

Stride toward more open world trade begins in Morocco

MARRAKESH, Morocco, Apr 12: Ministers from more than 120 countries opened a four-day meeting Tuesday to cement an agreement opening up the world trading system and lay the trade agenda into the next century, reports AP.

"We should be proud of this stride toward a more open world which will be, through the lifting of barriers and protectionist regulations, a source of prosperity and welfare for the peoples worldwide," said Moroccan Crown Prince Sidi Mohammed in an opening speech.

The so-called Uruguay Round accord was reached last December after seven years of bitter negotiations.

Many of the ministerial speeches which culminate in Friday's pomp-laden signing ceremony, will be congratulatory. Others are expected to take a swipe at the United States for its perceived use of economic muscle to force open markets.

US Trade Representative Mickey Kantor arrived Tuesday for the celebrations and, more importantly for bilateral talks to boost American exports.

He is scheduled to meet during the day with European Union trade commissioner Sir Leon Brittan for talks to open up supply markets to state-owned companies.

The two sides last year averted a trade war when the EU agreed temporarily to waive measures favouring European heavy electrical equipment companies competing for contracts with state-run monopolies. In return, Washington agreed to relax some of its own restrictions.

They now want to put this on a permanent footing under the Uruguay Round accord and

to settle an ongoing disagreement over state contracts for telecommunications equipment purchases.

Kantor was cautious about the prospects for a meeting scheduled Friday with Japanese Foreign Minister

Tsutomu Hata. The two sides are looking to resume full negotiations on how to reduce Japan's \$59.3 billion yearly trade surplus with the United States.

The Japanese cabinet was due to meet later Tuesday to approve sending Hata to this lush Moroccan City. But given the political crisis in Tokyo, it is unlikely he will have much negotiating authority.

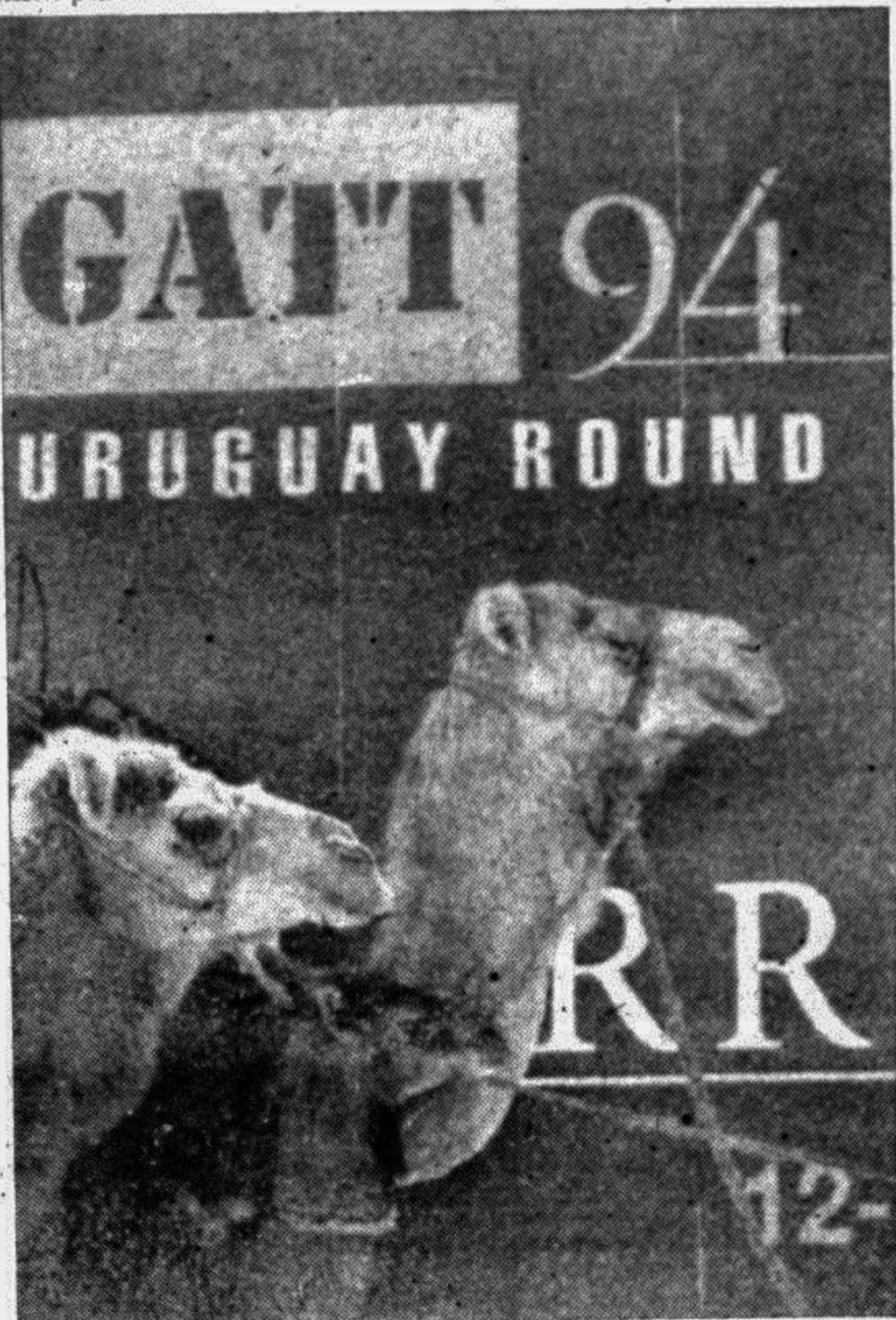
On the eve of the meeting, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade published a study to demonstrate that there will only be winners from freer trade.

