

Intel Corp in Japan puts on sale high capacity memory chips

TOKYO, Oct 30: Intel Japan KK, the Japanese unit of Intel Corp of the United States, said yesterday it had put on sale high capacity flash memory chips and related products, reports AFP.

The company said it was selling a flash chip with 32-megabit capacity, the world's highest so far, and a cheaper 16-megabit version.

It also launched four to 40-megabyte memory cards employing the chips. The cards can be inserted into computer slots based on Personal Computer Memory Card Interface Association (PCMCIA) standards.

Unlike Dynamic Random Access Memory (DRAM) chips, data stored in flash memory chips survives a power supply cut, making it suitable for use in so-called external memory devices whose market is now dominated by floppy discs and hard discs.

"The most exciting application is mobile computing," Richard Pashley, Intel Corp memory components division vice president, told a news conference, adding that mass production will start later this year.

Yeltsin asks regions to repay billions of rouble in owed taxes

MOSCOW, Oct 30: President Boris Yeltsin acted to reassert his authority over Russia's powerful regions yesterday, telling them to repay billions of rouble in owed taxes or have their economic lifeline cut, reports Reuters.

A Kremlin decree said regions would be deprived of export quotas, centralised imports and federal subsidies if they failed to transfer tax revenues to the central budget.

The crackdown signalled Yeltsin's intention of bringing to heel regions, some of which are still stubbornly resisting his moves to tear down Soviet structures across the vast federation ahead of elections on December 12.

It followed Yeltsin's lifting on Wednesday of restrictions on the free sale of land — a move sounding the death knell for collective farms, a cornerstone of the old communist system.

Many of the federations 88 regions and republics, fighting to boost their own powers at the expense of the central authority, were on the side of the conservative-led parliament in the struggle for power against Yeltsin.

A number of them, led by oil-rich Tatarstan, stopped paying federal taxes this year and billions of rouble are owed to central coffers.

The reformist president dissolved parliament last month and went on to crush a hardline uprising against him in Moscow on October 4.

Yeltsin has ordered regional and grass-roots Soviets (elected councils) to be dissolved by early or mid-1994 and has suggested to the ethnic republics, which enjoy greater status, that they do like wise.

The sanctions threatened in Yeltsin's tax decree could severely curb exports of raw materials by the mineral-rich regions, which are currently allowed to export a share of their natural resources, and deny them access to strategic imports.

The depth of feeling in some of the regions against the Yeltsin revolution was illustrated by a dying act of defiance by Sverdlovsk regional council on Wednesday.

In its final decision before being dissolved under Yeltsin's political reforms, it voted to proclaim itself the Urals republic, ITAR-Tass news agency

said. Sverdlovsk is Yeltsin's home town.

Apart from its political message, the tax transfer decree was also clearly aimed at cutting the yawning budget deficit — a point of dispute between the president and the now-disbanded parliament.

In another decree pushing along market reforms delayed during the power struggle, Yeltsin offered temporary amnesty to companies and citizens evading taxation.

He backed it with a threat to crack down on those who failed to meet a November 30 deadline to declare their earnings.

Yeltsin also signed a decree protecting the rights of private shareholders who have embarked on the country's ambitious scheme to sell off state enterprises.

In a separate development, the newspaper Pravda, at the centre of a row over freedom of the press in the run-up to the December 12 elections, grudgingly bowed to a government demand and replaced its editor.

Gennady Seleznev, announcing his own departure, said the newspaper had been

promised it would be able to publish soon.

But he excluded accepting a demand by the government that Pravda, the mouthpiece of the Kremlin in Communist Times, change its name, which means "truth".

"Our collective, by a 95 per cent majority, categorically refused to meet that demand. It will remain Pravda", Seleznev said in a telephone interview.

Pravda and most other opposition newspapers were banned or suspended by the information ministry earlier this month after Yeltsin's troops crushed the uprising in the rebel parliament.

The move against the media has sparked angry exchanges in the Yeltsin leadership, sensitive that charges of muzzling the press could harm its democratic image.

Yeltsin's press aide, Vyacheslav Kostikov, on Wednesday accused the government of trying to exert direct control over the media in the run-up to the historic elections.

The government minister protecting the rights of the media, Vladimir Shumeiko, has hit back saying some aides to Yeltsin are twisting facts.

