

BRIEFS

Ukrainian economy ruined

KIEV (Ukraine), Nov 17: Ukraine is suffering hyperinflation and its finances are "ruined," Economics Minister Viktor Pynzenyik told parliament on Monday...

Iran's oil output rises by 83,000 BPD

CAIRO, Nov 17: Iran produced an estimated 3.62 million barrels of oil per day (BPD) last month, 83,000 BPD more than in September...

Major's call to limit salary rises

LONDON, Nov 17: Prime Minister John Major late Monday called on private sector senior management to limit their salary increases in an attempt to help kick-start the economy...

Many US producers have gloomy outlook

NEW YORK, Nov 17: American manufacturers have shown only slight improvement in recent months and many are gloomier about the short-term economic outlook...

Pak-China ties can be broadened

BEIJING, Nov 17: Sartaj Aziz, Pakistan's Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs, said here that there are broad prospects for economic and trade cooperation between Pakistan and China...

Plans to transform Saudi bank shelved

DUBAI, Nov 17: Plans to transform Saudi Arabia's troubled banking giant, the National Commercial Bank (NCB), into a public company have apparently been shelved due to problems over valuation...

US high-tech plants losing to Japan

WASHINGTON, Nov 17: Key U.S. high-technology industries including consumer electronics and robotics lost ground in the 1980s to foreign competitors, particularly Japan, the General Accounting Office says...

Coordinated plan or economy urged

PARIS, Nov 17: A trade union body speaking for some 60 million workers in the industrial West and Japan has urged OECD governments to launch a coordinated programme for economic recovery without delay...

US to take hard stand in GATT talks

WASHINGTON, Nov 17: US trade negotiators indicated Monday they plan to take a hard position in talks with European officials later this week aimed at resolving a bitter fight over farm subsidies...

sidies to eight million metric tons, saying "I don't see how we can go any more beyond what we have done."

Negotiators from the EC and the United States failed to reach agreement on the soybean issue during talks in early November in Chicago.

is also blocking successful conclusion of global free trade talks, being held under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), said on Monday...

Arthur Dunkel, Director General of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), said on Monday that global reforms were vital if the world was to end its economic lethargy.



Top EC negotiator Ray MacSharry and British Farm Minister John Gummer.

Hills and Madigan are to meet European Community (EC) officials in Washington on Wednesday to try to head off a US-EC trade war.

Madigan said "the issue with the oilseeds dispute is whether or not GATT is a credible instrument. There isn't any point in negotiating new GATT agreement if the present one has no meaning."

Hills said after seeing Dunkel "our meetings have been very constructive" and Dunkel said "we are looking forward to very hard and intense work in the next weeks," apparently indicating reform talks beyond the immediate oilseeds crisis.

Dunkel added that the reforms were needed "to bring the world economy back from the very recessionary tendencies."

Ramos vows to reverse Filipino workers' exodus

MANILA, Nov 17: President Fidel Ramos vowed here Monday to reverse the decades-old exodus of Filipinos working in almost every country in the world as professionals, domestics, sailors and labourers, reports AFP.

term, overseas employment will remain a "strategic" part of the development plan for this country, half of whose 62 million people live in poverty, according to official figures.

"It is my belief and my hope that the exodus of our workers will taper down during the six years of my administration, as more industries are located in our country," he told a gathering of labour officials and recruiters.

He said jobs abroad ease local unemployment, which stands at about nine per cent. Underemployment is estimated at 20 per cent.

Millions of Filipinos now work in 130 countries, a large number of them in the Middle East, they remit an estimated two to five billion dollar a year to their families, making them the country's largest export.

Ramos said that in the short

Ecuador determined to quit OPEC

QUITO, Nov 17: Ecuador said it will not chance its mind about leaving OPEC, unless the organisation changes its position toward Ecuador, Energy Minister Andres Barreiro said, reports Reuters.

hard currency to finance the free-market economic reform programme now under way.

"Ecuador's position has not varied at all. It is the same as it was from the beginning, and the reasons continue to be the same," Barreiro said from the northeastern oil-producing region.

Local economic analysts said one possible solution would be for OPEC to allow unlimited production up to a level of 500,000 barrels per day so that minor producers such as Ecuador would not distort the market.

President Sixto Duran Ballen announced in September the nation would pull out of the 13-member OPEC.

Ecuador has an OPEC quota of 273,000 BPD, and capacity of 320,000 BPD, which is expected to increase to 420,000 BPD in the next four years. It now produces virtually at capacity.

