

BRIEFS

100 US farmers to assist Ukraine
NEW YORK, Apr 24: More than 100 American farmers will depart on Sunday, April 25, for Ukraine to assist Ukrainian farmers with spring planting...

Kuwait to raise oil products next yr
KUWAIT CITY, Apr 24: Kuwait has pledged to increase its exports of oil products next year, a newspaper report said yesterday...

Argentina neither buy nor sell dollar
BUENOS AIRES, Apr 24: Argentina's central bank (BCRA) said it neither bought nor sold dollar in trading on Friday...

Cameroon frees coffee market
YAOUNDE, Apr 24: The Cameroonian government has lifted its monopoly on the country's coffee market for the first time...

Dollar gains against yen in NY
NEW YORK, Apr 24: The US dollar declined against all major currencies except the Japanese yen in busy trading Friday...

Stocks finish lower in New York
NEW YORK, Apr 24: Stocks finished lower Friday, depressed by a surprisingly weak report on durable goods orders and a drop in bond prices...

Police save chief of Taiwan Hitachi
TAIPEI, Apr 24: Taiwan Hitachi Co Ltd Chairman Hsu Ming-Chuan was rescued here overnight following the arrest of his two kidnappers...

Deliver of US aid to Russia uncertain
WASHINGTON, Apr 24: President Clinton praised Boris Yeltsin as a "genuine democrat," but admitted that he could not be certain of delivering all the aid that he's promised the embattled Russian leader...

Yen's surge may wreck Japan's recovery

TOKYO, Apr 24: The relentless surge of the yen could wreck plans to put the Japanese economy back on its feet, economists said on Monday, reports Reuters. The yen, which has been setting one record high after another in the last two weeks, threatens to cripple Japan's critical export industries...

expensive and harder to sell overseas but dollar profits will not fewer yen for the bottom line. That could mean more job losses at major Japanese companies and deterioration of consumer sentiment, the weakness of which lies at the heart of the nations slump. Then yen is a serious concern. Many Japanese companies are going to have a hard time coping if it continues...

stock market, which has been trading at its highest levels in more than a year on the back of hopes for recovery. But after the yen's gains over the weekend, the Nikkei average fell nearly 200 points to 20,112.34 on Monday. Japan has tried to slow the yen's rise by intervening in foreign exchange markets...

UK resists EC accord on energy tax

LUXEMBOURG, Apr 24: A meeting of European Community energy and environment ministers aimed at reviving their fight against global warming ended without agreement Friday, after Britain blocked an accord on controversial EC-wide energy tax, reports AP. "When the British had the opportunity to be flexible, they were inflexible," said Dutch Environment Minister Hans Alders...

There are a number of delegations who may be trying to point the finger at the UK, but they will be doing so without justification," he said. The British delegation had tried to postpone any decision on tax until a June 7 meeting of finance ministers. But main supporters of the tax - Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands - had hoped an agreement in principle on Friday would send a signal to the finance ministers whose approval is needed for its adoption...

WB will lend Russia \$1b to boost lagging oil production

WASHINGTON, Apr 24: The World Bank announced on Friday that it has completed a deal for 1 billion dollar worth of loans to boost Russia's lagging oil production, reports AP. Half the money will come from the bank itself, the world's biggest source of aid loans. Some would be lent by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), an intergovernmental body set up to help Russia and eastern Europe...

today's prices that much oil could be sold for 1.5 billion dollar a year in the hard currency Russia needs to buy goods in other countries and to keep up with its debts. It would also provide the United States, Japan and other countries with a welcome source of supplies other than the Middle East. Russia was long the world's biggest oil producer, but production has dropped sharply in recent years and Saudi Arabia has now overtaken it. The World Bank deal was struck with the Russian government and three government-owned enterprises in western Siberia that have begun the long road to privatization...

Privatisation hits most Ugandans

The Uganda shilling used to be a big joke. When Kenyans visited, they returned home with stories that a bottle of beer and an overnight stay in a Uganda hotel could cost a sackload of cash. All this has changed. The Ugandan shilling has bounced back. A year ago the Kenyan shilling equalled 37 Ugandan shillings. Today it fetches 17. An increasing number of Ugandans want to invest in the sale of treasury bills offered by the Bank of Uganda. A year ago the bills were offered at 40 per cent interest and in a month the bank sold bills for 10 million shilling. The bank then cut the interest rate to 17 per cent and offered only five per cent. There was still a flood. An expatriate economist at Uganda's central bank said: "They have realised there is real value in the Ugandan shilling. People, especially the elite, have realised that it is no longer necessary to keep your money in Paris or New York. The real value could be here."