It said the accord would boost global trade by 755 billion dollar per year and pump an additional \$235 billion into the global economy by the year 2005.

"If I had to sum up the Uruguay Round in one word, it would be opportunity," GATT Director-General Peter Sutherland told the meeting. "The agreements you sign will mean opportunity to expand trade and employment," he said.

But non-governmental aid organizations, including the British-based Christian Aid, warned that poor countries in sub-Saharan Africa would get poorer. The reduction of US and European agricultural export subsidies, which helps them undercut other farmers on world markets, will help efficient agricultural exporters but may push up food bills in importing nations.

The Uruguay Round rolls back barriers to trade, including for the first time agricultural products and textiles, and updates obsolete trading rules.



Camels pass in front of the official placard of the Marrakesh ministerial meeting on April 11 near the congress hall where industrial countries will cut tariffs on industrial products by 38 per cent on average under the world trade pact to be signed this week. — AFP photo

Number of fruit bearing trees decreasing in Barguna

BARGUNA, Apr 12: The number of fruit bearing trees is gradually decreasing in the district due to its indiscriminate felling by the traders, reports UNB.

The poverty stricken poor people of the district are selling their trees like mango, jack-fruit, black berry, lichi and other species to the wood traders to meet their family expenditures.

The demand for firewood has increased largely due to its increased use in the brickfields and also for making furniture. On the other hand, planting of saplings has not increased proportionately.

Meanwhile, cultivable lands are being utilized for the construction of houses in the rural areas. As a result, farmers are much less interested in planting trees.

Despite the government ban, the brickfield owners are using firewoods for manufacturing bricks.

Furniture factories and firewood traders are also purchasing huge quantity of woods every day to meet their requirement.

According to experts, the unabated felling of trees is adversely affecting the environment causing ecological imbalance in the district.

Opposition asks Rao to seek fresh mandate for signing GATT

NEW DELHI, Apr 12: India's main opposition party today asked Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao to seek a fresh mandate for signing the GATT treaty, reports AP.

A mid-term election should be held to national parliament along with polls in 10 Indian states due later this year and

in 1995, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party) said.

The parliamentary balloting will help "know the people's response to the treaty," the Press Trust of India (PTI) quoted BJP General Secretary M. Venkaiah Naidu as saying in the northern city of Jaipur.

Rao's Congress (I) government came to power in June 1991 for five years.

Naidu said the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade Agreement, to be signed in Morocco on Friday, would particularly harm India's farm sector, and predicted a massive, country-wide campaign against the treaty in the coming days.

"The BJP will take the GATT issue to the people," he said.

The BJP and communists held massive demonstrations on two consecutive days here last week to denounce the GATT accord, which they said would seriously hit the domestic industry and agriculture and push up the cost of medicines.

Critics say that farmers would be forced to pay seed royalties on every crop they sow. Pharmaceutical firms would have to accept international patents, making medicines costlier.

Today, Finance Minister Manmohan Singh reiterated that the global trade accord would boost India's economy.

He told a seminar here that the GATT would be a boon to Indian agriculture and textiles as a result of greater market access, but admitted that prices of certain patented drugs in India would go up.

Suspend loans to Iran, US urges Japan

TOKYO, Apr 12: The United States has urged Japan to suspend governmental loans to Iran on grounds that the nation has sabotaged Middle East peace and sponsored terrorism around the world, a newspaper reported Tuesday, reports AP.

