

BCIC earns Tk 114.36cr

Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC) earned Tk 114.36 crore by exporting 2,72,280 tons of urea in the first six months of the current fiscal year (1993-94), reports UNB.

The urea was exported to India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, the Philippines, Vietnam, Nepal and Malaysia from July to December, 1993. This marked an increase of export of Tk 7.56 crore over the corresponding period of the last fiscal, said a press release yesterday.

The export of urea from July to December, 1993 was 2,15,436 tons valued at Tk 106.80 crores.

The total volume of export of urea in fiscal 1992-93 stood at 3,87,000 metric tons, earning foreign exchange of Tk 183.54 crore.

The BCIC has fixed the target of urea export at five lakh tons in fiscal 1993-94.

The actual export volume by the year-end is, however, expected to exceed five lakh tons leading to a foreign exchange earning of about Tk 210 crores. This will be an all time high record of export of urea from Bangladesh.

Nigerian minister hopes

World crude oil prices to firm up

Lagos, Jan 5: Nigerian minister for Petroleum Resources Don Etiebet expressed the hope yesterday that world crude oil prices, currently on a down trend, would 'firm up' above 14 dollar a barrel later in the year, reports AFP.

The slide in the price of crude, especially now, is of major concern to most OPEC countries, he said, adding that they are eager to convene a meeting soon to halt the deterioration in the situation.

Speaking to journalists shortly after a panel set up to inquire into the activities of the NNPC (Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation) was inaugurated, the minister said that he did not rule out the possibility that over-production by certain OPEC members could have been responsible for the current slide in oil prices, at a time when prices had been expected to be on the rise.

Although he did not confirm that Nigeria's budget for this year is to be based on a projected price of 14 dollar per barrel of crude, a state military administrator, Colonel Yakubu Muazu, told journalists at the end of a meeting of members of the Provisional Ruling Council (PRC) on the budget that the 1994 budget is based on 14 dollar per barrel.

Italy for better economic, trade ties with India

NEW DELHI, Jan 5: Italian Foreign Minister Beniamino Andreatta told Indian businessmen yesterday that Italy wanted to find new industrial sectors for increased economic and business cooperation with India, reports Reuters.

"After China, India is the next (economic) miracle and it is important to take a place in the front row, the Russian miracle is a question of the 22nd century," Andreatta, who is in India on a two-day official visit, told a meeting of Indian businessmen.

4 Asian dragons among top ten investors in Vietnam

HANOI, Jan 5: Asia's four 'economic dragons' — Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan — were among the top 10 foreign investors in Vietnam in 1993, the Vietnam news agency said Tuesday, reports AFP.

The four countries collectively had 375 investment projects in Vietnam at the end of November last year, totalling 3.52 billion dollar, the agency said.

The projects represented 47 per cent of the total number of all projects approved and accounted for 51 per cent of the total value of foreign investment for the year, it added.

At the end of November, Taiwan lead foreign investors with a total 1,497 billion dollar invested, followed by Hong Kong with 1,224 billion dollar. South Korea invested 481 million dollar, while Singapore was responsible for 322 million dollar.

World oil producers' move to counter slump in prices

MUSCAT, Jan 5: OPEC and independent producers are expected to meet to discuss joint action to counter the collapse of oil prices, the official Oman News Agency (ONA) said yesterday, reports AFP.

It said Oil Minister Saeed Ibn Ahmad Al-Shanfari would resume a tour of independent oil producers next week and expressed optimism about his talks.

"As the minister embarks on his second tour, a broad ground of understanding is emerging between OPEC and non-OPEC producers to stop the deterioration in oil prices," it said.

"It is expected that a meeting of producers from inside and outside OPEC will be arranged to discuss this issue and reach decisions that will safeguard the interests of both the producer and consumer countries."

Oil prices have plunged to their lowest level in five years due to over supply and world recession.

