

BRIEFS

World oil prices dip

LONDON, May 13: World oil prices dipped a couple of cent on Wednesday afternoon after Kuwaiti Oil Minister Ali Ahmad Al-Baghi said he will ask for a quota of at least two million barrels per day when OPEC meets next month.

China expects lower grain output

BEIJING, May 13: China expects a drop in grain production and weak growth in overall agricultural output due to poor weather and a decline in planted acreage, results of a government study reported Wednesday said.

Farmers' meet in Japan

TOKYO, May 13: Japanese farmers, steadfastly opposed to opening local markets to agricultural imports, will organise a gathering of their like-minded brethren from around the world to coincide with the July G-7 summit in Tokyo.

Meet in Toronto on market access

OTTAWA, May 13: Trade Ministers representing the United States, Japan, Canada and the executive commission of the 12-nation European Community will meet in Toronto on Friday.

GATT body to probe US-EC row

GENEVA, May 13: The GATT world trade body agreed on Wednesday to set up a dispute panel to investigate a complaint by the European Community that US car taxes discriminate against EC imports.

Bleak future for Hungarian industry

BUDAPEST, May 13: Hungarian Industry and Trade Minister Latorcai Janos Miklos said here yesterday that industry in the country would remain in recession until 1996.

Namibia fights ostrich smuggling

WINDHOEK, May 13: The government said Wednesday it was cracking down on ostrich smuggling in order preserve its multi-million dollar trade with the United States and Europe.

Billion-dollar EC plan to help distressed nations announced

BRUSSELS, May 13: The European Community on Wednesday announced billion-dollar plans for helping Third World nations emerging from war or famine cope with needs more pressing than long-term development, reports AP.

The Rehabilitation Support Programme is aimed at filling the gap countries experience as their need for food aid diminishes. Many are still too fragile while recovering from disasters to start building roads and bridges.

"We'd like to be able to act faster in a more coherent way," said Commission spokesman Javier Prats.

Under the one billion-European Currency unit (1.2 billion dollar) scheme, medium-term projects could help people feed themselves and rehabilitate society and

the economy, he said.

Vaccinating cattle, improving human health conditions, insuring water supply and sanitation and offering education could wean people off emergency aid, while supplying tools, material and spare parts could promote local production and reignite the economy.

Of the total, 60 per cent would come from EC money already pledged to African, Caribbean and Pacific nations through the Lome Convention. Each country targeted for a programme would be asked if it would devote its allotted funds to the project, Prats said.

The other 40 per cent would come from new contributions by EC member states.

Development ministers of the 12 EC nations will discuss the plan when they meet here

May 25, but Prats said they do not need to agree for it to take effect. Any of the 12 may contribute to the programme.

Prats said the idea was a response to criticism from non-governmental organizations that traditional aid patterns strand countries that need something in between food and phone lines.

The money must be earmarked for specific projects by 1994, but could be spent until 1996, Prats said. The EC could then consider extending rehabilitation programmes in some countries.

He said the EC Executive Commission had not drawn up a list of countries slated to receive rehabilitation money, but they could include Afghanistan, Cambodia, El Salvador, Haiti and Lebanon, as well as the African nations of Eritrea,

Ethiopia, Liberia, Mozambique, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan and Zaire.

The EC provided 273 million Ecus (332 million dollar) last year for similar efforts in Angola, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Mozambique.

EC sources said the money won't come with the strings usually progress and protection of human rights, because it is still considered emergency funding.

A problem is who to deal with in countries such as Somalia, where a functioning government does not exist, or Sudan, where the government represents — and favours — only one side in the country's civil war.

Prats said the money would go to whichever government or aid organisation could guarantee to get the money to needed projects.



Chaplin memorabilia go on sale

GENEVA, May 13: Hundreds of pieces of Charlie Chaplin memorabilia go on sale Friday, despite the protests of the great comedian's children, according to AP.

A range of Chaplin's personal effects, including pink silk pajamas, slippers, robes and a toiletry set, are being sold by his longtime chambermaid, Mirella Canese, who kept the items after Chaplin's fourth wife Oona died in 1991.

Swiss auctioneer Pierre-Yves Gabus said he expects the Geneva sale to fetch at least 343,000 dollars.

The couple's eight children, including actress Geraldine Chaplin, refused to vouch for the mementos' authenticity. But Gabus said the children took no legal steps to block the sale.

In advertisements in local newspapers, the children said they "never gave permission" for Canese's "systematic recapture of thrown-out or left-aside objects, even less so if Charlie and Oona had imagined that the ultimate aim was to turn them into money."

