

DHAKA WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 19, 1994

5 Muslim states
sign accords to
link up their
electricity grids

BAGHDAD, Jan 18: Senior officials from Iraq, Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Turkey signed bilateral accords here on Monday as part of a scheme to link up their electricity grids, officials said, reports AFP.

The project, under study since 1989, will go into operation next year and will cost an estimated 300 million dollars.

The cost will be borne by the Arab Economic and Social Development Fund based in Kuwait and the Islamic Development Bank based at Jeddah in Saudi Arabia, the officials said.

Jordan signed agreements with Egypt and Syria, Syria with Iraq and Turkey.

A fifth was concluded between Iraq and Turkey.

The accords concluded by the heads of the five countries' state electricity companies are to be ratified by ministers at a meeting in Cairo in April.

Iraq has had no diplomatic links with Syria since 1980 and broke off its ties with Egypt in January 1991.

APEC finance
ministers to
meet Mar 18
in Hawaii

JAKARTA, Jan 18: US Treasury Secretary Lloyd Bentsen said here Monday that finance ministers of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum would meet informally in Hawaii in March, reports AFP.

"I want to let you know that we have invited APEC finance ministers to meet informally in Hawaii, March 18th and 19th," Bentsen said on the second and last day of his Indonesian visit here.

Washington had earlier said the meeting was scheduled for April.

Bentsen said he expected the ministers would discuss development and opening markets, as well as making investment and sustaining growth.

He said the meeting will be useful to establish contacts and build relationships.

He said it was best for APEC's 15 members to build a relationship and start cooperation before there were critical problems between them.

Indonesia will host the second round of APEC ministerial meetings and the informal leaders' meeting in November.

APEC groups Australia, Brunei, Canada, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and the United States.

Tender Notice

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Pakistan approves farm
development package

ISLAMABAD, Jan 18: Pakistan yesterday approved a farm development package including the country's first agricultural tax, a government spokesman said, reports Reuters.

Agriculture, which accounts for 75 per cent of Pakistan's total foreign exchange earnings, will be the backbone of our economy, the spokesman said after a cabinet meeting.

The package includes plans for commercial and corporate farming, higher prices for crops, better credit facilities, crop insurance, improved fertilizer, seed and irrigation water supplies, and lower import duties on farm machinery.

Special farmers' banks will also be opened in rural areas.

Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's cabinet approved the tax in principle and necessary legislative and administrative actions would be taken later, the spokesman said.

The taxes on agricultural wealth and income have provoked opposition from powerful land-owners, many of whom are members of Bhutto's ruling Pakistan People's Party (PPP), and have never contributed to state coffers.

The taxes form part of a fund-raising plan which also includes obtaining 1.55 billion dollars from the International

Monetary Fund and other donors for the next three years.

The task force, which presented its report to Bhutto last month, raised the amount to be paid in income tax at the provincial level by making the tax progressive.

However, the report offset that tougher measure by introducing incentives to boost farmers' income through raising state-set support prices paid to farmers for their crops to bring them closer to market levels.

There is a need to relieve the farmers of the burden of implicit taxes in the form of government-fixed prices of agricultural commodities, which at present are below the market price of these commodities, the spokesman said.

"The prices of agricultural commodities need to be adjusted in favour of the farmers,"

Mobile telephone
in Malaysia

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 18: Two new mobile phone firms would start operations this year to feed Malaysia's booming telecom market, officials said Monday, but their services may still not be enough to meet projected demand, reports AFP.

There will, therefore, be an increase in the support price of wheat, rice, sugarcane and sunflower.

He said export duties on cotton through the fixation of a minimum export price and a benchmark system would be dismantled and forward trading would be permitted on the Karachi cotton exchange. All non-tariff measures for the prevention of export of raw cotton (will) be discouraged.

Cotton and cotton products account for 60 per cent of foreign exchange earnings, followed by rice exports.

The taxes — a wealth tax on large land-holdings to be passed by the national parliament and income taxes to be passed by the four provincial parliaments — will only affect farmers with more than about 50 acres (20 hectares).

International donors say the taxes are important because they will effect a structural change in an economy that has exempted agriculture since Pakistan's inception in 1947. Although initially they are not expected to be major sources of revenue.

The income tax will probably bring an additional 10,000 to 12,000 people into the tax net and raise about 48 million rupees a year.