Pledges from relatively small exporters such as Egypt,

Yemen and Syria to cooperate with OPEC have failed to prop prices up from around 13 dollar, nearly eight dollar below the cartel's target of 21 dollar per barrel.

Shanfari, whose country is a non-member of OPEC, had been due to travel to Malaysia and Brunei on Monday but the trip was postponed until the middle of next week, ONA said without giving a reason.

He has already toured Yemen, Egypt, Syria, Norway, Britain and Russia, Norway, the biggest oil producer in Europe, turned down his request for cuts last week.

Malaysia said Tuesday it would consider cutting its oil output only if there was a consensus among producers to lower production.

"We are not going to act on our own. It has to be a global concerted effort to be effective," Syed Hamid Albar, Minister for Malaysia's Oil Industry, told reporters.

Oman itself produces about 800,000 barrels per day and has announced a five to 10 per

cent reduction from January.

Gulf Arabs may hold emergency meet

Reuters says from Kuwait: Kuwait's Oil Minister Ali Ahmed Al-Baghli was quoted yesterday as saying that Gulf Arab oil ministers might hold an emergency meeting to discuss falling oil prices.

Kuwait's Al-Anbassa newspaper said that Al-Baghli told it that Oman's Oil Minister Saeed Ibn Ahmad Al-Shanfari will next week inform the other Gulf Arab ministers on the results of his talks with non-OPEC producers to help boost oil prices.

"He (Baghli) told Al-Anbassa that Shanfari... will inform the Gulf Cooperation Council next week on the details of his tour," the newspaper said. It did not provide direct quotes by Baghli.

"He (Baghli) hinted about the possibility of holding an emergency meeting of the GCC Oil Ministers but he did not mention a date," the newspaper added.

The GCC states — OPEC

members Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar and non-OPEC members Bahrain and Oman — said last month that they were willing to cut their production if other OPEC and non-OPEC did the same.

An Omani Oil Ministry official told Reuters on Sunday that Shanfari would leave for Brunei and Malaysia on Tuesday on a second tour of non-OPEC producers.

Another AFP report adds from Kuala Lumpur: Malaysia said yesterday it would only consider cutting its oil output to contain a global glut if there was a consensus among producers to lower production to boost flagging prices.

"We are not going to act on our own. It has to be a global concerted effort to be effective," Syed Hamid Albar, Minister for Malaysia's Oil Industry, told reporters.

Hamid said Malaysia had already slashed oil output by 4.8 per cent from 630,000 barrels per day (BPD) to 600,000 BPD since April last year in the wake of global oversupply.

India's trade deficit falls

NEW DELHI, Jan 5: India's trade deficit for the first eight months of the financial year 1993-94 (April/March) declined sharply to 532 million dollar compared to 3.1 billion dollar in the same period of the previous year, the Commerce Ministry said, reports Reuters.

It said India's exports during April-November 1993 were estimated at 13.8 billion dollar compared to 11.5 billion dollar in the same period last year, an increase of 19.3 per cent.

Imports were valued at 14.3 billion dollar compared to 14.1 billion dollar in the same period last year, a decline of 2.1 per cent.

In November 1993, the balance of trade was positive with exports at 1.18 billion dollar and imports pegged at 1.64 billion dollar.

In Rupee terms, exports increased by 31.3 per cent during the first eight months of the financial year 1993/94 over the same period last year, while imports were higher by 7.13 per cent.

The trade deficit in rupee terms declined to 16.70 billion rupee in first eight months of 1993/94 (April/March) from 88.28 billion rupee in the same period of the previous financial year.



A selection of over 40 lorgnettes on Tuesday's belonging to the French family of Borde Opticiens, a firm of renowned spectacle makers, provides a fascinating insight into the history of eye wear. The collection is due to be sold at auction early in March and the items are expected to go under the hammer for between 200,800 pounds sterling each.