Table with 2 columns: Going down, Going up. Rows: Gross National Product (GNP) per capita (1980, 1987, 1992) and Population (1981, 1990).

nted to seven million dollar. Now they are running at 35 million dollar a year. President Yoweri Museveni said foreign exchange sales last year totalled 300 million dollar - triple the amount Uganda gets from coffee, its largest export earner. The revival of the Ugandan shilling indicates the increased tempo of economic activity. Expatriates coming back into the country are impressed by the growth. Julia Crombie, an Australian consultant with African Pearl Safaris, says: "I see new buildings coming up, ifodern cars that are not generally seen on many streets in other African cities." The country's overall financial situation is improving, but Ugandans are not convinced by government statements. Professor Elisa Ochieng, of the Department of Economic at Makerere University, says: "Any policy to be relevant must put into consideration the politics of the stomach."

Steep losses and credit down grades deepen Japanese banks' woes

TOKYO, Apr 24: Japanese banks announced Friday 370 billion yen (3.4 billion dollar) in capital losses for the year to March to reflect write-downs on equity portfolios arising from Japan's stockmarket slump, reports AFP. Moody's Investors Services Inc and Standard and Poor's Asia Ltd meanwhile cut the ratings of seven banks to reflect their deteriorating asset quality, notable their exposures to the real-estate, construction and non-bank sectors. The banks downgraded by Moody's were Sumitomo Bank Ltd and Fuji Bank Ltd, affecting some 8.5 billion dollar in outstanding securities.

Standard and Poor's announced similar action against four trust banks - Mitsui Trust and Banking Co Ltd, Mitsubishi Trust and Banking Corp, Sumitomo Trust and Banking Co Ltd, and Yasuda Trust and Banking Co Ltd. Among the major losses, Sanwa Bank Ltd, suffered the biggest loss of 45.7 billion yen (415 million dollar). Mitsubishi Bank Ltd incurred a 39.7 billion yen loss while Long-term Credit Bank Ltd announced a loss of 39.5 billion yen. Other losses announced include 36.6 billion yen at Bank Ltd of Tokyo Ltd, 36.3 billion yen at Industrial Bank of Japan Ltd, 35.3 billion yen at Sakura Bank Ltd and 22.9 billion yen at Dai-ichi Kangyo Bank Ltd. Smaller losses were 21.4 billion yen at Asahi Bank Ltd, 21.2 billion yen at Tokai Bank Ltd, 20.8 billion yen at Nippon Credit Bank Ltd, 15.6 billion yen at Daiwa Bank Ltd, and 7.6 billion yen at Hokkaido Takushoku Bank Ltd. Among the trust banks, Sumitomo Trust suffered a loss of 19.7 billion yen while Mitsubishi Trust said its loss came to 10.5 billion yen. Mitsubishi Bank said in a statement the write-downs applied only to its reporting in Japan where marketable securities are carried issue by issue at cost or market price whichever is lower. Mitsubishi, the only Japanese bank listed in the United States, said the write-down "will not affect" its financial reporting under US generally accepted accounting principles. Earlier Friday, Moody's cut its ratings for the senior debt, long-term deposits and long-term letters of credit of Sumitomo and Fuji from "Double-A-3" to "Single-A". The same downgrades were applied to their guaranteed subsidiaries in Hong Kong and Australia as well as a Sumitomo unit in the United States and a Fuji subsidiary in Luxembourg. The subordinated debt rat-