The leading economic daily Nihon Keizai, quoting unnamed government sources, said the issue has yet to be settled and could become a major subject of discussion at the July summit of the Group of Seven leading industrial nations.

Teruhide Terada, a Foreign Ministry spokesman, said there have been diplomatic discussions between Japan and the United States regarding Japan's loan programmes for Iran. But he declined to disclose their contents.

Last May, Japan lifted a nearly 18-year freeze on official development assistance loans to Tehran. It signed an agreement to extend 38.6 billion yen (dollar 375 million) as the first of three instalments to help finance construction of a multipurpose dam in southern Iran.

For the 2.14 billion dollar 3rd instalment along the Karun River, scheduled to be completed in 2000, Japan plans to provide a total of 1.46 billion dollars. The second instalment is scheduled to be provided later this year. Its amount and other details have yet to be negotiated.

Last May's agreement, however, was accompanied by documents in which Japan warned Iran that the loan could be withdrawn.

Queen Elizabeth loses her place as UK's richest

LONDON, Apr 12: Queen Elizabeth II has been toppled from her position in The Sunday Times table of Britain's richest people by two Swedish-born business brothers, reports AP.

The Times of London reported Monday that the annual table compiled by its weekly sister paper shows Gad and Hans Rausing with a combined fortune of 5.2 billion pounds (dollar 7.64 billion) against 5 billion pounds (dollar 7.35 billion) for the queen.

The brothers made their money from milk cartons. "The queen's... pride may be flattered by the fact that she has been placed second place required the pooled wallets of Gad and Hans Rausing, the brothers whose father invented the Tetrapak (milk) container," The Times said.

It said Gad, 71, and Hans, 68, have lived in Britain since the early 1980s.

The table is compiled from published details about individuals' wealth and estimates where these are not available.

"The Sunday Times found that its first wealth league in 1989 was split equally between old and new money: in its latest list of the 500 richest people in Britain... only 28 per cent of the people inherited their fortune," The Times reported.

The table listed the richest Asians in Britain as Sri and Gopi Hinduja, the oil and trading family, with a joint fortune of 1.35 billion pounds (dollar 1.83 billion).

Members pledge \$16.33m to ESCAP

NEW DELHI, Apr 12: Member countries of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) pledged 16.33 million dollars for its activities in 1994, up 23 per cent over the previous year's funding, reports Reuters.

Japan topped the contribution for 1994 by dollars 1.0 million to dollars 3.2 million while Korea was 25 per cent higher at 500,000 dollars the statement said.

China's contribution will go up by 36 per cent in local currency and 25 per cent in US dollar funds.

BPC's unwise financial operations with some banks alleged

CHITTAGONG, Apr 12: Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation is allegedly running unwise financial operations with some banks, reports AP.

According to sources, BPC opened a series of fixed deposit accounts in a scattered way with at least 38 branches of some banks located at various parts of Dhaka and Chittagong and deposited around Taka 250 crore.

Though BPC is located at Agrabad of Chittagong Port city, it had opened about 50 per cent of its fixed deposit accounts in Dhaka, sources informed.

Interestingly, BPC made deposits with the same bank under different branches located at various remote places, reports said.

As for instance, BPC opened four accounts with National Bank Ltd and of them, three in Dhaka and one at Agrabad of Chittagong while it opened six accounts with IFIC bank in-

cluding three in Dhaka, reports added.

Similar practice was made with other banks including Rupali Bank, Arab Bangladesh Bank, Agrani, Sonali, Janata and Pubali Banks, reports also added.

According to sources, a section of BPC officials are reportedly involved in depositing the funds with the branches of their choice in such a scattered way in a bid to draw some personal benefits.

When contacted, the Chairman of Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation Fazlul Haque said over telephone "I don't rule out the possibility of personal interests by some officials in making such scattered deposits with various branches of banks".

"But now I have suggested my officials deposit the organisation's money at Agrabad area branches of banks near to our office," the Chairman added.

Indian tycoon keen to set up 250 MW power plant

A leading private sector power generation company of India is keen to set up a 250 megawatt power plant in Bangladesh, reports UNB.

The interest of the RPG Enterprises Limited, the fifth largest company in India, was disclosed by its Chairman Emeritus RP Goenka at a meeting in Dhaka yesterday.

Goenka said his company would send a team to Bangladesh after formal approval is given by the cabinet to the country's Energy Policy allowing private sector investment in power generation.

"We need to be sure that someone will purchase the electricity, and the proposed Energy Policy, as we were informed, will provide that guarantee," he told the meeting at the auditorium of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI).