Head of Italy's big public enterprise arrested for corruption

ROME, May 13: The chairman of IRI, Italy's huge state industrial conglomerate and its largest employer, was snared Wednesday in the political corruption scandal shaking the country, reports AP.

Treasury police arrested Franco Nobili and charged him with corruption and violating party financing laws, news agencies said. The accusations are the same that have hit most of the nearly 3,000 politicians and businessmen in the 15-month scandal.

Nobili has headed IRI, which stands for Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale, since 1989. He was described as close to seven-time former Premier Giulio Andreotti, the leading figure of the dominant Christian Democrats, himself facing allegations of corruption and Mafia ties.

A few lower level executives of the holding company already have been charged by the Milanese prosecutors of Operation "Mani Pulite" (Clean Hands). Another state-owned giant, energy conglomerate ENI, has been hit harder, with a number of leading executives arrested.

Myanmar posts 10.9 pc growth in last fiscal

YANGON, May 13: Mining and agriculture contributed significantly to 10.9 per cent economic growth in Myanmar in the fiscal year ended in March, according to a government report seen Wednesday, says AP.

The official annual statistical report also said per capita income rose to 1,227 kyat (204 dollar) from 1,120 kyat (187 dollar) the previous fiscal year.

Myanmar one of the world's poorest nations, is ruled by a military junta that brutally suppressed a pro-democracy uprising in 1988.

The junta has been widely criticised for mismanaging the economy, but has made some gains through sales of timber, fish and other natural resources to foreign buyers.

NAM supports Suharto's bid to attend G-7 summit

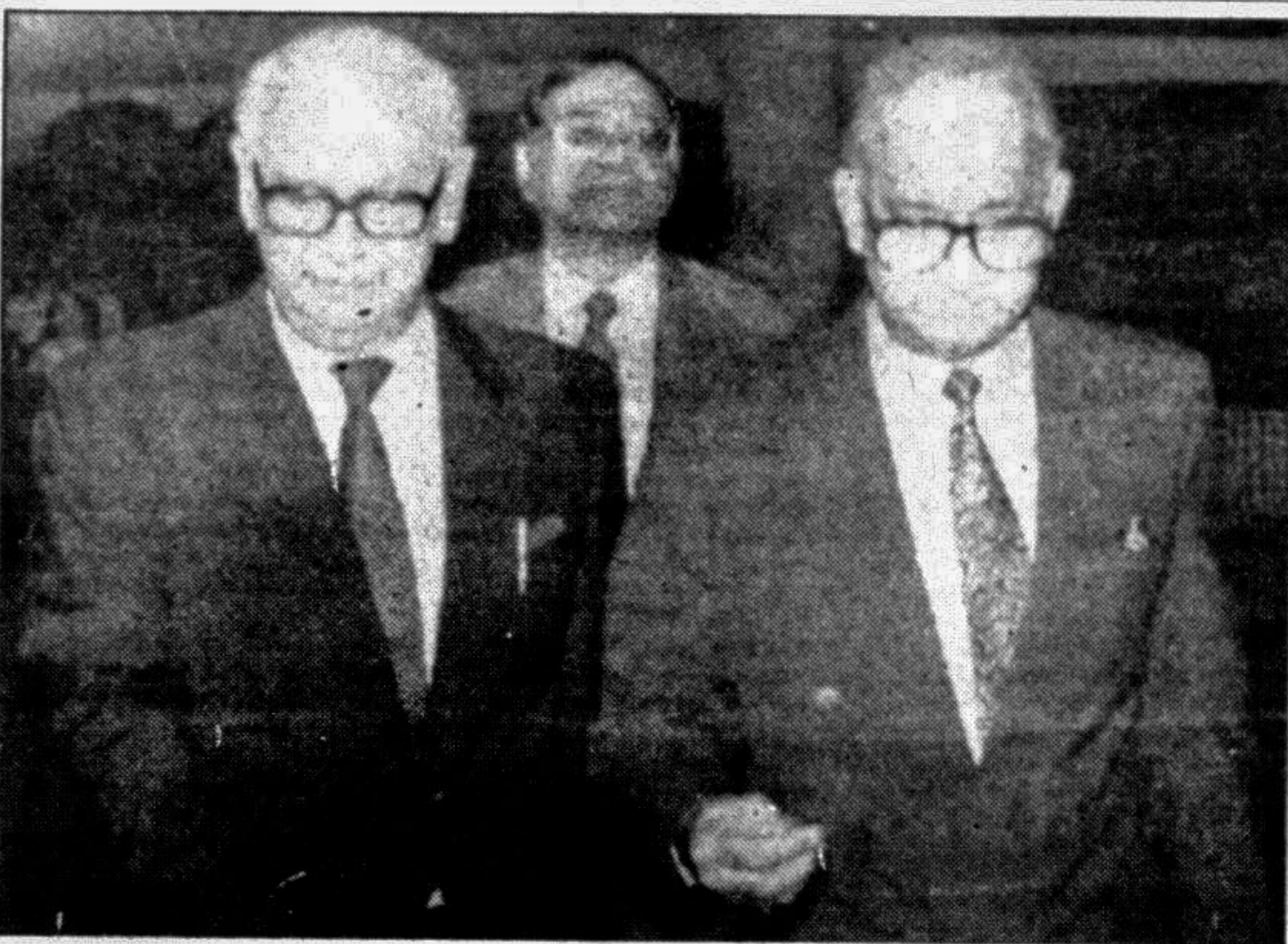
BALI, Indonesia, May 13: A meeting of Non-Aligned nations' economic ministers gave full support Wednesday for Indonesian President Suharto's effort to attend the summit meeting of seven major industrialised nations in July, reports AP.