World's only legal money launderer retires

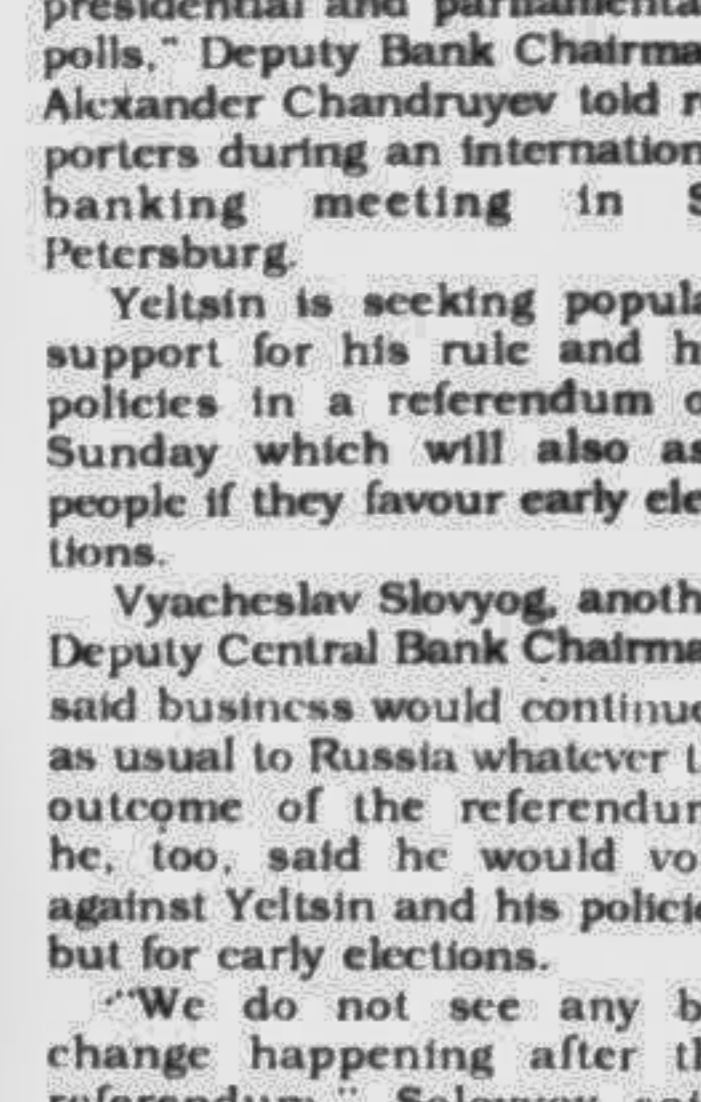
SAN FRANCISCO, Apr 24: A man dubbed the world's only legal money launderer is retiring after 31 years on the job, reports Reuters. Arnold Bailiner, 88, leaves his job today as official coin washer at the St Francis hotel in San Francisco, one of the city's most prominent hotels. The St Francis custom was started in 1938 because silver dollar were dirtying the white gloves of ladies using the hotel, says hotel spokeswoman Michelle Saeckve. Bailiner, born in Feldkirch, Austria in 1904, is estimated to have washed 17 million dollar in change in his three-plus decades as coin washer. His job involved cleaning the money with soap and polish, drying it with heat lamps, sorting and then packaging it for use in the hotel restaurants and bars. Saeckve said Bailiner is the only known coin washer anywhere but the hotel is searching for a replacement.

US new steps to lift trade bar on Russia

WASHINGTON, Apr 24: President Bill Clinton Friday reaffirmed his willingness to cooperate with Russian President Boris Yeltsin and announced new measures aimed at lifting trade restrictions on Russia, reports AFP. The announcement of the proposed measures made two days before the Russian referendum that will shape Yeltsin's political future appeared to be aimed at underscoring US support for the beleaguered Russian leader. "If he (Yeltsin) wins the election, if he is ratified by the Russian people to continue as their president, then I think we should do our best to work with him toward reform," Clinton said at a White House news conference. Asked about the possible consequences of Sunday's referendum, in which one of its four questions asks whether to continue pursuit of economic reform, Clinton said if the Russian voters "have confidence in the leadership, I think that's all we can ask." Yeltsin is a "genuine democrat - small 'D' - and genuinely committed to reform," he added. In response to a question about US aid to Russia, Clinton acknowledged that additional aid, announced at the recent Tokyo summit of the Group of Seven, the seven richest industrialised countries, has not yet been obtained. "The question is can we get any more aid for Russia that requires a new appropriation by the United States Congress," he said.

Central bank staff have no confidence in Yeltsin

ST PETERSBURGO, Russia, Apr 24: Russian central bank officials said on Friday they had no confidence in President Boris Yeltsin and favoured early parliamentary and presidential elections, reports Reuters. "I will vote against Yeltsin and the government's economic policies but for early presidential and parliamentary polls," Deputy Bank Chairman Alexander Chandrayev told reporters during an international banking meeting in St Petersburg. Yeltsin is seeking popular support for his rule and his policies in a referendum on Sunday which will also ask people if they favour early elections. Vyacheslav Slovyog, another Deputy Central Bank Chairman, said business would continue as usual to Russia whatever the outcome of the referendum, he, too, said he would vote against Yeltsin and his policies but for early elections. "We do not see any big change happening after the referendum," Solovyov said. "If the present reform government leaves, a new reform government will take office." Yeltsin, fighting for political survival against a conservative parliament which accuses him of leading the country to dictatorship, has said he will resign if he loses the ballot.