— AFP photo

Tajikistan adopts new Russian rouble as its currency

DUSHANBE, Tajikistan, Jan 5: Tajik television announced Tuesday that the Central Asian country will scrap all pre-1993 rouble and adopt the new Russian rouble as its legal currency, reports AP.

Russia announced last summer that it was abandoning pre-1993 roubles, but Tajikistan had continued to use old ruble as its currency.

Tajik television said the reason for the change was that the government no longer had enough old rubles to satisfy the demand for cash.

Starting January 8, the only legal tender in Tajikistan will be Russian rouble, printed in 1993 and thereafter, and salaries will be paid in new rouble.

The announcement said Tajik citizens would not be allowed to exchange their old rubles for new ones for the time being. Citizens were advised to deposit their savings, up to 200,000 rouble, into accounts at state banks. It is unclear when they will be able to obtain new rubles for their old ones.

Reports from the Tajik capital of Dushanbe said residents were already panicked by the measure, which effectively makes their savings worthless.

Dollar creeps higher against yuan on China's black market

BEIJING, Jan 5: The dollar crept higher against the yuan on China's black markets four days after the abolition of controlled official rates and the adoption of a state-managed floating exchange rate, money changers said on Tuesday, reports Reuters.

Confusion and chaos still dominated retail prices, which rocketed by 30 to 50 per cent at up-market hotels and shops after sweeping currency deregulation took effect on January 1, effectively devaluing the yuan by 33 per cent.

Prices rose despite a vague edict prohibiting such increases.

At least one government agency, Beijing's Telegraph and Telephone Bureau, raised prices 50 per cent for foreign companies settling in yuan instead of foreign exchange certificates, or FECs, which they were required to use before reform.

A clerk said the increase was spelled out in "internal regulations."

But some businesses began offering discounts for customers paying with FECs, whose value collapsed last week but has now nearly recovered after statements of official support.

The FEC, a separate foreigner's currency for 13 years, will be phased out gradually.

Dollar business has been anything but brisk as street traders hedged their bets amid unconfirmed rumours that access to foreign exchange would be liberalised sharply in coming days.

"Not many of US are trading in dollars right now," one woman in Beijing's busy Sanlitun black market said.

"I've heard that after 40 more days anyone will be able to buy dollars from the government so it's not worth the risk," she said.

Government officials have said restrictions on individuals' access to hard currency will remain firmly in place.

A few Sanlitun street traders were selling the dollar for 8.75 yuan, up from 8.65 yuan on the eve of the January 1 deregulation.

The 8.75 yuan rate also represents a slight premium over the central-bank-sanctioned floating rate of 8.7 yuan, a daily average of the previous day's trading at limited-access currency swap centres around the country.

In Shanghai, black market traders quoted a rate of 8.78 yuan for one dollar.

Traders said the narrow but slowly growing spread between the floating and black market rates reflected sharp restrictions on who could legally buy hard currency.

Despite its depiction as a market determined rate, the new floating rate has stayed unchanged at 8.7 in four days of dull swap centre trading.

Street traders said that barring a shift to full yuan convertibility, the black market dollar would rise further, buoyed by China's 20 per cent urban inflation and red hot 13 per cent annual economic growth.

"Demand for dollars has got to go up, especially with controls in place," one veteran money changer said.

Black market business was better for FECs, which are denominated in yuan but have long traded at a sharp premium to the yuan because of their relative convertibility and scarcity.

FECs, which are to be withdrawn in coming months, were commanding 1.4 yuan each on Tuesday in Sanlitun, down from 1.45 yuan before the new year but far higher than the one-to-one rate many nervous moneychangers were offering.



Mahbub Jamil, Chairman and Managing Director of Singer Bangladesh Ltd. opened the three-day Singer Annual Sales Conference '94 at Cox's Bazar Parjatan Complex recently.

Work for supplementing govt schemes, Mostafiz urges NGOs

Foreign Minister A S M Mostafizur Rahman yesterday urged the Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) to work for supplementing the government programmes for poverty alleviation and other development efforts, reports UNB.

