold War defense funds to education, health and other domestic initiatives, reports AP. The 370 to 42 vote was the House's first this year on how large the so-called peace dividend should be, and what they say Bush's budget "moves us backward," House Budget Committee Chairman Leon Panetta, D-Calif, said. "The world has changed.... We need to reorder these priorities and invest in areas that affect our society." But Republican Whip Newt Gingrich of Georgia said the Bush plan was "the least bad offer we have right now." He and other Republicans argued the Democratic proposal, by carving twice as much out of military spending as outlined by Bush, would recklessly weaken the country's defenses against unforeseen threats. Testifying before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Defense Secretary Dick Cheney said the Democratic plan would require additional cuts of 300,000 active-duty personnel next year, beyond the 236,000 already planned through 1993. "You want crippling defence cuts and higher spending, it's in the Democrats' budget," Republican Rep David Dreier said on the House floor. But many Republican law-

### India's tea output may hit 740m kg

NEW DELHI, Mar 5: Indian tea production this year is expected to be 740 million kilograms, of which 210 million kilograms would be exported, Indian minister of State for Commerce P Chidambaram told parliament on Tuesday, reports Xinhua. He said that plans had been initiated to raise the production to 1,000 million kilograms by the turn of the century and export 280 million kilograms. Apart from seeking to bring more areas under tea, the minister said, the government was keen to restore 'sick' gardens to productivity. It was willing to offer rehabilitation to any sick garden, but since most of them were privately owned, it was for the owners to avail of the facility. For promotion of exports of Indian tea, the Assam and Darjeeling Tea Logo campaigns have been launched in the United Kingdom, he added.

### Indian budget hits metal prices in London

LONDON, Mar 5: Gold, platinum and silver fell in London Wednesday, affected by the Indian budget and prospects of less Middle East demand with the start of Ramadan, reports AP. Gold fell to 350 dollar an ounce against 351.5 at Wednesday's close, before recovering slightly to 350.20 dollar at the fixing. Platinum was down to 360.75 dollar an ounce at the fixing against 363.75 at Wednesday's close, while silver was at 4.11 dollar an ounce against 4.16. Andrew Smith of Brokers UBS Phillips and Drew said gold would probably soon go below 350 dollar an ounce.

### WB comes in aid of India to fight AIDS

NEW DELHI, Mar 5: The World Bank has agreed to provide India with 85 million dollar for its AIDS control project, reports Xinhua. Announcing this in a written reply in the Lok Sabha (lower house of parliament) on Tuesday, the Indian Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare, D K Thara Devi Siddhartha, said the project was expected to be implemented from April 1, this year for a term of five years. Sixty-two hospitals in the country had facilities for AIDS detection. In the capital, seven surveillance centers were equipped with HIV (Human Immuno-Deficiency Virus) testing facilities.

### Romanian PM places deficit budget

BUCHAREST, Mar 5: Romanian Prime Minister Theodor Stolojan has proposed a deficit of around 450 million dollar for his 1992 austerity budget, reports Reuters. Under the budget bill, a copy of which was obtained by Reuters, state revenues for this year are set at 5,209 billion dollar and expenditure at 5,659 billion.

### Submission of product list for tariff cut to GATT

## No nation meets Mar 1 deadline

GENEVA, Mar 5: The 108 nations negotiating a new world trade agreement have fallen well behind on a timetable for a technical but crucial area of the talks, diplomats said on Wednesday, reports Reuters. "Everybody's starting to question this deadline," one Asian diplomat said. The negotiations on lowering tariffs, formally known as 'improving market access, are almost 'impossibly complicated as each nation submits a tariff schedule sometimes for as many as 8,000 product categories. Each schedule needs evaluation and subsequent bilateral haggling before final schedules are due on March 31. They get down to the tough issues of commerce that manufacturers, farmers and traders worry about — how much access they will gain to other markets, and how much competition they will face at home as tariffs fall. The task has been made harder by the persistent disagreement that some parties have with the direction of other areas of the Uruguay Round, in particular on cutting agricultural support. There is no sign yet of this crux issue being resolved. The Japanese submitted a 400-page list of tariffs on 6,800 industrial, forest and marine product categories on Monday evening. On Wednesday evening, it was submitting its agricultural tariffs offers, divided into about 1,400 product categories. But significantly, a Japanese diplomat said it would probably not list a tariff for rice or dairy product. All 108 nations, have been asked to take part in a meeting on Thursday.