Yeltsin: fighting for political survival

G-7 meet in Tokyo 15 states yet to send ministers

TOKYO, Apr 24: The second east-west aid conference opened here Saturday, but a number of the 15 participating nations did not send ministers and questions about the usefulness of the meeting persisted, says AFP. One western European diplomat said there was widespread concern that the conference would only duplicate other bilateral and multilateral initiatives already underway. Yet Japanese minister of International Trade and Industry Yoshio Mori, whose ministry is sponsoring the conference, said much important work remained to be done. "I'm convinced that it is necessary to promote not only stabilization in these countries via macro-economic measures, but also with micro economic (measures), especially to promote industrial reforms, trade and investment," he told the opening session. However, the Group of Seven (G-7) industrialised countries committed to helping the eight former east bloc countries transform their economies, indicated by their low-level participation that they are not convinced the forum is best suited to do the job. A number of the richest western countries, notably France and Italy, sent bureaucrats rather than ministers, and British board of trade President Michael Heseltine failed to arrive, although he had been expected to earlier. The European Commission and the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) declined to send their top people, while the body created to aid eastern Europe, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development sent no one.

WB, UN to press ahead with int'l donors' meet for Vietnam

HANOI, Apr 24: The World Bank and United Nations pressed ahead with plans Friday to hold a conference of international aid donors for Vietnam in anticipation that the US embargo will be lifted before the end of the year, reports AFP. Vo Hong Phuc, Vice Chairman of Vietnam's State Planning Committee, said the conference scheduled for October or November would help mobilise the 20 to 25 billion dollar in external investment Vietnam's economy needs by the year 2000. Vietnam, the World Bank and UN Development Programme (UNDP) are to co-sponsor the donors' conference with support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Asian Development Bank (ADB). "If there is no participation by these institution it is rather useless," UNDP resident representative Roy Merrey said after briefing diplomats and journalists on preparations for the conference. Merrey's comment was an acknowledgement that the conference depended on the United States unblocking multilateral loans to Hanoi, a move Washington has conditioned on progress in accounting for US servicemen missing from the Vietnam war. France and other countries have pledged to lobby the United States to make the move when the IMF and World Bank meet next month in Washington, and US President Bill Clinton is reportedly reviewing the issue.

NZ's economy booming?

WELLINGTON, Apr 24: The New Zealand government is using a flood of bright figures to show an economic boom is dawning but sceptics question whether it is just a coincidence that it happens to be an election year, reports AFP. In the past weeks, economic figures have shown unemployment has fallen, Gross Domestic Product has swelled, already insignificant inflation has tumbled further, and a record export surplus. Companies are reporting new confidence and higher returns. Even the soaring yen is seen as increased earnings for the booming forestry industry. The latest figure out Friday showed New Zealand posted a record monthly trade surplus in March of 521.1 million NZ dollar (284 million US). The figures, 9.2 per cent higher than the surplus in the same month last year, continued an improving trend since last September in the trade balance. For a country which has been in a virtually permanent recession since 1986 when then Finance Minister Roger Douglas launched a monetarist, free-market revolution it seems the worst is over. But this is an election year, and traditionally things look good here ahead of a poll. With the government at record lows in public opinion polls, its critics accuse it of priming the so-called "good news machine." Under Douglas the labour government mounted a vigorous assault on inflation, running nearly to 20 per cent. This was continued under current Finance Minister Ruth Richardson.

Steep losses and credit down grades deepen Japanese banks' woes

ability over the next several years, even as the bank's margin is benefitting from a cyclical downturn in interest rates, the US rating agency said. Moody's said the downgrading of Fuji, affecting 4.7 billion dollar, followed the bank's assistance to several troubled borrowers, especially affiliated non-bank financial institutions. "The work out of these problems is likely to take an extended period of time. In the interim, Fuji's profitability will be pressured," it said. Despite the problem loans at the two banks, among Japan's five biggest in terms of assets, Moody's noted that both had strong domestic re-