

# Delhi cuts taxes, tariffs in budget

NEW DELHI, Mar 1: Indian Finance Minister Manmohan Singh slashed taxes and tariffs and took a big step towards a full float of the rupee Monday in a bold budget he said was designed to advance reform and stimulate industry, reports AFP.

But the stock market gave an initial thumbs-down to the 1994-95 budget unveiled in Parliament which taxed brokers, posed greater competition to domestic industry from imports and aroused concern over a run-away fiscal deficit.

The Bombay Stock Exchange lost 100 points before recovering slightly in a special post-budget trading session in what some analysts said was a knee-jerk reaction that would die down when the positive impact of the package sinks in.

Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao said the budget 'vastly strengthened' the market reforms he launched in 1991 overturning four decades of socialist-style protectionism.

Singh, saying his prime task was to stimulate recession-hit industry, slashed the corporate tax rate from a prohibitive 51.75 per cent to 40 per cent. Bank lending rates were cut one percentage point to 14

per cent.

He announced a thorough overhaul of the taxation system, describing it as a 'complex maze'.

In line with his commitment to global lending agencies to ease market access to imports, Singh lowered customs duty from a peak rate of 85 to 65 per cent, saying it would give industry access to cheaper imported raw material.

Corresponding duty concessions were offered to preserve the competitiveness of domestic industry. Service sector institutions such as brokerages, non-life insurance companies and telephones were brought under the tax net.

In a major step towards making the rupee full convertible, the finance minister eased access to foreign exchange on current business transactions and for purposes of travel, education and medical treatment overseas.

Singh projected total receipts at 48.5 billion dollars and total internal expenditure at 50.5 billion dollars in the year to March 31, 1994.

Subsidies were largely untouched and welfare programmes, infrastructure and rural development were given

sizeable raises. Individual income tax-payers were given a minor exemption.

Singh boosted defence spending by 1.27 billion dollars to 7.6 billion, saying: "We cannot take chances with national security."

Analysts noted that such generosity, in addition to the burden of debt servicing and repayments on external and internal borrowings, had left an alarming fiscal deficit of 18 billion dollars.

Banker Suresh Babu called it 'disastrous'. "At eight per cent of the gross domestic product the fiscal deficit is unacceptably high," he said, warning that it held the potential to spark off an inflationary spiral.

The fiscal deficit in fiscal 1993-94 was put at 19.5 billion dollar — about six billion more than Singh had anticipated a year ago — after ballooning as a result of increased spending and falling revenues.

Opposition leader Lal Krishna Advani said the budget presented a 'depressing and thoroughly disappointing picture' and warned that the nation was plunging deeper into the trap of deficit financing.

Singh admitted there were

"some warning signals we must heed," and announced plans to tighten the governments' access to central bank credit through arbitrary issue of treasury bills.

But he underscored the need to give a major push to industry to boost economic growth above an anticipated four per cent in the current fiscal year.

Slow industrial recovery had kept overall growth low and prompted a fall in revenue collections, he said, voicing hope that lower taxes would lead to greater compliance and lesser evasion.

In a sign of confidence, he said the government intended to repay 1.4 billion dollars to the International Monetary Fund earlier than scheduled.

Industry reaction to Singh's fourth consecutive budget was positive.

The budget is industry-friendly, investment, friendly and growth-oriented, said Hari Shankar Singhania, President of the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

Bansi Dhar of the Tata Group was equally optimistic. "It has all the ingredients to take India to the front-ranking nations of the world."

## Australia forecasts \$10.5 b budget deficit

CANBERRA, March 1: Australia must stick to its plan for reducing its budget deficit to maintain confidence in the economy, Treasurer Ralph Willis said in a discussion paper released today, reports AFP.

The government has forecast a budget deficit of 14.75 billion Australian (10.5 billion US dollar) for the 12 months to June 30 and is committed to cutting that figure to about 6.0 billion dollars in 1996-97.

"Credible progress in the government's medium term deficit reduction programme is crucial to the maintenance of confidence," Willis said.

"Without it, increased inflationary expectations and concerns about consequential loss of competitiveness and increased interest rates would abort the investment take-off."

The paper will form the basis for discussions on the May 10 budget within the ruling labour party and with minor parties, who hold the balance of power in the Upper House.

Willis cautioned against cutting the budget deficit too far in the next financial year. "Too great a cut would re-

duce the overall level of demand in the economy, and so risk inhibiting economic recovery," Willis said.

"It is therefore, a matter of fine judgement as to what the deficit reduction should be for 1994/95, requiring close assessment of the underlying strength of the economy."

Willis said the fiscal framework was "very tight" but was in the context of a greatly improved economic outlook.

He repeated the government's most recent forecast that growth in Gross Domestic Product would run at 4.0 per cent in 1994-95 compared to a predicted 3.5 per cent in this financial year.

"Sustained high levels of economic growth require the maintenance of low inflation, low interest rates and the avoidance of balance of payments constraint," the paper said.

