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468MT of wheat for 285 projects in Jessor

JESSORE, Aug 6: Four hundred sixty eight metric tons of wheat have been allocated by the government for the implementation of 285 projects in eight thanas of Jessor district including Jessor Pourasava during the current fiscal year, reports BSS.

This was disclosed at the monthly relief coordination committee meeting held today at the conference room of Deputy Commissioner's office with Post and Telecommunications Minister Tarique Islam in the chair.

The projects include the repairing of educational and religious institutions, earth work reconstruction of kucha road and three plantation.

The meeting was attended, among others, by parliament members Rowshan Ali, Tabayor Rahman, Moulana Shakawat Hossain, Deputy Commissioner of Jessor and Police Super, Thana Nirbahi Officers and Project Implementation Officer.

Dollar falls in New York

NEW YORK, Aug 6: The dollar fell against the other major currencies, except the yen. Friday after better-than-expected jobless figures, reports AFP.

Gold lost 10 cents from its Thursday closing price and was trading at 377.40 an ounce.

The dollar was trading at 1.5832 German marks from 1.5879 Thursday and 100.45 yen from 100.37.

In London, the greenback was trading at 1.5845 German marks and 100.25 yen following publication of the July unemployment rate showing a slight rise from 6.0 per cent in June to 6.1 per cent in July.

The dollar lost ground against European currencies and was trading at 5.4120 French francs against 5.4360 Thursday, at 1.3344 Swiss francs against 1.3409 and at 0.6491 pound sterling against 0.6513 Thursday.

Reciprocating the feeling Dr Mosharraf emphasised the need for foreign private sector

Record tea output worldwide affects Bangladesh

A record production in the world's tea growing regions has pushed tea prices to one of the lowest in recent years, creating a serious crisis for Bangladesh's tea sector, reports UNB.

Average price in the country's lone auction market in Chittagong slumped to Taka 41 per kilo last week from the season's first auction price of Taka 51 in March — a 20 per cent drop.

Planters and brokers, quoting production and trends in the world's major auction markets, have cautioned a persisting depression in prices in coming months.

The Tea Board assessment has put Bangladesh's average production cost at Taka 46 a kilo, forcing the producers to bear the brunt of a widening gap between price and production cost.

It's a critical situation for the country's tea sector, already burdened with an extremely low productivity of both fields and labour, said Laila Rahman Kabir, Chairperson of Bangladesh Cha Sangsas, the association of tea planters.

The situation may not change even if Russia, which remained absent in last two auctions, enters the bidding this week, brokers forecast.

Bangladeshi type of tea — strong liquor and low flavoured — which is also grown in Assam, Duars, Cachar, South India, lower Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Malawi, had a surplus yield this year. As a result, producers are offering tea at very cheap and competitive prices.

South India alone has produced an additional 15 million kilograms, resulting in price

drop by about 11 Rupees per kg in last couple of months.

Although the low price has reportedly forced many planters to withhold production there, it lured buyers.

Prices in other auction markets — London, Colombo, Gouhati, Malawi, Indonesia — are reportedly similar. Calcutta auction, which usually sells Assam, Duars and Darjeeling tea, saw a price drop by about nine rupees in recent months.

Poland, till last season, had been maintaining strong presence in the Chittagong auction but now tends to switch to South India.

The East European buyers are currently operating at a very low price level.

Poland, Russia, Pakistan and Jordan are the major buyers of tea from Bangladesh, which produces on average 50 million kgs of tea a year. An esti-

mated 30 million kgs are for export.

Steady presence of Pakistan "bazaar buyers" is restraining the price in Chittagong auction from further slump. But top Pakistan blenders like Lipton and Brooke Bond have been totally absent this season.

Making her observation on the situation Laila Kabir warned that the price level of Bangladeshi type of tea has little chance to rise significantly in coming years with an increasing global production vis-à-vis a more of less stagnant consumption pattern.

The country's export earnings from tea — both in volume and foreign exchange — dropped from 41.14 million US dollar (32.79 million kgs) in 1992-93 to 38.18 million US dollar (27.41 million kgs) in 1993-94.

