Court says Tokyo electric company paid less to its 13 employees

TOKYO, May 24: A district court ordered Tokyo Electric Power Co. Monday to pay 106.62 million yen 1.03 million dollars to 13 employees it said had been underpaid or missed out on promotions because of Communist Party affillations, reports AP.

Presiding Judge Hidtsugu Kato held that TEPCO, the world's largest private electric power company, had infringed on the employees' right not to suffer discrimination because of their political thought, said "Seiichi Suzuki, public relations official of the Chiba District Court.

He said the payment was for both lost wages and compensation for the discrimination.

Watari said the court held that differing abilities accounted for some wage differences at the company, but that at least 30 per cent of the gap resulted from discrimination.

He said one of the employees had died, but the others still are working at TEPCO.

TEPCO had argued that the pay reflected the workers abilities. It said in a statement Monday it regretted that the court had not understood is position, and that it would study the ruling further before deciding whether to appeal. TEPCO, set up in 1951,

supplies electricity to 45.3 million people. It is capitalised at 670 billion yen 6.4 billion dollar and has 41,900 employ-

Free market boosts India's coffee exports

BOMBAY, May 24: Indian coffee growers, shedding five decades of state controls are riding an international price boom with new freedom to export directly and are urging further deregulation of the industry, reports Reuter.

"Free marketing has boosted exports contrary to fears that growers are not equipped to market their produce on their own," said A D Chandrasekhar, a leading coffee planter.

Chandrasekhar estimated India's coffee exports in the year ended March at 130,000 tonnes against a target of 120,000 tonnes and compared with 113,150 tonnes in 1992-

"It (1993-94) has been a fantastic year," he said.

Exporters said details of India's foreign exchange earnings for 1993-94 were still awaited.

The Commerce Ministry on January 18 announced a new coffee marketing policy, allowing growers a free sale quota (FSQ) of 50 per cent of their produce which they could sell directly to the domestic market or abroad.

But growers need to poll the rest of their produce with the state-run coffee board for disposal.

Growers, buoyed by a price boom, have already urged the government for freedom to market their entire crop. "We have a strong case for a

100 per cent FSQ." said

Chadrasekhar, who represents growers on the coffee board as its Vice-Chairman.

He said the government was inclined to agree to the growers' demand because of its move toward an open market economy under reforms launched three years ago to liberalise trade and reduce protectionism.

Chandrasekhar said exports would do even better in 1994-95 if the government lifted the remaining controls on marketing.

"We could aim for an export of 140,000 tonnes this year and India stands to gain a lot because of booming global prices," Chandrasekhar said.

Exporters say world prices are around 130 to 135 cents per pound for Arabica coffee and around 100 cents per pound for the robusta variety compared with 65 cents and 40 cents respectively a year

"There is a scramble for coffee. Traders are coming to the growers to buy coffee, besides flocking to auctions. said Chandrasekhar. Several growers had become exporters, he said.

"For the first time planters are really worried about the quality of their produce. Each one is working on quality in order to get better prices. Chandrasekhar said

Exporters said one reason behind the high prices was the retention scheme put in operation by major coffee producers. They said coffee invento-

ries in consuming countries were enough to meet only eight week's demand against

16 weeks a year ago. Exporters said prices were quite high at auctions held by both the coffee board and the Indian Coffee Trade Association, a pool set up by the growers themselves.

. "Auction prices are ruling (prevailing) at 85 rupees per kg compared to 40 rupees two months ago," said coffee planter Anil Bhandari.

Returns to growers from the coffee board are less because the state agency deducts its overhead costs, so the response to the coffee board pooling requirement is poor.

Traders said only 47,000 tonnes had been pooled under the coffee board for auctions against the 100,000 tonnes it ought to have received from the growers for 1993-94.

India's coffee output in 1993-94 (October-September) is expected to be around 200,000 tonnes, comprising 88,500 tonnes of Arabica and 119,500 tonnes of Robusta, in 1992-93, India harvested 161,500 tonnes, comprising. 79.300 tonnes of Arabica and 82,200 tonnes of Robusta.

Traders estimated the surplus from this year's crop at 145,000 tonnes, after placing the domestic requirement 55,000 tonnes.

"Not a single ban would be left from the current year's (1993-94) crop," Bhandari

Oil tanker spills 200 barrels in Valdez terminal

ANCHORAGE, Alaska, May 24: Clean-up crews say they have contained most of the 200 barrels of crude oil that leaked from a tanker at the Valdez terminal, dirtying sea animals and fouling the shoreline, reports AP.

The spill was mostly contained by booms Sunday, said British Petroleum spokesman Tim Bradner.