Abdul Mueyed Chowdhury, Biman's Managing Director and Convener of Tourism Sub-Committee, briefing the visiting 11-member American tour operator and travel writer group at Parjatan's Hotel Abakash in the city Monday.

GATT chief
meets Brittan

BRUSSELS, Jan 18: The head of the GATT world trade body met European commissioners on a range of issues concerned with the signing of the Uruguay Round deal by the April 15 final deadline, a commission spokesman said, reports Reuters.

"They spoke about the strategy leading up to the final signing in Marrakesh on April 15," the spokesman said of the meeting between GATT Director-General Peter Sutherland and EU External Economic Affairs Commissioner Leon Brittan.

The discussions were largely to do with tying up the remaining loose strings following the December 15 agreement on the minimum that the final deal will contain," he added.

He said Sutherland and Brittan had discussed pressure by the European Union and US for Japan to open up its home market by more that it has already agreed to do in the December 15 deal, and that the head of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade had restated his position that any new offers must be on the table by February 15.

Dniestr issues
own currency

TIRASPOL, Moldova, Jan 18: The self-proclaimed republic of Dniestr, a Russian-speaking region in eastern Moldova which is seeking independence, introduced its own currency on Monday in the form of the old Russian rouble, reports AFP.

The notes carried a stamp bearing the head of Marshal Alexandre Suvorov, a hero of wars against Napoleon and against Turkey in the 19th century.

The authorities in Dniestr have consistently refused to adopt the lei of Moldova and had continued until now to use old roubles issued before 1993.

These notes, former Soviet paper and Russian notes issued in 1992, were withdrawn from circulation in Russian in July and were then withdrawn progressively in most of the former Soviet republics.

Response to January 15, 1994 opinion entitled "Ban on plastic bags: A short-sighted decision".

In his January 15th Opinion essay, Jalal Alamgir called the Bangladesh government's decision to ban plastic bags "short-sighted." UBINIG believes it was not the ban on plastic bag production, but it's reprieve that demonstrates a lack of care for the future of both the people and environment of Bangladesh.

Alamgir rightly recognizes that plastic waste does not degrade and therefore accumulates solid waste, clogs up drains, blocks air passages, and places additional burdens on garbage collection." However, he argues against the ban on plastic shopping bags, because "products have to be packaged for durability, security, and advertisement." The fact that many environmentally appropriate packaging materials exist and are in wide use throughout the world is not mentioned, nor is it even relevant to this particular debate. The government's ban on plastic bags does not interfere with the need for durability, security, and advertising in a product's primary packaging; it bans only disposable single use shopping bags which are totally unrelated to a product's primary packaging.

We do, however, agree on one point. Alamgir points out that "had the government been really sincere about plastic's negative effects on the environment, it would have simultaneously banned the import of plastic bags." We thank the writer for pointing this out and hope the government will both reinstate the ban on plastic bag production and strengthen it to include a ban on the import of plastic products and wastes.

Alamgir states that "a modern economy is driven by consumer demand." While consumer demand does play a role, there are unfortunately, even stronger forces driving today's modern economy. Among the most powerful forces is the profit motive.

Capitalist industrial society is driven by the desire to accumulate profit, with little regard to public health and environmental well-being.

A number of consumer organizations in industrialized countries are calling for bans on plastic packaging. The boom in plastic and related petrochemicals in the last 25 years or so has led to an enormous increase in the volume and toxicity of hazardous chemicals and wastes in the environment. These chemicals contribute to increased rates of cancer, birth defects and reproductive disorders. The public in industrialized countries equates plastic not with a

Opinion: Plastic bag issue

Reprieve is short-sighted,
not the ban

Although waste prevention technologies exist and public opinion polls consistently show consumer support for such environmental protection measures, industrial facilities continue to pollute the environment, their host communities, and their workers rather than invest in clean technologies, in order to maximize profits.

The reason that plastic is cheaper to produce than other forms of packaging is that plastic producers are permitted to externalize the true costs of their products.

Alamgir points to the use of plastic in industrialized countries as evidence of their appropriateness. However, plastic products are heavily criticized by the public in these countries. A 1990 Roper poll found that Americans think plastic packaging is the second most serious cause of the nation's solid waste problem. And a recent poll by the Wirthlin Group found that 73 per cent of the American public believe that "plastic harm the environment."

