

**Myanmar accused
of pillaging
natural resources**

LONDON, Aug 31: The Myanmar government was accused Thursday of pillaging its own natural resources in international business deals in disregard of its people and national interests, reports AFP.

Since the 1988 coup in Yangon, an "era of enhanced repression" has taken hold, where "all dissent is stifled and no voices can be raised to protect Myanmar's heritage of natural and cultural resources," said the London-based Anti-Censorship Group Article 1.

In a report entitled "paradise lost," the group says exploitation of Myanmar's resources has been "brutal, creating new categories of displaced persons."

"Land has been seized for road building and government projects, often with the mass use of forced labour," says the report.

**Nawabganj branch
of Agrani Bank
opens**

Mojibur Rahman, State Minister for Finance inaugurated the Nawabganj branch of Agrani Bank on Sunday, says a press release.

While opening the branch he said, "It is not further possible to give loan if the disbursed loan is not adjusted in due time. As a result, new loan seeker will be deprived of taking the bank loan as well as the services of the bank."

Giving emphasis on keeping balance between disbursement and recovery of loan, he also called upon the loanees to use money properly and to participate in the national economic development activities.

He advised the bankers to evaluate credit disbursement correctly to allocate working capital properly.

Abdul Mannan, State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism, stated the perspective of the foundation of bank and stressed the co-ordination of credit disbursement and increasing of deposit.

He advised the officers and staffs of the bank to participate in the economic development of the rural people by providing the small loans to the villagers.

Mustafa Aminur Rashid, Managing Director, Agrani Bank, described the banker-customer relationship in details and said, "We have to continue our efforts to accelerate the economic development of our country through exploring the wealth and using it properly."

Among others, Khondkar Ibrahim Khaled and Subid Ali also spoke on the occasion.

**China taking tough
measures to
curtail rise in
tariff evasion**

FUZHOU, Aug 31: China is taking tough measures to curtail the rise in tariff evasion, official sources said here yesterday, reports Xinhua.

In the first half of this year the Chinese customs intercepted 18,268 cases of intended duty evasion nationwide, valued at 670 million yuan (about 90 million US dollars), Deputy Director of the General Administration of Customs Wu, Naiven told National Customs conference.

Wu said that some of the evaders made false reports on the prices of their imports to the customs in order to pay less duty.

Wu said that his administration has tightened control of import checks to prevent duty evasion.

The right to approve duty deduction and exemption has been tightened, while the customs bureau in different cities have strengthened cooperation on supervising import movements, Wu said.

Wu said that his administration will focus on fighting against duty dodgers in the latter months of this year.

Correction

National Bank Limited gives a correction of the article published in the special supplement of our August 25 issue titled 'Brief Profile of Banks' as under:

Capital: The authorised capital of the Bank is Tk 50.00 crore and the paid up capital, Tk 24.00 crore of which Tk 12.00 crore is paid by the Group 'A' shareholders including Directors, Tk 1.20 crore by the Government and Tk 10.80 crore by the public.

Reserve: Tk 21.15 crore.
Profit: Tk 853 crore in 1993.

Finance Minister says**No plan to devalue Taka**

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday categorically ruled out any devaluation of Taka in near future asserting that the economy does not demand such a step, reports UNB.

Rahman dismissed press reports predicting downward revision of Taka value.

"There is not an ounce of truth in it... It is completely a baseless speculation," the minister said while speaking at the launching of a branch of the National Bank of Pakistan (NBP) in the city yesterday.

Rahman said there is no question of devaluation as Taka has been quite stable as a result of low inflation and sound macro-economy. Moreover, he added, Taka is now convertible for all external current transactions.

The state-owned NBP is the second Pakistani bank after

Habib Bank Ltd now operating in Bangladesh.

Saifur Rahman, while boasting that the national economy is in a healthy state, accused the International Monetary Fund (IMF) of underestimating the country's economic growth rate.

"I believe that Bangladesh achieved at least six per cent growth last year... the statistics on which the IMF depends are not always dependable." He claimed that economic activities in the rural areas are very often ignored while estimating the growth.

IMF has estimated Bangladesh's GDP growth rate at five per cent in the past fiscal year (1993-94).

Stressing further changes in the country's banking system, the Finance Minister blamed the private banks for

not coming in risk-taking ventures.

"They (private banks) always give money to rich people while shut the doors to poor fellows... I am not convinced about what they have done during the last ten years."

Rahman also accused the overseas banks of practising "blue chips business." Worse are the foreign banks who go only to the rich people.

Pakistan Ambassador Anwar Kemal who was present on the occasion, told the function that trade potentials between Dhaka and Islamabad have still remained unexplored due to the absence of proper transport facility.

He was optimistic that arrival of the NBP will facilitate bilateral trade between the two countries.