The tanker Eastern Lion was carrying about 830,000 barrels of oil for BP exploration (Alaska) Inc. when it sprung a leak Saturday night, company officials said. It wasn't immediately clear what caused the leak. A barrel is about 40 gallons (150 liters).

Divers said the leak appeared to have stopped by Sunday afternoon.

The terminal is 25 miles (40 kilometers) from the site where the Exxon Valdez ran aground in 1989 in the nation's worst oil spill, which dumped nearly 11 million gallons of oil into Prince William Sound.

Scott Thompson of the watchdog Prince William Sound Regional Citizens Advisory Committee, said at least 10 birds, three seals and three sea otters had come into contact with the oil from Saturday's spill, but were not seriously threatened.

Oil also was reported on the shore of a small island next to the terminal, he said.

Pakistan amends

banking law

tan has amended its banking law to strengthen a drive for

recovery of bad debts

estimated at one billion dol-

lars, officials said yesterday,

form of a presidential ordi-

nance issued this week, em-

powers the government to

order publication of a list of

defaulters owing one million

rupees (33,000 dollars) or

more to a bank of financial in-

recovery process as politically

influential people with bad

debts would not like their

names to appear on the de-

fault list for fear of damage to

India must double

grain output to

meet needs: Rao

must more than double its

grain output to some 400 mil-

next 50 years, to meet the

needs of its spiralling popula-

tion. Prime Minister P.V

Narasimha Rao said here today,

Rao told a meeting of agri-

culture experts that existing

method of cultivation were

inadequate and new methods

were needed to boost food-

grain production, which to-

talled nearly 180 million

reports AFP.

NEW DELHI, May 24: India

their image in the public eye.

The move could help the

The amendment, in the

reports AFP.

stitution.

ISLAMABAD, May 24: Pakis-

COLOMBO: Vendors sell shirts yesterday in front of a huge illuminated structure to mark the Buddhist festival commemorating the birth, enlightenment and passing away of the Buddha over 2,500 years ago. Meat and liquor sales have been banned for three days in honour of the religious occasion. US dollar edges higher, stocks gain marginally

TOKYO. May 24: The US dollar edged higher against the Japanese yen in morning trading Tuesday, while prices on the Tokyo Stock Exchange gained marginally, reports AP.

The dollar closed the morning session at 104.32 yen, up 0.02 yen from Monday's finish but below its overnight New York close of 104.36 yen.

After opening higher at 104.56 yen, the dollar weakened at midday due to profittaking, dealers said.

The resumption of preliminary US-Japan trade talks last week has generated cautious optimism for the dollar in global markets.

The negotiators met in Washington Monday for the fourth time in five days and were reportedly close to a compromise in the longstanding trade dispute.

The yen tends to rise with trade tensions because traders believe Washington will push for a higher ven if it cannot clinch a trade agreement. A higher yen is seen as a way to reduce Japan's burgeoning trade surplus by making its products costlier abroad.

On the stock market, the 225-issue Nikkei Stock Average finished the morning session at 20,588.12 up 19.41 points, or 0.09 per cent. On Monday, the benchmark index had gained 226.54 points, or 1.11 per cent, closing at 20,568.71

The Tokyo Stock Price Index of all issues listed on the first section was up 1.34 points, or 0.08 per cent, to 1.655.55. The TOPIX had gained 11.67 points, or 0.71 per cent, to 1,654.21 on Monday. The price of the benchmark

No 157 10-year Japanese government bonds finished the morning session at 104,81 yen, down 0.25 yen from Monday's close. Their yield rose to 3.785 per cent from 3.750 per cent.

Swiss firm to buy US baby food company

NEW YORK, May 24: The Swiss pharmaceuticals and chemicals conglomerate Sandoz Ltd. has agreed to buy the U.S baby foods maker Gerber Products Co. for 3.7 billion in cash, the companies announced vesterday, reports

The deal would enable Michigan-based Gerber to expand internationally much faster than it could on its own. while Sandoz would get a North American building block for its global nutrition business.

It said it plans to begin its tender offer for Gerber shares on or before Friday, expects to complete the deal within three to six months. Gerber Products, based in

Fremot, Mich, is a 1.2 billion dollar developer, producer and marketer of baby foods and baby care products.

Sandoz, which had 10.3 billion dollars in revenue last year, has interests in pharmaceuticals, chemicals, nutrition, seeds and the construction business.

Russia to seek return of imperial gold reserves

- AFP photo

MOSCOW, May 24: President Boris Yeltsin's chief of staff wants France and Japan to return millions of dollars worth of gold bullion that belonged to Czarist Russia, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported Tuesday, reports AP.

Sergei Filatov said he had detailed information about the Czarist gold and would recommend the creation of a government commission to seek its return, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported.