Suharto wants to present the developing nations' case to the heads of government of the United States, Japan, Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Canada — the Group of Seven. He is the current Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas said a communique from the economic ministers' meeting would reflect a consensus in support of Suharto's attendance at the G-7 summit in Tokyo.

President Clinton told a meeting of the US Export-Import Bank that he hoped to meet Suharto in Tokyo.

But Alatas said the G-7 still is trying to reach a consensus on whether Suharto should join the summit.



BALI, INDONESIA: Indian Foreign Minister R L Bhatia (L) and his Bangladeshi counterpart Mostafizur Rahman (R) walk out of the meeting room for their bilateral talks during the second-day of the Standing Ministerial Committee for Economic Cooperation of the Non-Aligned Movement here May 12.

Manila takes step to ban commercial logging for next 30 years

MANILA, May 13: The Senate has approved in principle a bill banning commercial logging in Philippine forests in the next 30 years, its principal author said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

The log ban bill is expected to be finally approved by the Senate within the next few days but will need a counterpart measure from the House of Representatives, Senator Francisco Tatad, Chairman of the Committee on Natural Resources, said.

He said he hoped the Lower House would pass its own version of the measure so that a harmonised bill can be submitted to President Fidel Ramos for approval.

The House has yet to formally discuss a proposed forestry code.

The Senate bill prohibits the cutting and felling of trees in all forests except in industrial tree plantations, communal forests and other such projects. It aims to restore the country's forest cover which

has been fast disappearing.

"Upon passage of the law, all existing timber licenses, agreements or permits... will be automatically revoked. No such permits will be issued again until the end of the 30-year ban," Tatad said in a statement.

The government banned logging in virgin rainforests beginning in January last year after about 7,000 people drowned in flashfloods in the Central Philippines in November 1991. The flooding

was blamed on deforestation.

About 120,000 hectares (296,500 acres) of forest in the Philippines are destroyed each year by indiscriminate logging and "slash and burn" policies, according to the Natural Resources Department.

The country's forest has been reduced to about 6.8 million hectares (17 million acres) but only around 800,000 hectares (1.97 million acres) are virgin rainforests, it said.

Trade status linked to human rights issues, US warns China

BEIJING, May 13: US President Bill Clinton's administration warned China on Wednesday to expect human rights conditions on its preferential trade status, setting the stage for a fresh diplomatic dispute, reports AFP.

The message was conveyed by senior State Department official Winston Lord during a three-day visit that ended Wednesday, a US official here said.

"We have explained that it is most certainly likely now," the official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said.

Lord, the assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, was the first senior diplomat in Clinton's administration to come to Beijing.

His talks here, described as

"frank and useful", were seen as important for setting down the framework of future ties.

Conditions on Most Favoured Nation (MFN) trading status would be linked to Beijing's progress in human rights, trade and arms non-proliferation, but "no final decisions have been made" on their exact form, the official said.

Clinton must decide by June 3 whether to revoke, extend or place conditions on China's MFN status, which grants preferential tariffs to Chinese exports to the United States and must be reviewed each year under US law.

"It would have taken dramatic progress not to have some kind of conditions," the official said, adding that

Beijing had "much more work" to do before it met US concerns.

"Whatever conditions and whatever form they take, they will obviously be serious ones where we try to make progress. But the objective has always been to make progress, but not to actually lose MFN, which would have some harmful effects. So we have to work within that context," the official said.