The government cited difficulties in paying the 4.2 million dollar owed in OPEC back dues, and the need to boost oil production to bring in more

Venezuelan Energy Minister Alirio Parra visited Quito on Friday to meet with Barreiro and Duran Ballen, in what local analysts and oil industry officials said was an OPEC-sponsored effort to keep the Andean nation in the organisation.



KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysian Finance Minister Anwar Ibrahim (R) meets November 16 Club of Rome President Ricardo Diez-Hochbein of Spain who opened here the club's conference "Towards A More Equitable World Order".

Bhutto's call for long march pushes shares down in Karachi

KARACHI, Nov 17: Opposition leader Benazir Bhutto's call for a "long march" on the national assembly in Islamabad caused a fall in share prices on the Karachi Stock Exchange (KSE) Monday, reports AFP.

Russia draws up anti-crisis plan for winter

MOSCOW, Nov 17: President Boris Yeltsin and his Cabinet on Monday drafted an "anti-crisis plan" to get Russia through the winter, but rejected opposition demands to freeze prices and slow reforms, reports AP.

programme, to be submitted to lawmakers next week, will shore up Russian industries through subsidies and tax breaks, as well as tariffs on some foreign imports, he said.

The government also decided to charge world prices for sales of oil, gas and other natural resources to former Soviet republics that no longer use the rouble, Chief Economic Spokesman Alexei Ulyukayev told a news conference.

Russia's military budget will stay roughly at the same level next year, Ulyukayev added. The government will spend less on weapons production, but this savings has been offset by housing and relocation costs for troops returning from Eastern Europe and the Baltic states, he said.

"This is what we have in mind: not to subsidise the economies of neighbouring states," Ulyukayev said.

Military spending this year accounted for 1.88 trillion rouble (4.2 billion dollar) or 16 per cent of Russia's state budget.

Ulyukayev's remarks followed a Cabinet meeting to complete the government's four-month anti-crisis plan and a draft budget for 1993. The

Yeltsin's government has faced rising pressure from the increasingly powerful Civic Union parliamentary bloc to

BCCI scandal Poor health may prevent Clifford from facing trial

NEW YORK, Nov 17: A prosecutor acknowledged Monday that former Defence Secretary Clark Clifford's poor health may prevent him from facing trial in the BCCI scandal, but he argued the charges should not be dismissed, reports AP.



Prices of French farm products have gone in US markets following slow progress of farm subsidy talks between the EC and US. Both agree that difference is small but deep. Photo shows an array of French products ready to be shipped to the US.

Assistant District Attorney John Moscow contended that the case against Clifford is strong, the charges are severe, dire forecasts about his health are speculative, and he could be well enough one day to go to trial.

Egypt unveils plan to reform ailing public sector

CAIRO, Nov 17: Egypt has announced long-overdue plans to shake up publicly owned firms to help inject competitiveness into its ailing state economy, reports Reuters.

company handles all the affiliates in a particular sector, such as food products or textiles.

But some western economists said the moves, which should have come into force in May, might be held up further by a valuation of the companies' assets and liabilities, the first step towards privatising them.

In some cases such as cement, where the public sector is the major local supplier, the holding company has effectively been able to set its own monopoly prices even after the International Monetary Fund (IMF) economic reform programme started last year.

The 27 holding companies set up last year to manage the huge public sector will be reduced to 20 or 18, with each handling a portfolio of firms in competing industries, officials said.

The goals are to break up monopolies... and balance them between each other, to prevent the parent companies from intervening too much in their affiliates and give most power to the management," Al-Ahram newspaper on Monday

Green groups, recession help shrink Japan's log imports

TOKYO, Nov 17: Pressure from international green groups and an economic slowdown has for the first time reduced Japan's imports of tropical hardwoods from South East Asia, but environmentalists say it is too early to tell whether this represents a trend, reports IPS.

the government and corporations want to preserve tropical forests," says Eishi Macsawa of the environmental group Traffic.

1989, Sarawak sent almost half its logs to Japan, Sarawak has cut down production this year by some 1.5 million cubic metres.

In addition to the transfer to technical expertise for better forestry management in Asia, Japan plans to take steps to cut tropical wood wastage at home, including the use of low-cost softwoods like pine for making concrete moulds, a spokesman for Japan's forestry agency told IPS.