Sumeth Darabananda, Executive Vice-Chairman and Sompop Amatayakul, President of the well-known Thai business group, Saha-Union Corporation, along with Prachub Kowidkrisdakul, Ambassador of Thailand in Dhaka, called on Latifur Rahman, President and CK Hyder, Secretary-General of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Dhaka yesterday to discuss investment possibilities in Bangladesh.

**SBSI seeks US
legal experts'
assistance**

JAKARTA, Aug 31: The independent labour union Swajahtera (SBSI) is seeking assistance from US legal experts on the arrest of its leader, Mukhtar Pakpahan, an official said here yesterday.

"We will ask American legal experts to visit Mukhtar Pakpahan to see whether there was any violation of law" during his arrest, SBSI official Rekson Silaban told AFP.

Silaban and three SBS officials were to meet US trade representative assistant Robert Cassidy and four other US experts, who are currently in Indonesia to discuss a number of bilateral and multilateral trade issues including human resources development, workers' rights, and market access, according to a US embassy spokesman.

Pakpahan, who heads the SRS, was arrested on August 11 in connection with allegations that he incited labour unrest in the north Sumatran city of Medan which led to racial riots in April.

Pakpahan's arrest raised concern in Washington which has said the issue could be raised in ongoing trade talks on the generalized system of preferences (GSP).

**Mixed results evinced
at tea auction in Ctg**

By Staff Correspondent

Mixed results were evinced at the weekly tea auction sale held in Chittagong on Tuesday last.

According to a Unity Brokers market report, strong export demand led the prices for bolder broken to move up sharply while the prices for all other types of tea on offer declined.

Prices for the bolder broken were dearer by Taka one to Taka three per kilogram as buyers for both Russia and Poland were active at the sale.

All other categories of tea eased by Taka one to Taka two per kilogram as the buyers for Pakistan and the local traders held lower limits at the sale. Large broken are now selling above the prices of other grades.

A total of 22,523 packages of leaf and another 4,765 packages of dust were offered at the auction. Total withdrawals stood at 31 per cent against last week's 28 per cent.

In the leaf category, the export buyers accounted for 53 per cent of the sale while the internal traders purchased 18 per cent and the remaining 29 per cent was withdrawn.

In the dust category, the lo-

cal traders brought 44 per cent of the amount sold while the export buyers purchased 11 per cent and the rest was unsold.

Following is the category-wise market performance report as prepared by Unity Brokers:

CTC: Bold broken were well sought-after and prices improved by Tk 1/3. These sold up to Tk 44.00. All other broken were easier by Tk 1/2. Few best lines sold between Tk 45.50-Tk 48.60.

Most Fannings generally eased by Tk 1/2 with selective lines selling between Tk 45.50-Tk 48.10. Secondaries sold between Tk 32.00-Tk 35.

GREEN TEA: 270 packages were on offer. YH's were easier and sold between Tk 95.00-Tk 102.00 whilst the Hyson sold at Tk 68.00.

DUST: 4,765 packages were on offer. Lower demand led prices to decline by Tk 1/2. There were large withdrawals.

The next weekly tea auction sale will be held in Chittagong on September 6 and total offerings will consist of around 24,500 packages of leaf and another 4,500 packages of dust.



Mojibur Rahman, State Minister for Finance, is seen inaugurating the Nawabganj Branch of Agrani Bank on Sunday. Abdul Mannan, State Minister for Civil Aviation & Tourism, Mustafa Aminur Rashid, Managing Director and Khondkar Ibrahim Khaled, Deputy Managing Director of the bank are also seen in the picture.

**US consumers, businessmen less
optimistic about economy**

NEW YORK, Aug 31: Two surveys released Tuesday show American consumers and businessmen are becoming less optimistic about the US economy, a decline that partly reflects the impact of rising interest rates, reports AP.

The Conference Board, a New York-based business research group, said its monthly assessment of consumer confidence dropped for the second straight month. Cahners Economics, a Newton, Mass.-based financial research group, said its index of business confidence dropped to the lowest level of the year.

The results come as evidence mounts that the economy has been slowing down as interest rates have been moving up. The Federal Reserve,

the nation's central bank, has pushed up rates five times since February.

Since then, the overall housing market has slowed, factory orders have weakened and the economy's growth rate has declined markedly from its torrid pace of late 1993.

The Cahners survey in particular showed how the higher cost of borrowing has impeded business growth. The results showed a slowdown in product introductions, employment, production and marketing spending in August.

The Cahners confidence index, calculated from a monthly telephone survey of 400 executives in cyclical manufacturing industries, fell to 66.6 in August, down from 68.6 in July. The index hasn't been as low

since a 66.4 reading in December.

"Manufacturers' confidence has been tempered in recent months by interest rate hikes and by evidence that the Fed's actions have begun to have their desired effect of slowing growth in the US economy," Cahners said in a news release.