Leading businessmen, industrialists and entrepreneurs of the country were present at the meeting.

Goenka 63, a Calcutta-based

industrialist, said his company is currently generating 1000 megawatt of power and distributing it in some nine Indian cities. They were planning to increase the generation capacity to 1700 MW by 1997, he added.

Goenka said system loss in the power sector is 15.5 per cent in Calcutta while it ranged from 12.28 per cent in greater India. By avoiding every one per cent of system loss, there can be a saving of Tk 24 crore, he informed.

The Indian industrialist said the RPG Enterprises, which have an annual turnover of Rs. 3,200 crore, also has a factory in Madras producing chemicals for processing leather. They will be willing to supply such chemicals to Bangladesh and might even set up a unit here if there is adequate demand, he added.

FBCCI President Mahbubur Rahman urged the Indian industrial tycoon to set up textile mills and telecommunication industries in Bangladesh.



George P. Georgitsis, (L) Vice President (Technical Operations) of the Pepsi-Cola International Asia Division is seen handing over the quality award of Pepsi-Cola to Mia Amanullah, Managing Director of Bangladesh Beverage Industries Limited at Panda Garden in the city yesterday. — Star Photo

Haripur — the only oil producing field in Bangladesh

yet to be evaluated for their commercial production feasibility. Until now, Haripur remains the only oil producing field in the country.

Haripur oil field, by world standard, is a very small field with an estimated recoverable reserve of about 6 million barrels of oil and an estimated probable total reserve of about 25 million barrels, according to Petrobangla information. Oil production in the field started in January 1997 and till date about 500,000 barrels of oil has been produced leaving a further 5.5 million barrels of producible oil. Oil production rate has gradually decreased from about 450 barrel a day at the beginning to the present level of about 100 barrel a day. This production is far from the demand of petroleum of about 45,000 barrel a day for the country.

How Haripur is related to the Assam oil? The Brahmaputra valley in the Upper Assam form one of the most prominent oil rich province in India and it supplies a major share of the total Indian oil production. Most of the oil fields in Assam are big to very

big. Geological comparison of Assam and Bangladesh oil occurrences has shown striking similarities. Both Haripur and Assam oil are paraffinic, highly waxy and are genetically related. However while most of the reservoir horizons in Assam oil fields belong to the Barail rock layers, the Bangladesh oil horizons are located in the overlying Surma rock layers. The Barail rock layers in Bangladesh lie beneath the Surma rock layers at great depth not yet tested by deep drilling. The Patharia-5 well in Sylhet basin, originally planned to test Barail rock layers with a target depth of 5000 meters had to be abandoned at about 3400 meters due to mechanical problems. Thus the Barail rock layers, yet to be tested in Bangladesh, remains a prime target for oil.

Haripur oil field is more closely related to the Badarpur oil field just 10 km east of Sylhet-India border. The Badarpur oil field was discovered in 1915 and produced high wax oil from Surma rock layers, for about 18 years before being exhausted of its oil con-

tent. The total number of well drilled in Badarpur was 60, the average daily production of oil per well was 10 to 20 barrels and a cumulative of about 2 million barrels of oil was ultimately produced from the field.

How has Haripur oil field been managed from the beginning? Although Haripur discovery in 1986 was hailed as a "Great achievement" in the context of national economy, not all the drum beating that followed had sweet sounds.

In fact the whole aspect of Haripur oil discovery turned sour when the Ershad government handed over the oil field to an unknown and ambiguous company, named Scimitar Oil Ltd. This was too much of humiliation, perhaps, for the Bangladeshi geologists and engineers who discovered the oil field and who should have been rewarded for the discovery instead. As the event followed, the fall of Ershad government, charged with numerous mismanagement of national wealth, coincided with unveiling of the Haripur oil

Dr Badrul Imam

conspiracy as widely reported in the press by the Public Enquiry Commission on Haripur oil as headed by Dr. Kamal Hossain. While Ershad never recognised the Public Enquiry Commission on Haripur oil, the newly elected BNP government became a pain in the neck for Scimitar and cases were lodged against the Scimitar for breach of contract and fraud. This was taken up seriously by the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources with Dr K. Mosarrat Hossain in charge of the Ministry who happened to be a member of the Public Enquiry Commission. Scimitar was alleged for breach of contract and caught almost red handed for fraud as it prepared false ministerial document with fabricated signature of high government officials including that of the minister of Energy Resources.