"A fiscal policy which reduces the level of public sector demands on the economy as private sector growth accelerates, and reduces the public sector's call on the national savings needed to fund economic growth, is essential to achieve these outcomes."

## Dhaka Stock Prices

At the close of trading on March 1, 1994

### Gainers dominate floor

Star Report

The gainers, led by the Bangladesh Tobacco Company Ltd (BTC) in terms of volume, heavily dominated the floor of the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) on Tuesday.

The BTC led 38 gainers out of 55 issues traded. The share prices of seven issues, led by the Tullu Spinning in terms of volume, declined and ten others were remained unchanged.

The BTC's 13650 shares were traded at the rate of Taka 181.00 as against last trading day's Taka 180.00.

The 6th ICB M Fund (1370), Atlas Bangladesh (2510), Quasem Drycells (2150), Zeal Bangla Sugar (3500), Rupam Oil (5600), Eagle Star Textile (1750), Beximco Synthetic (6220), GQ Ball Pen (2670) and the Beximco Ltd (7600) were also the major gainers in terms of volume.

The Bangladesh Lamps, with a gain of Taka 100.00 per share, dominated the gainers' list in terms of volume. The turnovers on the DSE fell. The volume dropped by 20 per cent and the value showed decline of 20 per cent. A total of 55095 shares changed hands at Taka 6693835.00 as against 69139 shares valued at Taka 8369883.50 of the previous day.

The DSE All Share Price Index rose to 549.84509 from 546.16884, an increase of 0.6731 per cent.

The following are the Sonali Bank's dealing rates to public for some selected foreign currencies effective as on Mar 1.

(Figures in Taka)

Currency	TT & OD	OD	Transfer
US Dollar	40.1810	40.2110	39.9805
Pound Sterling	59.7170	59.7616	58.9535
DM	23.6914	23.7091	23.3249
FF Franc	6.7618	6.7670	6.6589
C Dollar	29.9347	29.9570	29.4781
S Franc	28.3044	28.3255	27.8575
Jap Yen	0.3883	0.3886	0.3785
Indian Rupee (AMU)	1.2844	1.2883	1.2741
Pak Rupee (AMU)	1.3191	1.3231	1.3085
Iranian Rial (AMU)	0.0231	0.0232	0.0229

A) T. T. (DOC) US Dollar Spot Buying Tk 39.9382

B) Usance Rates:

30 Days DA 39.3480 90 Days DA 38.7816 180 Days DA 38.2152

C) US Dollar sight export bill 3 months forward purchase Tk 39.8960

D) US Dollar 3 months forward sale Tk 39.8960

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## American banker granted immunity in Iraq loan case

ATLANTA, Mar 1: A federal judge granted imprisoned banker Christopher P. Drogoul immunity from further prosecution so he can testify before a grand jury probing his former employer's loans to Iraq, Drogoul's lawyer said Monday, reports AP.

"Apparently they have convened a grand jury, at least in Atlanta, which is scheduled to commence tomorrow morning," said Attorney Robert M. Stine.

U.S. District Judge G. Ernest Tidd, granted immunity to Drogoul, a major figure in the case involving five billion dollars in loans to Iraq by the Atlanta branch of Italy's Banca Nazionale del Lavoro.

Prosecutors say Iraq used at least some of the money, obtained under a U.S. government programme to help finance agricultural exports, to buy weapons before its invasion of Kuwait in 1990.

Drogoul pleaded guilty to wire fraud and submitting false reports to bank regulators. He is serving the final months of a 37-month prison term.

Leon Brittan assured

## China won't punish British firms

LONDON, Mar 1: European Commissioner Sir Leon Brittan said on Monday China had assured him it would not punish British firms in retaliation for a row over Hong Kong, reports Reuters.

Brittan, in Beijing for talks on subjects including China's bid to re-enter the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), told Chinese leaders non-discrimination was the basis of European Union (EU) trade policy. Disagreements over Hong Kong should not be met with discrimination, he said.

"I made it clear it would be a matter for the EU as a whole and a very serious matter if there was any such discrimination," Brittan told British Broadcasting Corporation Radio.

"I have had an assurance from the very highest level in China saying that there will be no discrimination against any individual member state of the EU and that it is recognised that non-discrimination is a fundamental principle of the GATT."

"This is an important development."



## New DMD of Pragati Insurance

Reza-e-Karim Khan has joined Pragati Insurance Limited as Deputy Managing Director recently, says a press release.

Karim joined insurance industry in 1966. He did his MBA from Dhaka University and worked in various capacities in state owned Sadharan Bima Corporation. Before joining Pragati he was General Manager (Finance and Administration) in Sadharan Bima Corporation.

## Yugoslavia's hyperinflation being tamed

BELGRADE, Mar 1: Yugoslavia's hyperinflation, one of the worst in history, is being tamed, the newspaper Politika said yesterday, reports Reuters.

It said the country had cut its monthly inflation rate to one per cent in February from 313 million per cent in January.