Clinton was still consulting US Congress to reach a consensus on the exact terms of MFN conditions, he said.

Clinton, the official said, attached "great importance" to relations with Beijing, but would place more emphasis on human rights than Bush had done.

Bonn expresses its concern

Another report from Bonn adds: German Chancellor Helmut Kohl told visiting Chinese Vice Premier Qian Qichen on Wednesday that he was keen for stepped-up economic relations with China but remained concerned over human rights there.

"Long-term cooperation with the People's Republic of China has decisive importance, especially in view of the changes in Europe and Asia," Kohl said.

But the Chancellor also stressed Germany's desire for an "open political dialogue" with China, "in which critical questions such as that of human rights must not be shunted aside."

Doll factory fire makes Thailand learn the hard way

BANGKOK, May 13: The doll factory fire that killed more than 200 people this week demonstrates that Thailand's safety conditions have lagged behind one of the world's most rapid rates of economic development, labour experts said Wednesday, reports AP.

At least 240 workers — most of them women — died when fire broke out Monday at the factory outside Bangkok. Authorities still were searching for other bodies believed buried under debris.

Chalongphob Sussangkarn, a labour economist at the Thailand Development Research Institute, said the government has been slow to develop and enforce workplace safety regulations.

"We have never really taken these issues seriously," he said. "Now we are learning the hard

way." Labour activist Nihom Chandravithun described some factories as "death traps," without adequate fire precautions or proper emergency procedures or fire exits.

Small-scale "sweat shops" abound, with owners trying to squeeze maximum profit while providing the minimum in terms of a safe and hygienic work environment. These are virtually immune to inspections by authorities.

Nihom said that last year, there were more than 90,000 work-related injuries reported, but numerous others went unreported.

Chalongphob said the Thai manufacturing-for-export boom began in 1986. New factories financed by foreign investment recruited rural women, most of them former

rice farmers, as unskilled and semi-skilled labourers.

Most workers are paid the minimum wage of 125 baht (five dollar) a day, but some in the smaller factories receive less. Factory workers generally put in 10-hour days, but most work overtime for the extra income, he said.

Such low wages and relatively small allocations toward developing safe, clean factories have helped fuel Thailand's growth toward coveted status as a "Newly Industrialised Country." In recent years, the country has posted yearly growth rates just below or above 10 per cent — among the highest in the world.

Women's rights activist Thanavadee Thajee said many of the women workers are unskilled, impoverished and illiterate.

"That is why employers are able to exploit them," she said. "The conditions in women's factories are terrible."

Some also employ children in violation of laws, but with the connivance of local authorities.

Bundit Hanachaisethavuth, a researcher with a non-governmental labour organisation, said workers are unable to influence safety conditions in the plants because Thailand's labour unions are small.

"We have 780 trade unions, but only 18,000 union members nationwide," he said.

The Kader Industrial (Thailand) Co. Ltd doll factory had a small union, but Bundit said he did not know how many workers were members. Investigations are still un-

derway, but police officers have already stated that the toy factory was built of sub-standard materials, had few fire escapes and failed to implement even the most basic of safety procedures.

Chayuth Chavalantitkul, an Interior Ministry labour expert, said the ministry has only 50 safety inspectors to enforce new fire regulations at 90,000 factories and businesses nationwide.

The regulations established a year ago require employers to hold fire drills and to provide firefighting equipment, water reserves and emergency exits.

Many have been slow to comply, Chayuth said. "We are trying to get more staff," he said. "But it takes time."

India planning to boost tea export in '93-94

NEW DELHI, May 13: The Tea Board of India has formulated an action plan under which it is hopeful of exporting around 210 million kilogramme (kg) of tea during 1993-94, reports Xinhua.

For this, the board has taken into consideration a level of domestic consumption at 565 million kg with a projected tea output at 775 million kg, according to local reports.

The board has decided to continue joint exercises in tea promotion with tea councils in the UK and Germany for generic promotion of tea. It will also participate in several fairs and exhibitions to be held in different world capitals.

Direct promotional action

plan for value added Indian tea would be carried out in the UK in collaboration with Harrods, a chain store company with the aid of demonstrations and video shows.

This would be supplemented with press advertisements. Harrods will also undertake promotional activities in their international shops at Frankfurt, Toronto and Tokyo.

In the US, promotional activities would be carried out to boost export of value-added Indian tea through logo promotion, participation in fairs and exhibitions.

In West Asia, promotion will involve participation in international trade fairs and exhibitions in Cairo, Damascus, Tehran and Dubai.