This was enough for the present government to cancel the contract with Scimitar which had to leave the country in disgrace. Subsequently Scimitar lodged a case against Bangladesh government in international court asking for compensation. This episode was concluded with the verdict of the case gone in favour of Bangladesh government.

It thus follows that since the discovery of Haripur oil field, it was never given a proper development programme. Scimitar's drilling of the Surma-1 well in 1989 was a kind of non-professional job because this was not preceded by seismic survey and hence was a failure as a dry hole. This resulted in a situation whereby the discovery well Sylhet-7 (later named as Haripur-1) remained the sole oil producing well in the field for more than seven year to date — a rather unusual situation in the development history for an oil field by any standard. This had certainly not helped the underground oil reservoir of the field and was not healthy for the life of the oil field.

The geology of Haripur oil field testifies its not so simple structure setting. The oil was trapped by an anticlinal fold which is significantly faulted. Thus the location and extent of the oil reservoir in the subsurface has been controlled by fault system. The complex distribution of the reservoir by faultings could however, be resolved by close grid seismic survey and certainly to a very satisfactory degree by 3D seismic survey. Fixing the location of development well for increasing the oil production should have been followed by such seismic coverage. The production of oil from the field could thus be systematically increased to optimal level. Unfortunately this was never done denying Haripur field a proper development programme till date, although the petroleum experts believe that the above could boost the production level significantly.

After Scimitar finally lost its case against the government of Bangladesh in early 1994, the government regained undisputed claim on block 13 in Sylhet basin including Haripur oil field with respect to oil exploration and production. However, Sylhet Gas Field Company Ltd (SGFCL — a subsidiary of Petrobangla), the operator of Sylhet-7 well, is yet to receive a working order from the government

regarding the Haripur field. There seems to have no oil field development programme of Petrobangla at present for Haripur field. Sylhet-7 well is being seen as a declining well whose production level has dropped from 450 barrel a day at the beginning to the present level of about 100 barrel a day.

The block no. 13 in the Sylhet basin in which the Haripur oil field is located is being negotiated for a Production Sharing Contract with the internationally renowned Occidental Oil Company.

According to a reliable source, the Occidental Oil would be offered, if an agreement is reached, the block 13 minus the Haripur oil field area. So Occidental Oil, in that case, would be expected to discover and develop new oil field only. What would happen to the Haripur oil field is not yet clear. This much talked about oil field, a milestone in the exploration venture of Bangladesh petroleum sector, should be placed in a proper appraisal and development programme instead of just referring to the declining oil production of a single well — the discovery well.

The writer is a professor of the Department of Geology, Dhaka University.

Nepal, Germany sign accord to establish export promotion project

KATHMANDU, Apr 12: A Nepal-German export promotion project will be established to develop export industry in Nepal, reports Xinhua.

An agreement to this effect has been signed here on Monday between Nepal-German Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NGCCI) and the German Agency for Technical Cooperation.

The project will focus its activities mainly on textile, garment, knit-wear, leather and leather-goods, handicrafts and jewellery.

The project will also take appropriate measures for sustaining the competitiveness of Nepalese carpet industry taking into consideration the present international carpet market situation.

BSIC embroidery training course for women ends in Tangail

TANGAIL, Apr 12: The three month long training course on embroidery for women concluded recently at the Bangladesh Shal and Cottage Industries Corporation premises here, reports BSS.

Thirty women took part in the training course, AHM Shamsul Alam, Dhaka Divisional Regional Manager of BSIC, distributed certificates among the participants.

Speaking on the occasion he hoped that such training would enable women to find self-employment to establish themselves in the society. Such training is needed to create job opportunity for the women, he added.

Shamsul Haque Chairman Tangail Paurashava, attended the function as special guest.

Amirul Islam Chowdhury, Assistant General Manager BSIC Tangail, presided over the function.

Students asked to cultivate vegetables

MYMENSINGH, Apr 12: Dr Monwar Ahmed, agriculture scientist and Director Research System of Agriculture University, called upon the students to cultivate vegetables in the premises of their respective institutions to grow habit of savings, reports UNB.

He made the call while distributing prizes and certificates as their guest among the students of 21 educational institutions of Agriculture University Extension Centre who took part in its Educational Winter Crops Cultivation Programme.

The prize giving ceremony organised by the centre last week was presided over by its Director Prof Abdul Halim.

Dr Monwar also called upon the students to plant saplings and cultivate vegetables at the courtyard of their houses for the economic development of the country. He said the school and madrasa teachers can play a very important role in this regard.

Sutiakhali Government Primary School, Fakirakanda Govt Primary School and Rifles Govt Primary School won the first, second and third prizes respectively, said a press release.