Bank unions call off strike in India

BOMBAY, Oct 30: Bank unions representing over one million employees at state-run banks, financial institutions and insurance companies called off a strike set for next Tuesday, union leaders said, reports Reuters.

"This followed an agreement between the Indian Banks Association (IBA) and union leaders on pension benefits.

"We have achieved the superannuation benefits and shall seek wage revisions later," said Lakshmi Narasiah, chairman of the strikers joint action committee. The accord will bring pension benefits to all bank employees with retroactive effect from January 1, 1986, Narasiah told reporters.

It will cost the banking sector over four billion rupee (130 million dollar) to meet the superannuation benefits of its employees, bankers said.

Other demands will be taken

up later, he said. "It is a compromise and a happy one at that," Narasiah added.

Union leaders said that their demands for wage hikes have only been postponed and not withdrawn.

"We will renew discussions for wage revision early next year. Wage revisions will be at the industry level and not individual banks and that is another achievement for us," a union leader said.

Bankers said that as a concession to bank managements, unions have agreed to faster computerisation in the banking sector.

But union leaders said that their opposition to denationalisation of the banking sector has not been withdrawn.

"We will continue to oppose privatisation of the banking sector which the government started at the behest of the world bank," Narasiah said.

Nissan loses \$ 306m in 6 months

TOKYO, Oct 30: Nissan Motor Co, Japan's No 2 automaker, on Friday reported a net loss of 32.8 billion yen (306 million dollar) in the first half of the fiscal year. It blamed the high yen and sluggish demand, reports AP.

Nissan's parent company loss for the half-year ending Sept 30 deepened from losses of 21.99 billion yen (205 million dollar) in the same period a year ago.

It was the latest reflection of the worst downturn in decades for Japan's auto industry.

The car companies' woes mirror the overall state of the country's economy. Japan has been unable to shake off a persistent slowdown, and top government officials suggest a recovery is not likely to take hold until next year.

The major Japanese automakers have been taking cost-cutting measures such as job reductions, cuts in worker

bonuses and mandatory vacations. They have also been moving more production overseas to try to escape high yen-fueled operating costs at home.

The Japanese automobile industry is facing a very difficult business environment, and Nissan is no exception. Executive Managing Director Heiichi Hamaoka told reporters.

The company said overall domestic and foreign vehicle sales had fallen by 10.2 per cent in volume terms. In yen terms, sales fell 6.7 per cent to 1.78 trillion yen (16.6 billion dollar) from 1.91 trillion yen (17.8 billion dollar).

Hamaoka and other company officials expressed optimism that dramatic restructuring efforts would bring a modest rebound in the second half of the fiscal year. But he acknowledged that depends largely on the success of government efforts to revitalize Japan's lagging economy and stimulate

domestic demand.

That's what all the automakers are pinning their hopes on, said auto analyst Benjamin Moyer of Merrill Lynch.

Nissan has already announced reductions of 5,000 jobs through attrition over three years, and officials said they hoped no further cuts would be necessary. But they left open the possibility of layoffs if the outlook does not improve.

The sale of some assets is also being considered, Hamaoka said.

Hamaoka said Nissan hoped to break even at the operating income level in the years second half, but even so, the company is projecting zero net income for the fiscal year.

Given the series of body blows the car companies are suffering, Japanese auto executives are arguing their industry is in no position to take the brunt of any trade concessions to Washington.



German Agro Action's track record till date comprises 3250 projects in Asia, Africa and Latin America with a financial outlay of 880 million DM. The year 1992 alone saw 48 projects dotted on the Asian part of the globe, covering Bangladesh, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines. —IN photo

ASEAN blasts Europeans over timber labelling

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 30: Agriculture ministers from the six member nations of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations on Saturday criticised European environmental groups' calls for labelling of tropical timber products, reports AP.

The ministers from Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Brunei, Singapore and the Philippines concluded in a communiqué concluding their annual three-day meeting in Bandar Seri Begawan, the capital of Brunei in Borneo island.

Friends of the Earth and other organisations in Germany, Switzerland, Britain, France, Sweden and other European nations have been asking their governments to require any product made from tropical timber to carry a label saying so.

The groups' aim is to discourage people from buying

such products and to help preserve tropical rainforests.