After the 1917 Revolution, the Bolsheviks shipped 93.5 metric tons (102.9 short tons) of gold to Germany to pay for the landing of German troops in Russia's northern ports of Murmansk and Archangelsk, which had been occupied by British troops.

After Germany was defeated, the gold was sent to France, according to Filatov.

Adm Alexander Kolchak, a Czarist commander in the civil war with the Bolsheviks, also is believed to have sent 22 cases of gold bullion to Japan before he was defeated by the Red Army. The weight of that gold is unknown.

Since Russia has been recognized as the legal successor to the Soviet Union and imperial Russia? it has the right to demand the return of the gold. the ITAR-Tass news agency

The Czarist bullion would

bolster Russia's gold reserves. which amounted to 272.8 metric tons (300.1 short tons) last September, according to the government.

Asian currencies end week generally stronger against US dollar Japan trade talks, a Thai mili-

HONG YONG, May 24: Asia's curre anded the week generally stronger against the US dollar, as the region's currency markets awaited a possible resumption of crucial US-Japan trade talks, reports AFP. JAPANESE YEN: The yen

closed the week at 104.34 to the dollar, up 0.24 from a week earlier as market players sold yen for dollars as Japan and the United Sates hold preparatory trade talks. The yen gave up some of

early gains against the dollar but still closed slightly higher than the previous week's level amid growing prospects of the two countries reviving talks aimed at reducing Japan's trade surplus.

After opening, the week lower at 105.07 to the dollar the yen hit the week's low of 105.15 on Monday, but turned upward later to hit a high of 103.46 Thursday, despite a US rate hike on Tuesday.

AUSTRALIAN DOLLAR: The Australian dollar surged during the week to close three quarters of a US cent firmer Friday after reaching an 18-month high as traders chased the currency due to firmer commodity prices, analysts said.

The domestic currency Friday at 72.88 US from the previous week's finish of 72.10 US

On Wednesday it reached it a peak of 73.21 US cents due to rallying prices for commodi-

ties. Australia's major exports. On the reserve bank of Australia's trade weighed index a basket of major trading lar closed at 54.1 points, from the previous week's finish of 53. points.

HONG KONG: The Hong Kong dollar, pegged to its US counterpart, remained generally steady throughout the

Senior bankers doubted that Friday's increase in local deposit and prime rates which took overnight and savings rates up 50 basis points to 2.5 per cent - would shake the local unit's stability.

The effective exchange rate index, which measures the dollar's value against a basket of currencies, ended Friday at 124.8 down 0.3 points.

INDONESIAN RUPLAH: The Indonesian currency closed the week's trading Friday at 2.154 rupiah. two rupiah higher than the previous week's finish at 2,152 rupiah. MALAYSIAN RINGGIT: The

ringgit rose 203 points to close the week higher against the US dollar at 2.5880 from 2.6083 previously

Dealers said the local currency surged after the government lifted a key measure imposed early in the year to offset speculation in the ringgit, which it noted was now "incredibly undervalued" and "unrealistically low."

The ringgit also finished higher against the sterling at 3.9043 from 3.9044 previously and the yen at 2.4796 from 2.4867.

NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR: The New Zealand dollar closed Friday at 58.62 US cents, slightly up from the previous Friday's closing of 58.36

While in Malaysia this week Prime Minister Jim Bolger said the steadily firming Kiwi was of no particular concern at the moment to his govern-

A dealer said as a result the Kiwi was doing slightly better than normal. It is expected to continue

rising next week. SINGAPORE DOLLAR: The Singapore dollar strengthened against the US dollar, finish-

ing at 1.5390 here Friday, up

from last week's 1.5535.

Dealers said the US dollar was generally weak against mafor currencies for most of the

They said sentiment against the US dollar was bearish throughout the week but managed to hold well against only the Japanese yen on expectations of trade talks due to commence soon.

SOUTH KOREAN WON: The won wakened slightly over the week to trade at 806.5 won Saturday, down from 806.00 a week ago.

TAIWAN DOLLAR: The Taiwan currency declined slightly to close at 26.828 to the US dollar, down 0.55 of a Taiwan cent from the previous week's finish of 26.8225.

THAI BAHT: The bank of Thailand's exchange equalisation fund fixed the official moderate Friday at 25.20 baht to one US dollar.

The dollar was down two satangs the baht from last week's close of 25.22 baht. because the market was await ing the outcome of the US-

PHILIPPINE PESO: The

tary bank official said.

Philippine peso rose to 27.058 pesos to the dollar on Friday, from 27.095 pesos the previous week.

Malaysia's bid to find new palm oil buyers

KUALA LUMPUR, May 24: Malaysia dispatched yesterday a huge palm oil delegation to Japan, South Korea and Taiwan to find new buyers for the commodity in the three countries, official said, reports AFP.