"We can expect that average

auction price will remain in the range of Taka 43 in next few years," said Kabir, a leading planter in the country.

To her, survival of the local tea sector depends on cutting high production cost by radical improvement in its staggering low yield, resulting from overwhelming old plants — age 40-50 years and above.

She said many gardens which had obtained low-interest development finance under the British-funded Tea Rehabilitation Project had partially replaced their old plants with better quality young ones and they were getting up to 200 kg per hectare. But the rehabilitation project ended in 1985.

Replacement of the old plants is a longterm investment and requires government patronage with low-interest bank credit, Kabir said. Return

from investment in new plantation usually cannot come before 10 years, she said and pointed out that most planters cannot afford investment at 12 per cent interest now being offered to the sector.

"One cannot predict the fate of the Bangladesh tea sector in the next decade if it fails to radically improve its yield and cut cost of production," Kabir said.

Frustrated by the Finance Ministry's "lack of comprehension" about the demand for preferential credit for plantation, the Cha Sangsas is now looking for funding support off state land and equipment to companies.

The newspaper quoted Vice Finance Minister Zhang Youcai as saying profits generated by state firms and incomes from the transfer of state property rights will have to be comprehensively accounted for.

According to a state regulation promulgated last month, proceeds may not be used for non-productive purposes or to balance deficits, but should be channelled instead into the promotion of medium sized state firms.

"The current work will target the transfer of property rights and the process of setting up a shareholding company, as well as transforming and merging state firms," Zhang said.

Cheap sales of state assets are already estimated to have cost China billions of dollars, as the issuing of shares has in recent years become a popular method of trying to improve the performance of the inefficient sector.

Zhang stressed that state property is still owned by the Chinese people, with the government as the sole representative of national ownership.

US consumer borrowing up

WASHINGTON, Aug 6: US consumer borrowing in June increased at a 15.6 per cent annual rate over May, the Federal Reserve reported yesterday, says Xinhua.

The report said consumer installment credit rose by 10.9 billion dollars in June.

At the end of June, consumer installment credit totalled 849.6 billion dollars, the report added.

Consumer borrowing increased at a 16.6 per cent annual rate in May and 14.9 per cent in April.

Some analysts note that debt as a share of disposable income while rising, are not yet as high as they were in the 1980s.

The debt-to-disposable income ratio is now below 17 per cent, the ratio had reached 19 per cent before the recession started in 1990.

Cuba brings back income taxes

HAVANA, Aug 6: The Cuban National Assembly approved a new tax system, bringing income taxes back for the first time in 30 years, and sharply increasing existing state levies, reports AFP.

In a unanimous vote late Thursday, legislators passed a bill introduced by President Fidel Castro, who attended a two-day session of the National Assembly of People's Power.

The bill states that "as an inalienable, general principle, all incomes including salaries, will be subject to taxes proportional to their amount."

An initial provision in the bill that called for income tax collection when the country's economic and social conditions permit it, was struck from the final version at Castro's insistence.

On Wednesday, Castro said income tax "must not be an un-touchable dogma," and restricted debate on the controversial provision.

He also urged legislators to save the social security system from its current deficit of more than 500 million dollars through workers' contributions.

Cuba's economy and government spending has been decimated by the break-up of the Soviet Union, which cost the Caribbean nation its east bloc trade subsidies, and the three-decade-old US trade embargo.

Stressing the need to gradually create fiscal awareness among our people, the bill calls for reshaping the current, low-keyed fiscal system and imposing new taxes, mainly on national and foreign business profits and personal income.

The bill also calls for taxes on real estate, the use of natural resources and advertising, and imposes highway tolls.

Country's economy lauded in Canada

The Speaker of the legislative assembly of Alberta of Canada lauded the economic progress of Bangladesh under the present government, reports UNB.

"It is likely that Bangladesh could emerge as a major power in the upcoming economic forces in South-East Asia," Speaker Stan Schumacher expressed the optimism at a dinner party hosted by him Friday night in honour of Bangladesh Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Dr Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain.

The present trend of economic progress indicates a new dimension in the future of Bangladesh, the Speaker told the gathering, according to a message received here from Calgary in Canada Saturday.