The ASEAN agriculture ministers said if there was to be labelling, then it should be applied to all types of timber products, which would require international agreements and guidelines.

Malaysian government officials also said the calls were unfair because European timber products did not carry specific labels.

"We oppose strongly any form of unilateral and discriminatory certification and labelling of tropical products," they said in their joint statement, issued through the Malaysian Foreign Ministry.

The ministers asked for speedy implementation of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development Forest Principles by all countries.

Secret of longevity in China

BELJING, Oct 30: Hoping to cash in on one modern-day Chinese methuselahs, a county in Sichuan is building a "China longevity town" for aspiring oldsters with wanderlust, reports Reuters.

The 811 million dollar tourist resort is going up in rural Pengshan county, "known as the town of longevity since the Qin Dynasty (221-207 BC)", the official China Daily said today.

The number of elderly citizens in Pengshan is 17 times the national average, it said. It did not define "elderly".

The town will feature a mansion honouring Pengzu, the Chinese God of Longevity, whom legend says died at the age of 800 in the Shang dynasty (16th to 11th centuries BC).

"Visitors can learn about the secrets of longevity that have been pursued by Pengzu and his followers," the newspaper said.

In one part of the town, local centenarians will "demonstrate their way of life ... and offer longevity tips to visitors".

A recreation centre will host triple-digit birthday parties and longevity banquets and an attraction called the "stone steps of longevity" is already complete.

Old people are venerated in China under enduring Confucian moral codes and common toast is "to a long life" pharmacies are filled with herbal potions that purportedly extend life.

The official Xinhua news agency reported last month that the average life expectancy in China had doubled since the communists took power in 1949. It quoted Qiao Qinzeng, an official with the Ministry of Public Health, as telling a Beijing seminar the figure was now 71 years.

China's oldest man is Gong Laifa who still tills the land in Guizhou province at the age 131, according to the official media.

Asia-Pacific urban population to exceed 2.4 b in 30 years

BANGKOK, Oct 30: The "inevitable" urbanisation of Asia's population is so rapid that it creates the equivalent of a new city of 150,000 residents every day, population experts warned here Wednesday, reports AFP.

From 991 million city dwellers in 1990, the Asia-Pacific region is expected to surpass 2.4 billion people living in urban areas in the next 30 years, according to experts here preparing the first ministerial conference on urbanisation in the Asia-Pacific region.

"The single-minded pursuit of rapid growth has led to severe environmental degradation," according to a preparatory report for the conference organised by the UN Economic and Social Commission on Asia and the Pacific.

Thirty five countries and 18 cities in the region are to send representatives and more than 20 government ministers are expected at the November 1 and 2 meeting.

The conference will focus on the new doctrine of "inevitable urbanisation," which comes from lessons learned in the past decade that the growth of urban areas cannot be contained, only managed.

This recent admission originates in the fact that efforts to improve the standard of living

in rural areas only accelerated migration to the cities.

The new strategy is that "urbanisation should be facilitated rather than restrained," according to the report entitled

Jordan may resume banking in West Bank, Gaza Strip

AMMAN, Oct 30: Jordanian-Israeli negotiations in Washington next week could clear the way to reopen Jordan's banks in the occupied territories that have been closed since the 1967 Middle East war, sources close to the talks said, reports Reuters.

Although some terms remain in dispute, one official speaking on condition of anonymity said a pact to allow resumption of Jordanian banking in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip would take place in Washington next Monday or Tuesday.

The reopening of branches by the banks that operated before Israel captured the territory in 1967 was described by western diplomats as essential for handling the aid flows that have been promised to Palestinians.

the "state of the urbanisation in Asia and the Pacific 1993."

Among the consequences cited are "massive, seemingly irreducible slum and squatter settlements, overcrowding and congestion, and worsening environmental degradation."

In the large Asian cities, population measured in sulphur dioxide and suspended particles in a cubic metre of air "can be 10s to 100s of times worse than in American or Canadian cities," according to the report.

For example, the report said, in Bangkok, one of the Asian cities affected by pollution, suspended air particles caused the death of 1,400 people in 1989 and cost 24 million days of lost work because of sickness.

The average level of lead in the blood was 40-45 microgrammes per decilitre, four times the permitted level in the United States.