"The role of NGOs in development efforts should not be seen as substitute of government programme," he told a seminar on the "Role of NGO in the development of Bangladesh" at a local hotel in the morning.

"Together we must devise a way of better integration of development activities of the NGOs with the national programmes," he said.

Speaking as the chief guest, Mostafiz lauded the role of the

NGOs as "the third sector in development process." He, however, said, "the NGOs must be accountable to the government as to their resource utilisation and their activities."

The Foreign Minister advised the development partners to avoid misuse of resources and duplication of efforts.

"Equity in the allocation of resources and access of services should be important element of NGOs policy and programme," Mostafiz added.

Referring to the government's policy on the subject, the Foreign Minister said, "the democratic government believes in decentralisation of development efforts in collaboration and coordination with

the NGOs."

Fullbright visiting scholar Ahtesham H. Chowdhury in his key note paper said, "there are about 15000 NGOs in Bangladesh of which about 750 organisations receive international assistance."

He explained the NGO's role in various sectors including eradication of illiteracy, medical facilities, poverty alleviation and human resources development.

"NGOs are not alternative to the government organisation which provides the framework within which we all operate," Chowdhury added.

Arranged by the Bangladesh Federation of Non-Government Organisations, the function was presided over by its Chairman Md Nazmul Haq.

Japan's 11 major banks' undisclosed bad loans swell to \$ 59.4b

TOKYO, Jan 5: Bad loans undisclosed by Japan's 11 major commercial banks total about 6.7 trillion yen (59.4 billion dollar), including 747 billion yen held by Hokkaido Takushoku Bank Ltd, the Yomiuri Shimbun newspaper reported Tuesday, says AFP.

The 11 major banks have already disclosed publicly 9.27 trillion in non-performing loans as of September 30, including the undisclosed sum, their combined bad loans swelled to 15.97 trillion yen, the mass-circulation daily said.

Bad loans or non-perform-

ing loans are loans which have become uncollectible due to the bankruptcy of borrowers or on which interest payments have not been made for six months or longer.

The daily said Hokkaido Takushoku Bank had 747 billion yen in undisclosed bad loans, compared to its disclosed amount of 440 billion yen.

The disclosed and undisclosed bad loans at Hokkaido Takushoku accounted for 15 per cent of the Sapporo-based bank's outstanding balance of lending, the daily said, adding

that the ratio is nearly three times higher than the 11 commercial banks' average.

Hokkaido Takushoku has already decided to stop lending to Kabuto Deco, a real estate firm whose president was arrested last month on suspicion of forging bills, the daily said.

But the bank will have to write off most bad assets amounting to about 90 billion yen extended to Katuto Deco, as well as about 57 billion yen to Esko Co., a Kabuto-affiliated credit company, the daily said.

Brazil's army to get \$ 800m for training, equipment

BRASILIA, Jan 5: Brazil's army will escape budget cuts felt elsewhere in 1994 and be given 800 million dollar to invest in training and equipment over the next four years, a Brazilian General said Tuesday, reports AFP.

General Gilberto Serra said the army would begin negotiations in the first half of this year to buy equipment, especially light arms, tanks and helicopters.

Foreign purchases will be coordinated by Brazilian military representatives in Washington.

No plan to devalue Iraqi currency

BAGHDAD, Jan 5: Iraq, striving to boost confidence in its sinking dinar, said on Monday it had no intention of devaluing the currency, reports Reuters.

"There is no intention at all to lower the value of the Iraqi currency," Baghdad newspapers said, quoting the Governor of Iraq's central bank, Tareq Talib Al-Tukmaji.

His statement came at a time when the dinar was plunging against the US dollar. It stood at 41 per dollar on the black market. The dinar's official rate is 3.2 dollar.

There is much conjecture here about what the government, battling against soaring prices, will do with the huge amounts of money in circulation.

Some say it will seize bank accounts. Others say it will devalue the dinar or change the currency.