France rejects EC-US farm agreement

PARIS, May 13: Premier Edouard Balladur said Thursday that France rejects the farm agreement between the European Community and United States and said there would be no overall accord on stalled world trade talks without "an armistice" on controversial points, reports AP.

Outlining the French position on trade negotiations at a news conference, Balladur said Paris wants "global, balanced and multilateral negotiations" that are not focused solely on agriculture.

The November EC-US accord on oilseeds subsidies at the time averted a trade war with the United States. But France's previous Socialist government and now Balladur's conservatives reject it on the grounds that it demands too many sacrifices from French farmers.

France is the EC's No 1 agricultural producer, and angry French farmers have effectively kept their interests alive. The threat of a French veto has been hanging over the EC, which still must ratify the accord.

An official memorandum

presented by Balladur said the oilseeds agreement "is not acceptable in its present form."

But Balladur also stressed that world trade talks must be reduced to a confrontation between the Europeans and Americans.

Trade negotiations "were too much seen, and perhaps even too organised, as a sort of confrontation between the United States and Europe," Balladur said, "essentially over agricultural questions." He said this amounted to a "fundamental error in focus."

"We intend to put an end to the perception that several hundred thousand French farmers pose an obstacle to the relaunching of world production and activity which would result from a GATT accord," he said, referring to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.

"Agricultural exports by the Community represent but a weak proportion of world trade," Balladur said. "All subjects, and not just agriculture, must be really negotiated and all parties, and not just Europeans, must adopt a positive attitude."

Clinton opts for alternative plan to spur investment

CHICAGO, May 13: Faced with resistance in Congress, President Bill Clinton is prepared to scrap his proposed investment tax credit, opting instead for a smaller increase in the corporate income tax than earlier envisaged, an administration official said Wednesday, reports AFP.

Although Clinton sought the credit as a way to spur business investment, he is now willing to negotiate with Congressional leaders on a different plan that would raise the corporate tax rate to between 35 and 35.5 per cent from the current 34 per cent, said the official travelling with

the President. Clinton initially proposed a 36 per cent top rate.

The Washington Post said Tuesday the White House is willing to accept a corporate tax rate of 35.25 per cent.

Clinton's initial corporate tax hike proposal would have raised 30.5 billion dollar over five years, offset by credits of 28.8 billion dollar, according to Treasury Department estimates.

In a related matter, the Wall Street Journal reported that Clinton was willing to exempt beer from the "sin taxes" under consideration to help finance health care reform.

'Swiss' dinars cost their lives

KARAMEH, Jordan, May 13: Two Jordanians who had placed their life savings in Iraqi dinar died of heart attacks after Baghdad cancelled foreign-printed banknotes, hospital officials said, reports AFP.

One was a man who lost 38 million Iraqi dinar and the other was a woman who had sold her jewels and a parcel of land to invest in prized dinar notes that were printed abroad before the Gulf War, they said.

They died in a hospital in the northern Jordanian town of Irbid. About ten other people are in the hospital after they too suffered heart attacks over the Iraqi move to shore up its sanctions — hit currency.

An estimated 100,000 Jordanians held Iraqi dinar and their losses could reach

several hundreds of millions of dollar, economic experts in Amman said.

Baghdad closed its borders for six days until Monday to allow those living inside Iraq to exchange the so-called Swiss dinar for local ones.

Holders of "Swiss" dinar outside Iraq were left with worthless banknotes. The foreign-made notes had fetched three to four times more than the local ones and were being hoarded by speculators.

With the cancellation of the notes and other monetary moves, Baghdad has succeeded in bringing the black market value of the dinar to below 50 dinar to the dollar, down from a record 90 dinar to the dollar last month.

Officially one dinar is worth 3.2 dollar.

E German steelworkers' strike turns into countrywide protest

BERLIN, May 13: The giant trade union IG Metall succeeded in turning the east German steelworkers strike into a country-wide protest on Wednesday when workers in car plants in the west of the country downed tools for a few hours, reports AFP.

As work stoppages occurred at the Volkswagen plant in Wolfsburg and several other engineering factories, analysts said it was the first time since the Nazis came to power in 1933 that a strike had been so broadly supported.

IG Metall's spokesmen forecast that there would be street demonstrations involv-

ing tens of thousands of people later on Wednesday in a show of solidarity with steelworkers in the former east Germany who are demanding the same salaries as their western counterparts.

The strikes, which began on May 3 after employers revoked an accord to give pay parity to east German steel and engineering workers have so far halted production at 82 east German plants and made idle around 45,000 workers.

The protests have been backed by the Federation of German Trade Unions (DGB), the umbrella group of organised labour.