The 25-member delegation of various palm oil authorities and millers will extoll the positive and economic values of Malaysia's best-selling edible, oil in three nations over the next two weeks, the officials

"Japan, South Korea and lion tonnes a year over the Taiwan are among the biggest East Asian markets for Malaysian palm oil now and we have to maintain them," delegation leader Tengku Mahmud Tengku Mansur told reporters.

Mansur, who is Malaysia's deputy primary industries minister, said Japan bought 339.650 tonnes of palm oil from Kuala Lumpur last year compared to 143.000 tonnes in 1992.

tonnes in the last fiscal year. The Prime Minister said He said Taiwan had in-India's population of nearly creased its imports of the commodity from 629 tonnes in 900 million was expected to 1980 to 88,458 tonnes last virtually double in the next 50 years, and "our agricultural year while South Korea used growth is just keeping pace palm oil for about 25 per cent with the population growth." of its oil and fats needs.

currencies, the Australian dol-

Chancellor Helmut Kohl tries out the Mercedes-Benz Kleinwagen (small car) which will be launched onto the market in two to three years. IN photo

Saudi Arabia looking for joint ventures in Asia

SEOUL, May 24: Joint ventures in Asia will play a key role in Saudi Arabia's attempt to turn its state oil firm Aramco into a fully integrated multinational, a senior Saudi official said.

"We are looking for business in East Asia and elsewhere in the world. But growth in Europe is flat and Latin America is self-sufficient." said the official, who is accompanying Oil Minister Hisham Nazer on his current Asian trip.

"The economic growth in the region is highest in the world and its oil demand is rising fast," the official told Reuters. He asked not to be named.

Nazer visited South Korea as part of a four-nation east Asian trip which Middle-East oil industry official described as a search for new refining outlets for Saudi Arabian crude. Nazer, who also went to the Philippines and China, toured Ssangyang oil refining co in

Onsan, South Korea, where

Aramco is spending 400 mil-

lion US dollar to help build

cracking and desulphurising

Aramco has a 35 per cent sate in Ssangyang oil, which is due to launch a new unit to in-

facilities.

crease its refining capacity to 525,000 Barrels Per Day (BPD) in the first half of next year from 325,000 at present.

"This is our major regional project which will serve markets in South Korea, east Asia and to some extent the United States," the Saudi official said before leaving for Japan with Nazer at the weekend on the final leg of the tour.

Aramco is particularly keen

in Ssangyang's 60,000-BPD upgrading facility which will turn heavy fuel oil into light products like petrol, kerosene and diesel "The facility will be producing environment- friendly reformulated gasoline (petrol)

from 1996 and this will boost Ssangyang's exports to the United States," he said without elaborating. "We are also talking to possible partners in China which

is a very important market for US," he added. The Saudi official declined to give details but officials at Ssangyang said a proposal called for a 1.5 billion US dol-

lar refinery in Qingdao to process 200,000 to 300,000 BPD. "The proposal calls for a 45 per cent stake by Aramco, a 15 per cent stake by Ssangyang

China) but it is just one option and nothing specific has been agreed upon yet," a Ssangyang official said, asking not to be named.

The Saudi official said

Aramco's aim was to build several joint-venture refineries in Asia which would secure outlets for Saudi crude oil. This part of our strategy to restructure the oil industry. The strategy has three main

purposes - securing markets, making better profits and achieving stability in the oil market, both for US and consumer nations," he said. Aramco's drive to expand overseas began in 1988 when it bought a half-share in

Texaco's refining and sales operation in the US east and Gulf coast states. The official said it would continue, notably in Asia - the destination of 40 per cent of Saudi oil exports. "Our venture in South

Korea has proved a success. We are now supplying more than 30 per cent of South Korea's oil needs compared with just five per cent before we invested in Ssangyang in 1991." he said, predicting a new suc cess in the Philippines.

Aramco early this year acquired 40 per cent of Petron and the rest by Sinochem (of Corp. the Philippines' biggest

oil refiner and distributor, for 502 million US dollar.

In Japan, Nazer may meet oil industry leaders in an attempt to revive a joint oil refinery project scrapped last veat because of differences of opinion, a Ministry of International Trade and Industry official said in Tokyo.

up as an historic venture between the Saudis, the world's largest oil producer, and Japan, one of its biggest buy-

The project was once held

Thailand needs to limit economic growth BANGKOK, May 24: Thai-

land's economic growth should

not be allowed to exceed eight per cent this year to avoid fuelling inflation and creating balance of payments problems. a Bank of Thailand official said Tuesday, reports AFP. Analysts have said the Thai economy, one of the fastest

growing in the region, could reach 8.4 per cent this year. up from 7.0 per cent last year. Last month, the central

bank reported that inflation during the first quarter of the year reached 4.8 per cent.