Japanese log imports from South East Asia shrank from a record 12.3 million cubic metres in 1989 to 11.3 million in 1990, according to the International Timber Trade Organisation (ITTO). The Yokohama-based group estimates another eight per cent drop for 1991.

Vociferous environmental campaigns against hardwood imports made a major dent in Japan's massive import of tropical timber, but conservationists say there are other factors involved.

Green groups urge Japan to shift from tropical hardwood to environment-friendly soft-wood timber from plantations in temperate countries. An average Japanese consumes 300 kg of paper each year, while a Chinese or an Indian uses only two kg.

According to ITTO, Japan's consumption of temperate wood, mainly from Canada, New Zealand and the United States, has risen since 1991 to ease the pinch caused by depleting wood stocks.

Thailand has taken over from Japan and become the world's biggest importer of sawn wood," says Steve Johnson of ITTO. Among buyers of tropical logs, however, Japan still ranks first.

Japanese demand for cheap tropical timber is blamed for most of the forest loss in the Philippines and Thailand in the 1960s. After decimating a country's forest, big Japanese companies have simply moved on to neighbouring ones to plunder trees.

Environmentalists are lobbying for rich countries to formulate a long-term policy to encourage high value, low-volume timber trade.

Japan's pledges to protect tropical rainforests, including the much-trumpeted slogan 'sustainable management by the year 2000: have yet to set targets for a higher pricing system or an increase of plywood imports made in developing countries.

Tough new work law—to deter workaholics

TOKYO, Nov 17: Taking aim at workaholic executives who toil late into the night, industry giant Nippon Steel is enforcing a tough new directive: lights out at 10 pm, reports AP.

It's part of an efficiency campaign at the world's largest steelmaker to "drive home the idea that one should finish working by 10 o'clock, said spokesman Takeshi Nakae.

That concept has yet to win widespread acceptance among many Japanese managers who frequently work into the wee hours. Japan's average of 2,080 hours of work last year was tops among leading industrialized nations.

The directive means all 3,300 workers at Nippon Steel's Tokyo headquarters must leave before electricity is turned off at 10:00 pm.

Managers who wish to work after 10 pm must receive prior permission from their boss and make arrangements with building personnel.

Those hoping to make up for lost time by working Sundays, meanwhile, will find the doors locked.

Nakae suggested that one way managers could maximise efficiency was by writing fewer New Year's cards, an annual custom in Japan. To encourage that, the company will stop distributing 70,000 cards for free as it has done in the past.

Nippon Steel may have more difficulty enforcing its other efficiency measure: cutting the time and paperwork for meetings in half.

"It's true that some people think everything discussed at meetings is necessary, but we'd like to restrict them to the most important items," said Nakae.

WB, Russia accord on loan

Another report from Washington adds: Russia and the World Bank signed an agreement Monday on a first loan of 600 million dollar that has been delayed since August by a dispute over what happens if the Russians fail to repay.

US interest rates not expected to change soon

WASHINGTON, Nov 17: No quick changes in US interest rates are expected from the Federal Reserve, but analysts said Monday that the central bank may start pushing interest rates higher during President-elect Clinton's first year in office, reports AP.

The Fed's top policy-making group, the Federal Open Market Committee, meets behind closed doors Tuesday — its first session on interest rates since the election. Until recently, many economists had been forecasting that the central bank would decide to push interest rates down again in the face of continued economic weakness.

However, the prevailing view now is that barring any surprisingly weak economic reports, the Fed has made its last interest rate cut and could very well start raising rates by late spring.

"I believe policy will stay on hold for a while until they see what the new administration is going to do," said David Wyss, an economist at DRI-McGraw Hill Inc. "Depending on what the new administration's programme looks like, they might well start raising rates around midyear."

Western donors backing Egypt's economic reforms with 10 billion dollar of debt forgiveness have pressed for some public flotations for nearly a year.

"Matters are being measured by the millimetre because this concerns public capital being sold... these are funds belonging to the people and the funds invested must be recovered," Sedki said last week.

Ministers reject EC budget changes

BRUSSELS, Nov 17: European Community budget ministers rejected almost all the European Parliament's additions to the EC's 1993 spending plans, reports Reuters.

The ministers threw out the parliament's proposal that commitments next year to future spending should jump to 70.16 billion European Currency Units (ECU) from 1992's 63.91 billion.

Instead they sent back to parliament a budget that at 65.86 billion ECU was a scant 0.2 per cent above the 65.71 billion ECU they had agreed for future expenditure when they gave the plans a first reading in July.