Thus, continued plastic use in industrialized countries does not result from consumer demand, but from industries' ability to externalize costs, their desire to maximize profit, and their complete disregard for human health, the environment, and public concern.

While other materials may be heavier than plastic to transport, a US based research organization, Franklin Associates, found that the distribution (eg. transport) of bottles accounts for only about 45 per cent of the energy consumed in the total production. Plus, the estimated energy re-



Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman speaking at a reception accorded to him by Green Delta Insurance Company at a city hotel Monday night. From left: Managing Director of the company Nasir A Chowdhury, Commerce Minister M Shamsul Islam and Shafat Ahmed Chaudhuri, Chairman of the company.

Rouble tumbles
to record low

MOSCOW, Jan 18: The rouble tumbled to a record low Tuesday amid uncertainty over the shape of Russia's future following the resignation of the Cabinet's leading economic reformer, reports AP.

Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin was expected to announce the lineup of his new Cabinet Tuesday after a meeting with President Boris Yeltsin.

Yeltsin, who last week told President Clinton that Russia's reforms would continue, accepted the resignation Monday of Deputy Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar, the architect of Russia's market reforms.

With Gaidar gone, hopes for reform were pinned on Finance Minister Boris Fyodorov, another ardent free marketeer.

If Fyodorov goes, said Mikhail Berger, an analyst for the newspaper IZVESTIA, "it will be very hard for Yeltsin and Chernomyrdin to convince anyone that reform will be preserved."

Fyodorov, an advocate of fiscal and monetary restraint, said he was willing to remain in the Cabinet only if two conservatives, including the chairman of the Central Bank, were replaced.

With the course of reform murky, the rouble tumbled seven per cent Tuesday to 1,504 to the US dollar. It was the largest drop since and 18 per cent fall on September 23 after Yeltsin disbanded parliament and it came on top of a three per cent decline Monday.

Cooperative officers'
confce begins

LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Barrister Abdus Salam Talukder said Tuesday that the present government had taken up realistic programmes for poverty alleviation, manpower development and employment generation through cooperatives, reports BSS.

Inaugurating a three-day conference of district level cooperative officers at Samabay Sadan in the city as the chief guest, Barrister Talukder said cooperative societies could play the vital role in over all socio-economic development of the country's teeming millions.

Presided over by Secretary of Rural Development and Cooperatives Division of LGRD and Cooperatives Ministry Mahe Alam, the function was also addressed by State Minister for Planning and Chairman of Bangladesh Samabay Bank Dr A Moin Khan, Deputy Minister for LGRD and Cooperatives A Hye, Chairman of Jatiya Samabay Union Salauddin Ahmed MP and Registrar of Cooperatives Al-haj Azizul Huq Bhuiyan.

The LGRD and Cooperatives Minister recalled with satisfaction the creation of employment opportunity for about 2.25 lakh people through cooperative societies so far. Referring to the accumulated wealth of about Taka 996 crore of cooperatives, the minister stressed the need for devotion of the cooperators for the success of the cooperative movement.

He referred to the two-year action plan undertaken by the cooperative directorate for fish cultivation, raising of poultry birds, mass education and expansion of tree plantation through cooperatives in the rural areas.

He urged the officials of the directorate to work with dedication and sincerity for the success of the cooperative movement which was launched in this Sub-Continent about 100 years ago.

He referred to success stories of some of the cooperatives including Milk Vita, Cooperative Insurance and Bangladesh Samabay Shilpa Sangstha.

He mentioned with satisfaction the role of cooperators in agriculture sector behind attaining near self-sufficiency in food production. He expressed the hope that they would help develop other sectors in the same spirit.

He said if one crore people who were associated with cooperatives could be mobilised and properly utilised, there could be tremendous improvement in the country's overall economic progress. He underlined the need for honest leadership for removing the prevailing shortcomings in some of the cooperative societies.

Referring to the role of the cooperative officials, he expressed the hope that they would work with dedication so that cooperative movement could reach its desired goal.

Agency data, three of the top five US industries with the largest total toxic emissions and offsite disposal of toxic chemicals are involved in the production of plastic.

A 1993 study by US waste consultants Cole and Brown on the environmental impacts of packaging materials found the dangers of plastic production (including waste produced, chances of serious hazardous accidents, feasibility of recycling, etc.) much worse than those of glass production.