Although 69 per cent of survey respondents characterized prevailing business conditions as good or excellent, only 65 per cent said they expect conditions to improve three months from now, down from 77 per cent, the Cahners survey found.

The Conference Board said its index of consumer sentiment fell to 89.0 this month from a revised reading of 91.3 in July and 92.5 in June.

**APEC forum offers master
plan for trade**

SINGAPORE, Aug 31: The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum seeks to be a community, with a small "c," in nurturing free trade around the Pacific rim, a member of the task force entrusted with shaping the group's future said Wednesday, reports AP.

"It will promote free trade in the area, not a free trade area," Lee Tsao Yuan told a news conference.

Unlike the North American Free Trade Agreement and the European Union, no exclusive barriers would be erected around the vast APEC region.

She spoke to reporters in Singapore as a master plan for

sweeping aside regional trade barriers was presented to President Suharto of Indonesia in Jakarta.

Suharto will act as host at APEC's annual meeting of foreign and trade ministers in Jakarta on November 11 and 12. All or parts of the plan may be submitted to the summit called by Suharto in the Javanese town of Bogor on November 15.

If carried out, the ambitious vision for APEC's future could turn the Pacific rim into the most open trading area in the world by 2020.

The proposal was put together by the so-called Emi-

nent Persons Group of businessmen, academics and former government officials at the request of the last APEC meeting in Seattle for specific recommendations.

The blueprint calls for a policy of "open regionalism" which would allow APEC members to trade freely among themselves and offer the same benefits to others willing to reciprocate.

The forum accounts for more than 13 trillion dollars in annual economic output - close to 50 per cent of world trade and about 40 per cent of world population.

ROK PM promotes investment in Hanoi

HANOI, Aug 31: Prime Minister Lee Young-duk of South Korea wound up a three-day trip to Vietnam Wednesday by promoting South Korean investment in the fast growing Southeast Asian nation, reports AP.

Lee, the most senior South

Korean leader to visit since the Vietnam War ended in 1975, spent part of his last day in Vietnam at his country's largest investment here so far, the Orion Hanel Picture Tube Co. Ltd. The television tube factory, six kilometers (four miles) east of Hanoi, is worth

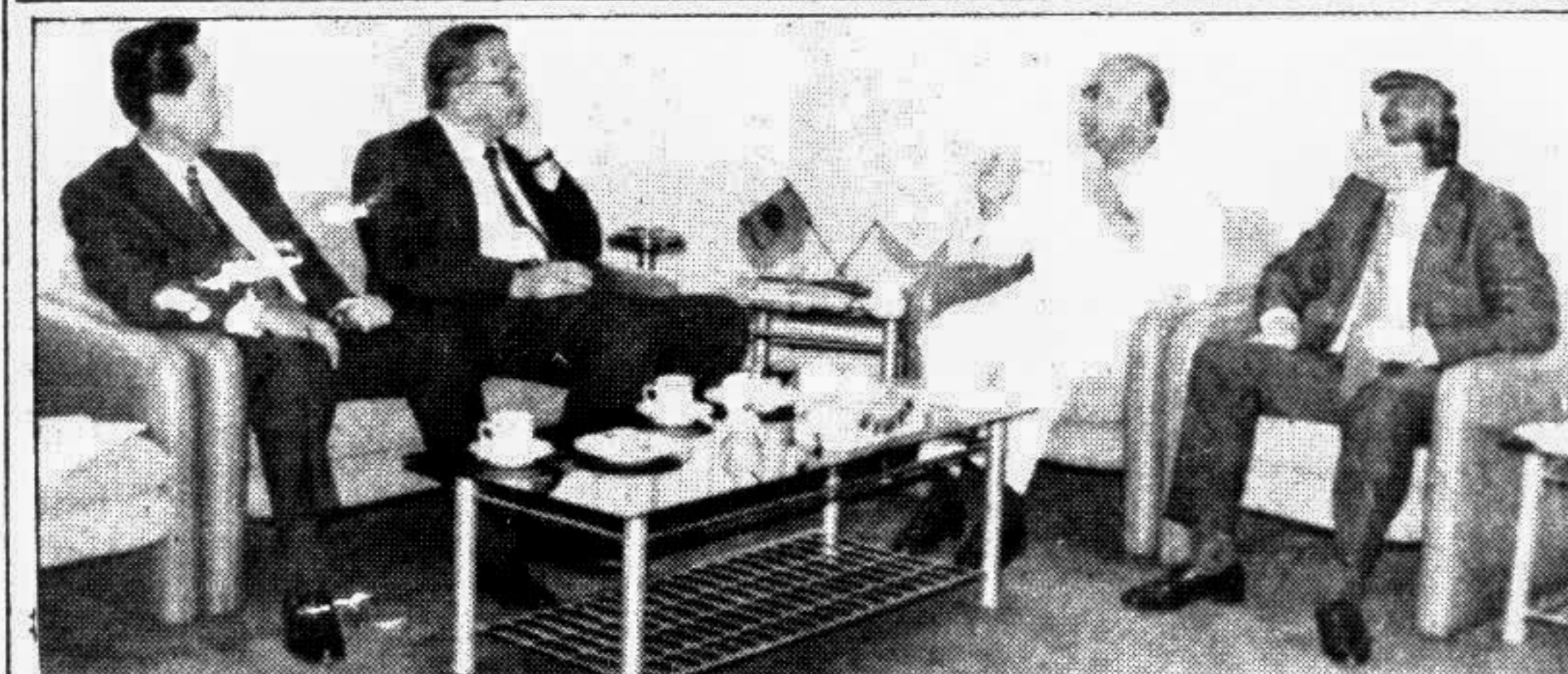
170 million dollars. South Koreans also launched a 40 million dollar joint venture to install telephone lines as Lee met on Tuesday with top Vietnamese leaders. South Korea established diplomatic relations with