Last year Yugoslavia suffered hyperinflation of over one billion per cent. But the Belgrade government launched an anti-inflation programme on January 24, pegging the new 'super dinar' to one German mark and gold reserves.

"The hurricane hyperinflation of 313 million per cent in January has been cut down to only one per cent in February," Politika said, quoting from an interview with Milovan Zivkovic, head of Serbia's bureau of statistics.

Experts said Yugoslavia's hyperinflation was curbed mainly by a tight control of fresh money on the market.

The economy of Yugoslavia, hurt by UN sanctions imposed because of Belgrade's support for Serbs in Bosnia's three-sided civil war, came close to collapse last year and authorities were forced to continually print fresh money.

With industry practically at a standstill, the relentless printing of money resulted in hyperinflation exceeding one billion per cent last year.

## Chinese economy reaches cyclical peak in '93

BEIJING, Mar 1: China's overheated economy reached its cyclical peak in 1993, but official growth and inflation targets for 1994 may still turn out to be the unachievable 'ideals', the State Statistical Bureau (SSB) said Monday, reports AFP.

China's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew 13.4 per cent last year to 3.14 trillion yuan (361 billion dollars), the highest rate since 1985, while industrial output totalled 1.41 trillion yuan, up 21.1 per cent on 1992, SSB Director General Zhang Sai quoted the bureau's 1993 communique as saying.

Investment in fixed assets jumped 50.6 per cent over 1992 to 1.18 trillion yuan while the amount of money in circulation soared 35.3 per cent to 586.5 billion yuan, fuelling retail price increases of 13 per cent nationally.

The cost of living meanwhile rose 14.7 per cent nationwide, with the rate for the 35 biggest cities at 19.6 per cent compared with 13.7 per cent in the countryside, the communique said.

But the bureau chief noted that per capita income had on the whole kept ahead of inflation with real increases of 10.2 per cent in cities to 2,337 yuan and 3.2 per cent in rural areas to 921 yuan.

However, he acknowledged, rapidly increasing prices had led to the decline of living standards in some households.

Direct foreign investment continued to soar, with 110.9 billion dollars contracted, up 90.7 per cent, and 25.76 billion dollars utilised, up 130 per cent, the SSB report said, adding imports jumped 29 per cent to 104.4 billion dollars while export rose only eight

per cent to 91.8 billion dollars. The report revealed that China's foreign exchange reserves hit 21.2 billion yuan, up 1.76 billion on the end of 1992. Funds deposited in the bank of China, the country's main foreign exchange bank, were not included.

Zhang said the main problems facing the economy were steep price rises, together with excessive fixed-asset investment and bottlenecks caused by the failure of infrastructure to meet the demands of high growth. Transport facilities could only meet 60 per cent of demand, he said.

He said he believed GDP growth and inflation had both hit the peak of the current cycle, but indicated they would remain relatively high for some time and gave little sign of government resolve to bring them down.

## Iranian rial plunges to record low

TEHRAN, March 1: The Iranian rial plunged to a record low against major foreign currencies yesterday, losing nearly 10 per cent of its value against the dollar in 24 hours, reports AFP.

The rial dropped to 2,700 against the Greenback on the open market from 2,480 on Sunday, further widening the margin with the official rate which remains at 1,750 to the dollar.

The dollar had gained 65 per cent in value in the past four months, after the central bank stopped its intervention in the market in late October.

To prevent a collapse of the national currency, the Iranian monetary authorities spent hundreds of millions of dollars on the market for several months last summer and autumn.

But the move had to be stopped because of the bank's

limited hard currency reserves and the country's severe cash crisis.

The collapse of the rial has been directly linked here with a fall in the price of oil, Iran's main export, and a reduction by 30 per cent in the country's hard currency earnings.

Iran received some 12 billion dollars in oil income in 1993, while it owes some 30 billion dollars in short- and medium-term foreign debt, of which more than 13 billion dollars are arrears in payment.

The rial accelerated its fall after the government imposed new restrictions on imports by private companies last week in a bid to shore up its hard currency reserves.

The fall in the rate of the rial could also be because of the coming of the Iranian new year in March 21 and a rise in the demand for imported goods.

## Dollar, stocks up in Tokyo

TOKYO, Mar 1: The US dollar finished higher against the Japanese yen Tuesday, while prices on the Tokyo Stock Exchange advanced moderately, reports AP.

The dollar closed at 104.92 up 0.62 yen from Monday's close and above its overnight New York finish at 104.60 yen.

After opening at 104.70 yen, it ranged between 104.52 yen and 104.99 yen.

Traders said the dollar was supported by buying from US fund managers Monday in New York, but news of NATO's first offensive military action in its 44-year history was mostly played out on overseas exchange markets.

US jets, under NATO command, shot down four Bosnian Serb planes that violated a United Nations no-fly zone over Bosnia Monday.

The dollar is considered a safe haven in times of international unrest.

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