Finally, Alamgir complains that "our ecological system is tremendously encumbered by an ever-growing population." An increasing volume of literature has found that "The nature of environmental disruption is only indirectly — and tenuously, if at all — related to the size and growth of population" (Kasun 1988). Instead, ecologically incompatible industrialization (of which plastic production is a prime example) is the leading threat to the global environment.

Dr. Barry Commoner, Director of the Centre for Biology of Natural Systems at Queens College in New York, found that between 1947 and 1970, population in the United States increased by 40 per cent, but pollutants increased 267 per cent due to the use of synthetic pesticides, 630 per cent due to nitrogen oxides in motor fuel, 648 per cent due to inorganic fertilizer nitrogen, and 1,845 per cent due to detergent phosphorus. These figures demonstrate that the best way to combat pollution is to transform those activities responsible for the production and releases of such huge amounts of pollution into clean production alternatives.

Switching from disposable plastic bags to reusable jute bags is a good way to begin this transformation.

In conclusion, UBINIG again offers their support for the government's ban on plastic bag production and encourages this ban to be expanded to protect Bangladesh from the dangers associated with plastic production, use, disposal, and import. Such a move is a significant and powerful step towards creating a toxic free world for people of Bangladesh and everywhere.

11,000 workers
in Indonesia
go on strike

JAKARTA, Jan 18: Some 11,000 workers of seven factories in Tangerang near here went on strike Monday calling on the management to respect the government-set minimum wage standards, press reports said today, reports AFP.

The Republik daily said that workers at the factories in the Tangerang industrial zone, want to be paid according to the Jakarta wage standard rather than the west Java standard.

The government has decided that as of January 1, the minimum wage standard applicable to industries in Tangerang, West Java, should come in line with that of nearby Jakarta.

The daily minimum wage for west Java stands at 2,600 rupiah (1.23 dollars) while the Jakarta standard stands at 3,200 rupiah (1.5 dollars).

Some of the factories involved are still paying workers below the minimum standards, the Republik quoted workers as saying.

The factories affected by the strike include the Indonesian producer of Nike Sportshoes, garments producers, furniture makers and a tin packaging plant.

Malaysian
edible oil assoc
refutes Aussie
allegations

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 18: The Malaysian Edible Oil Manufacturers' Association (MEOMA) has refuted Australia's allegations that Malaysia was dumping edible vegetable oils in retail packs in that country, reports Bernama.

MEOMA President Toh Pang Huat Monday said it was unfair for Australia to use the word dumping as Malaysia's exports of edible oil in retail packs were small and therefore would not cause any injury to the Australian domestic industry.

"Malaysia's export of edible oil in retail packs is less than 300 metric tonnes a year, which is so small and I don't think that is dumping," he said.

It was reported recently that Australia had accused Malaysia and Singapore of dumping edible vegetable oils which were allegedly sold in Australia at 60 per cent below prices of local oils.

Jakarta to import
100,000 tonnes of
cooking oil

JAKARTA, Jan 18: Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim nation, is to import 100,000 tonnes of cooking oil to meet possible increased demand during the month of Ramadan, a report said here today, according to AFP.

"We are allowed to import 100,000 tonnes of cooking oil to stabilise the domestic price during Ramadan," the BSNIS Indonesia daily quoted Food Minister Ibrahim Hasan as saying.

Hasan refused to single out the country from which the cooking oil would be imported.

Indonesia's total consumption of cooking oil was estimated at 2.4 million tonnes this year.

Bombay bourse
index gains
84 points

BOMBAY, Jan 18: Bombay shares prices climbed to dizzy heights the back of heavy buying by foreign investors, propelling the key index past the 4,000 mark for the first time since April 1992, reports AFP.

The Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) sensitive index of 30 blue-chip shares galloped to a Monday close of 4,022.72, gaining 84 points over Friday's finish.

The national index, which tracks the movement of the 100 most traded shares in India, zoomed to 1,914.5. It gained 21 points over Friday's close.

Both indices closed at their highest levels since a share price boom turned to bust in April 1992 after the surfacing of a major bank swindle.

That boom was fuelled by 1.3 billion dollars in bank funds siphoned off by unscrupulous bankers and brokers who used the money to play the stock market.

Analysts attributed the current bull run to heavy investment by foreign institutions to whom the market was thrown open in September 1992, and also to healthy economic indicators ahead of next month's federal budget presentation.

Almost every share is moving up, broker Mahesh Doshi said. "A lot of money is coming into the market."