Prices of essentials climb faster than wages in Sudan

KHARTOUM, Jan 5: Almost two years after Sudan's government announced sweeping measures to liberalise the economy, life is getting desperate for those on fixed salaries in both the private and public sectors, reports Reuters.

The reforms included a devaluation of the Sudanese pound, removal of subsidies on basic commodities, scrapping of import controls and decontrol of prices.

The strongly Islamic government of President Omar Hassan Al-Bashir, who came to power in a bloodless coup in 1989, said productivity would go up and life would improve for everybody.

Prices would rise at first but would lead to an abundance of commodities which would in turn bring prices down again, the then Finance Minister Abdel-Rahim Hamdi said.

But the prices of almost all commodities, especially basics like meat and bread, have climbed faster than wages — to the extent that few salaried employees can afford two meals a day.

Hamdi, who was closely associated with the reforms which had the backing of the International Monetary Fund, was removed in a cabinet reshuffle last November.

Sudan's economy is weighed down by foreign debts of more than 16 billion US dollar and a long-running civil war in the south which has led to widespread famine there.

The rate of inflation is officially put at 105 per cent.

Salaries in Sudan are extremely low. The minimum monthly salary including allowances is about 3,000 pound (0.4 US dollar). The maximum salary of civil servants is about 25,000 pound (78 US dollar). Most people take more than

one job to survive. A technician in a public corporation has a taxi which he drives after work. His monthly salary is 7,000 pound (29 US dollars) but he needs 1,500 pound (4.7 US dollar) a day to provide food for his family of four.

The low salaries are fuelling migration. On specialist doctor in a hospital in the capital Khartoum is trying hard to leave for the Gulf.

He says his salary is 23,000 pound (72 US dollar) a month yet his colleagues, working in the oil rich Gulf countries are getting about 5,000 US dollar a month — about 70 times his salary.

There are over 100,000 Sudanese working in Saudi Arabia alone. The reforms do appear however to be helping the poorly educated and those working in the private sector.

Japan's vehicle sale falls by 8.4 pc in '93

TOKYO, Jan 5: Japan's vehicle sales fell by 8.4 per cent in 1993, dropping below 5 million for the first time in five years, the Japan Automobile Dealers Association said Wednesday, reports AP.

As the nation's economic slump dragged on, 1993 also marked the first time that sales had fallen from year-earlier levels for three consecutive years, said Michiro Saitoh, a spokesman of the association.

He said sales declined 3.9 per cent in 1991 and 7.2 per cent in 1992.

Domestic sales of vehicles totaled 4,887,179, including 3,427,088 passenger cars, down 6.9 per cent from 1992; 1,441,066 trucks, down 11.7 per cent, and 19,025 buses, down 11.8 per cent, he said.

Pakistan denies curbing central bank's autonomy

ISLAMABAD, Jan 5: The Pakistani government yesterday denied it had curtailed groundbreaking autonomy given to the central bank three months ago by a caretaker government, reports Reuters.

A decree issued last week by Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's government removed uncertainty about the autonomy of the State Bank of Pakistan and "internal contradictions" in the previous bill, Finance Secretary Qazi Alimullah told a news conference.

Critics of the new decree say it curbs the central bank's independence by restricting its powers to fix government limits on borrowing, reducing the term of office of the governor and giving the government the right to name new directors.

The bank retained the power to determine the limit of credits to the federal and provincial governments but would now do so "in consultation with the federal government," Alimullah said.

However, analysts said the bank would not be in a position to override the federal government.

The government wanted to review the appointments of the governor and directors because these were made on October 6, the day of elections that brought Bhutto back to power and marked the last day of the government of caretaker Prime Minister Moeen Qureshi, Alimullah said.

A government elected for five years had the right to review these appointments and to have a team of its own choice.

"No government can function if it does not have a homogeneous team," Alimullah said. The provision of consulting the government did not take away the bank's right to fix final credit limits, he said.