The Energy Minister said the economic and social reforms initiated by the present government had started yielding benefits to the common people of Bangladesh and would go a long way for economic emancipation of its people.

Member of the delegation — chairman of Power Development Board (PDB) Kazi Golam Rahman, Director (Planning) of Petro-Bangla Mosharraf Hossain and acting High Commissioner of Bangladesh in Canada A M Abdus Salam were present on the occasion.

6.23 pc women employed in banking sector

By Staff Correspondent

The proportion of women employees working in the country's banking sector is only 6.23 per cent. This was revealed in a study on 'Women in Banking' in the city on Friday.

Bangladesh Institute of Bank Management (BIMB) conducted the study on all the 27 banks operating in the country until 31st of December last year.

According to the survey, the proportion of women employees in banks increased during the last ten years but at a very slow rate. There was only 5.9 per cent female employees in the banks in 1983.

The shares of female bank officers and staff are 6.33 per cent and 6.16 per cent respectively. These figures are far below the government directives of 10 per cent and 15 per cent of women employment quota for officers and employees respectively. Even a large number of branches for women are manned and managed by the male bankers.

The proportion of women bank employees is over 11 per cent in India, 6.31 per cent in UK, more than 50 per cent in USA and 36.19 per cent in Turkey.

The survey reveals that the



A model shows how the end of the famous Mini has been turned into a piece of household furniture in London on Friday.

The idea of garage mementoes has been turned into a thriving business. A London based company, EMR Reincarnation, will recycle old Mini cars into an array of furniture and other artefacts.

— AFP Photo

Three computer experts held in Japan

TOKYO, Aug 6: Japanese police have arrested three computer experts who made free overseas phone calls for over a year by fooling switchboards with signals from their personal computers, a police spokesman said Friday, reports Reuters.

The calls, worth 18 million yen (179,104 US dollars) totalled and estimated 1,500 hours between February 1993 and March this year, said a spokeswoman for telecommunications firm Kokusai Denki Denwa Co (KDD).

The three, Christophe Prevoitoux 28, a French computer engineer, Michael Molsner, 30, a German organ maker and Takeshi Ozawa, 30, a Japanese employee of a computer sales company, were arrested on Thursday for suspected fraud.

They are suspected of sending electronic signals that let them bypass switchboard operators, a police spokesman said.

The KDD spokeswoman said police were called in after unusual signals were noticed in a routine check last November.

She said KDD has made improvements in its software and systems to prevent such incidents and is considering discussing measures with telephone firms in other countries.

"This is definitely a serious incident," she added.

Lieutenant-Colonel John Espen Lien, speaking from the north sector headquarters of Norway's Defence Command, said he was in no doubt that the lives of three coastguards were in danger when a shot was fired from the Icelandic-owned trawler.

"Authorities have decided to arrest the ship Hagangur II in Norwegian harbour to answer charges of violence against government personnel," Defence Ministry spokesman Kirsti Skjerven said.

"This is one we have met in the area several times before. It is not a new offender," he said.

They could not disclose any details of the action being taken to detain the craft — one of five trawlers in the vicinity at the time. "I don't want to give anything away to the enemy."

The crew on board the trawler, which is registered under the Belize flag of convenience, were known to be Icelanders, he added.

"The shot hit the water approximately two metres (yards) from their boat which was moving in waves one to two metres high it's all too

close," he told Reuters.

The clash mirrored tension in the Bay of Biscay of Spain.

Spanish fishermen cut the nets of an Irish trawler on Thursday, ensnaring a fourth country in the "tuna war" already involving Britain and France.

In the latest round, Norway pledged on Friday to arrest Icelandic fishermen.

It shot at a coastguard patrol trying to prevent illegal trawling in a protected zone near Svalbard.

At that time the Defence Ministry said it hoped its action had shown its will to enforce the zone and would not have to be repeated.

At Friday morning's incident the coastguards were closing in on the Hagangur II in an inflatable boat launched from their large patrol ship and intended to cut its trawl lines when they saw a man come on to its deck with a rifle and aim it at them.

"When the shot hit the water they turned back," Lien said.

The trawler crew did not deny the shooting, he added, but said they had been firing at seabirds.

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