Because of overpopulation in Asian cities "the average number of people per habitable room ranges between two and 36," according to the document.

The report again underlines "the urgent need for fundamental policy and institutional change in the region," including decentralisation of decision making and allowing local community participation in solving urban problems.



A member of the ground staff of Air France prevents an international flight from taking off from Orly airport by sitting on the landing gear, Tuesday. The French trade unions have resolved to continue their strike action in the face of French government plans to restructure the state-owned airlines. — AFP photo

Frankfurt gets seat of European Monetary Institute

FRANKFURT, Oct 30: Frankfurt, chosen Friday to host the European Monetary Institute, is Germany's financial and banking centre and the seat of the venerable Bundesbank, reports AP.

Situation on the banks of River Main in central Germany. Frankfurt has a population of 660,000 people, a quarter of them foreign, which lends the city an international flair. It is Germany's fifth largest city, after Berlin, Hamburg, Munich and Cologne.

The city has been campaigning vigorously for several years to get the seat of the European Monetary Institute, the forerunner of the European Central Bank.

One possible site for the bank is the sprawling former administrative building of I G Farben, the chemicals giant that delivered poison gas for Hitler's concentration camps.

The building has served since the end of World War II as the headquarters of the US Army's 5th Corps, which is moving out by the end of 1996.

Frankfurt, which had been a vibrant Jewish cultural centre before the Nazi rule, suffered extensive damage in Allied bombing raids during World War II. Three-quarters of the city was destroyed.

was rebuilt after the war, while its modern, skyscraper skyline has given the city its nickname of "Mainhattan".

One of its major tourist attractions is the house where

JVC loses \$98m in first half of current fiscal yr

TOKYO, Oct 30: Major audio-visual products maker JVC said Friday it lost 10.63 billion yen (98 million dollar) in the first half of this fiscal year, joining other Japanese electronics firms that have reported poor earnings, reports AP.

The company blamed the loss on the high yen, which makes Japanese-made products more expensive and less competitive overseas, and increasing sales costs to cope with stronger competition.

Japanese electronics firms are having trouble staying profitable in part because of the lack of new hit products, JVC said it has had success with a compact stereo system and a wide-screen television, but not enough to overcome the recession in traditional products such as regular-size televisions and stereos.

Much of the historic centre

German poet and author Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was born and grew up.

Among the concrete and glass of Frankfurt's 428 banks and 170 insurance companies, busy workers and visitors can relax in dozens of quaint inns that serve a cider-like drink called "ebbelwei" and "hand kaese mit musik," a local cheese with a generous sprinkling of vinegar and onions.

The city's airport is the largest in continental Europe. Frankfurt hosts dozens of fairs, among which the Auto Show and the Book Fair are the largest in the world.

On the downside, the city also has an infamous crime-infested red light district near the main train station. Drug dealing is rampant on several city streets.

Real estate is among the most expensive in Germany, although prices for office space have come down since the recession.

Frankfurt also boasts Germany's most influential conservative newspaper, Frankfurter Allgemeine, and one of its most liberal, the Frankfurter Rundschau.

Residents welcomed the European Community decision to send the central bank to their city.

"It is a happy occasion for Frankfurt.

Bank of Japan reports Fuji's real-estate loans up 10-fold in 5 years

TOKYO, Oct 30: A secret report on a Bank of Japan (BOJ) investigation into Fuji Bank Ltd showing the sum of its questionable real-estate loans had surged 10-fold in five years has allegedly been leaked to financial circles, daily newspaper Mainichi Shimbun said today, reports AFP.

According to Mainichi, the BOJ report on the investigation, completed in December, found that Fuji's bad loans totalled 5.4 trillion yen (50 billion US dollar) and "have surged tenfold since the previous study was made" five years earlier.

The mass-circulation Mainichi did not comment on the source of the leak. The BOJ immediately denied the Mainichi article, saying the report on which it was based was not written by the central bank. The report was dated January 19.

International finance agencies start lending to Vietnam

HANOI, Oct 30: The United States has yet to completely lift its economic embargo on Vietnam, but international finance agencies led by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have begun lending a hand to the war-ravaged nation desperate to reconstruct its economy, reports IPS.

But the new loans may not be all that beneficial for this country, which is struggling to get back on its feet after decades of war against the French, the United States and the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia.