# GM launches ad drive to outclass Japanese cars

TOKYO, Mar 5: General Motors gave the Japanese something new Wednesday in its fight to overcome American cars' image problems in Japan — ads that directly compare GM and Japanese cars in size, price and performance, reports AP. "Please compare Cadillac Seville's fuel cost with that of Infiniti's Q-45," says a full-page ad in four major Japanese newspapers. It shows a Seville and a Nissan Infiniti standing side-by-side at a gasoline pump. "President Bush made efforts to sell more American cars in Japan a major focus of his visit here in January, saying he wanted to create jobs for Americans." Bush brought along the chairmen of Big Three auto makers GM, Ford and Chrysler. Autos and auto parts account for about three-fourths of the United States' annual 43 billion dollar deficit in trade with Japan. The latest move, the two-month GM ad campaign, is the first of its kind in Japan in that it openly compares competitive models, and figures, said James E. Steinhagen, GM Japan's vice president for marketing, sales and service. Japanese ads tend toward a soft-sell approach. The ad says that with a liter of gasoline, the GM car runs 6.8 kilometers in town and 10.63 kilometers on the highway, compared with 6.8 kilometers and 9.35 kilometers for the Nissan car. "We want to put to rest the decade-old image of 'huge American gas-guzzlers' that persists in Japan," Steinhagen said. "Our studies show that many who hold those opinions have never driven or owned one of our cars. We'd like to encourage them to try the new GM US cars and form their own opinions," he added. The full-page fuel economy comparison will appear in the newspapers Asahi, Yomiuri, Mainichi, Sankei, Nikkei, Chunichi and Tokyo Shimbun, with a combined nationwide circulation of more than 20 million copies a day, he said. Additional "head-to-head" ads during the next two months will compare GM and Japanese cars

in size, price and quality, Steinhagen said. GM Japan declined to state the cost of the advertising campaign. But a single full-page ad in Japanese national dailies costs between 20 million and 23 million yen (154,000 and 177,000 dollar). The American share of Japan's car market was estimated at less than 0.4 per cent of the more than four million cars sold in 1991. GM Japan imports about 10,000 GM cars a year, or about a 0.25 per cent share of the Japanese market. Nissan, Japan's No 2 auto maker, exports more than 580,000 cars to the United States, enjoying a 4.7 per cent share of the US market. Meanwhile, Russian tourists are snapping up used cars in Japan, apparently because they can resell them at home for high prices, the Yokohama Port Authority said Wednesday. The newspaper Asahi Shimbun said a car bought for less than 50,000 yen (385 dollar) in Japan can fetch more than 200,000 yen (1,500 dollar) in Russia, where cars are in short supply.

In 1991, Russians arriving as tourists aboard Russian ships bought 1,845 used vehicles in Yokohama port alone, up from 800 vehicles in 1990, said Susumu Ando of Yokohama Port Authority. "Tourists are reportedly buying second-hand cars in other Japanese ports like Niigata," he added. A customs official at the Yokohama Port, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said a tourist can buy a car and carry it home as baggage if the vehicle is valued at less than 50,000 yen. Thus, he said, there were no official figures on how many used cars were shipped from Yokohama. Ando said that in 1991, the 12,798-ton passenger and cargo ship Rus visited Yokohama 20 times on a regular route between Yokohama and Nakhodka in eastern Russia. The Rus can carry 200 passengers and 170 cars, he said. In the latest visit Russian ship visit, the Marina Cvetaeva arrived last Dec 23 and carried out 97 used cars, Ando said.



KUWAIT CITY: Workers fixing oil pipes at Wafra oil plant. Oil production from on-shore wells in the neutral zone between Saudi Arabia and Kuwait resumed Wednesday for the first time since the Gulf crisis. —AFP photo.