Some of the new money is for projects that have already failed in neighbouring countries, while the repayments are due for loans taken out for actions of a government that was thrown out of power almost two decades ago.

For the past 18 years, Vietnam has been cut off from loans from multilateral banks like the World Bank, the IMF and the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

Ever since north Vietnam routed the US-backed Saigon government in 1975, Washington, a major source of funds for most of these banks, has declared an embargo on relations with Vietnam.

But time, changes in government policies on both sides of the Pacific, and a lot of diplomacy have healed some of these wounds.

In July, Washington announced it would partially lift the embargo to allow new international loans to Vietnam. This November, a major conference of 23 donor countries is scheduled in Paris to discuss a package of some one billion dollar in new loans.

Like any other loans, there are strings attached. The first condition is that Vietnam repay the IMF the outstanding sum of 140 million US dollar in borrowed in the 1970s. A group of 15 countries, led by France and Japan, have banded together to help Vietnam meet this condition.

But the debt had been incurred largely when Vietnam requisitioned the assets of Mobil, a US-based oil company.

The assets were seized after Mobil, which had been permitted to drill off the coast of Vietnam by Saigon, made the first significant discovery of oil in Vietnam in January 1975.

Three months later, the government that gave it permission drill for oil fell to the communist-led forces in the north.

The second condition is likely to be attached to the new loan of 400 million US dollar the IMF is expected to promise at the Paris conference. IMF money is normally lent on condition of "Structural Adjustment" Economic Programmes (SAPs) that attempt to convert countries to free trade policies.

In neighbouring Laos, for example, the IMF has lent the government 50 million US dollar over three years, which

IMF Resident Representative Chi Do Pham says amount to almost a tenth of that country's annual budget.

This money, he says, has helped cut inflation to six per cent. But the government has also had to shed a fifth of its own workforce. In other countries that have implemented SAPs, results have been more drastic, such as in Kenya, where price hikes in basic foodstuffs have left the poor even poorer.

But aside from the IMF, two other major lenders are expected to grant new loans to Vietnam in November. The World Bank has been predicted to come up with 350 million US dollar while ADB is supposed to be ready with 250 million US dollar for Vietnam.

Many development activists now warn some of the World Bank's money will pay for projects that are almost guaranteed to fail. The Vietnamese trade union newspaper Lao Dong, for instance, reports the

bank will lend 30.9 million US dollar for rubber plantations and processing for export.

Yet rubber prices have been falling steadily in the last few years and Vietnam will be competing with nearby countries like Malaysia that already have an excess of capacity for rubber processing.

Environmental activists like John McKinnon of the Hong Kong-based Asian bureau for conservation also say rubber plantations are bad for the soil. Bangkok-based writer John Hamilton adds that World Bank money to pay for similar projects in Thailand have resulted in major deforestation.

But other bank loans seem harmless enough — like those for regional road development, which the ADB is also interested in funding. These roads will give Vietnam and its neighbouring countries better access to each other.

The huge Chinese manufacturing industry is looking for

new markets, and it has already found some in Vietnam. Indeed, the proliferation of cheap smuggled bicycles from China has recently all but forced Vietnam's 97 bicycle factories out of business the new roads may only hasten such import invasion into this country.

Still, the choices are hard for Hanoi, which has struggled almost alone for years to restore Vietnam's war devastated economy and environment. The promise of billions of dollar of new loans — even with endless conditions — is very tempting for the government of Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet, who is trying to rewrite the country's old socialist aspirations.

In a recent open letter to the Vietnamese youth, he wrote: "Rich people, a strong country and a civilised country — that is our dream and the dream of any Vietnamese today."

Brown, Marian give Tennessee varsity largest private gift

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. Oct 30: The estate of Hollywood producer-director Clarence Brown and his wife, Marian, has given the University of Tennessee the largest private gift in the school's 199-year history, reports AP.

The bequest, valued at 12 million dollar will benefit the university's theater programme — from renovations to scholarships. The donation is in the form of stocks, bonds and California property that will be sold, with proceeds placed into an endowment.

Brown, a 1910 engineering graduate, made 52 feature-length films during a 40-year Hollywood career. Clark Gable, Greta Garbo, Jean Harlow, Rudolph Valentino, Jane Wyman and Gregory Peck were some of his stars.