Vietnam in December 1992, 17 years after the end of the war in which it sent troops to fight against Communist forces loyal to Hanoi. It is already Vietnam's third largest investor after Taiwan and Hong Kong, with projects worth a potential 749 million dollars.

Lee told Vietnamese Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet that South Korea considers Vietnam one of its most important economic partners, according to an unofficial spokesman for the South Korean delegation. The Koran spoke on condition of anonymity.

Investors from South Korea see Vietnam's abundant natural resources and diligent population of 72 million as a major market and investment opportunity. Vietnam's ruling Communist Party has enacted free market reforms since the mid-1980s, and annual economic growth has averaged 7.1 per cent during each of the past three years.

South Korean televisions, refrigerators and other home appliances have enjoyed a burst in popularity in Vietnam, where more expensive Japanese brands have traditionally dominated.



Sunthorn Vidhyameth, Ambassador of Thailand-R, along with Sumeth Darabananda and Sompop Amatayakul, Executive Vice-Chairman and President respectively of Saha-Union group, one of the leading industrial houses in Thailand, called on Mahbubur Rahman, President, the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) yesterday at the chamber office. They expressed their interest in manufacturing of textiles which is now being studied by them. The group is finalising soon to set up a garment linkage industry under joint venture in Bangladesh.

Cebu becomes exports and high-tech manufacturing centre

CEBU CITY, Philippines, Aug 31: This once-sleepy port, known mainly as the place where explorer Ferdinand Magellan was slain, has become the boomtown of the Philippines - a centre for exports and high-tech manufacturing, reports AP.

Over the past eight years, a business-oriented city government has helped Cebu City attract some 60 foreign companies, producing watches, computer chips, cameras, electronics and other high-tech goods.

The businesses, including Timex, United Technologies and Taiyo Yuden of Japan, now employ more than 25,000 workers.

With a population of nearly one million, the Cebu area, about 560 kilometers (350 miles) southeast of Manila, now accounts for 10 per cent

of the Philippines' total exports.

"Cebu is not just a land of promise and potential," former provincial gov. Lito Osmena said. "Cebu has a track record of double-digit growth even in times of national decline."

Signs of the boom here, the area's backward past. For years, Cebu was a laid back, seedy port which relied on copper exports, regional shipping and small scale manufacturing.

Today, gleaming shopping malls, well-equipped medical centres and five-star hotels are flourishing. A modern airport operates direct flights to Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia.

The boom has not been without problems. The city's narrow streets are clogged with traffic. Critics claim the

city administration has favoured political allies in lucrative contracts.

Nevertheless, local businessmen believe the boom has a solid foundation.

"I think here in the Philippines, Cebu is number one in terms of activity," said Assatao Hasumi, president of Taiyo Yuden.

The engine of Cebu's growth is the Mactan Export Processing Zone, located on an island near the city centre where Magellan, a Portuguese mariner, was killed in 1521 on history's first round-the-world voyage.

In 1986, the Philippine government established a zone 14 kilometers (8.6 miles) east of the downtown district where foreign companies were exempt from many of the regulations which have discouraged international investment.

For example, enterprises in the zone could be entirely foreign owned, rather than having to take on majority Filipino partners who often could not raise matching capital.

Industries in the zone pay no taxes for the first six years. Most equipment can be imported duty free. After six years, manufacturers receive tax credits for purchases of domestic raw materials.

In return, manufacturers agree to export 70 per cent of their products.

More than half the zone's businesses are Japanese. They are in for the long haul," said Joel Yulo, a city consultant. "They are not carpetbaggers who pull out at the first sign of trouble. They make inroads into markets and also bring their work ethic, which is good for us."

The zone has already trig-

gered a spillover effect. Plans call for construction of a 50-hectare (123.5 acre) business park outside the zone to accommodate support enterprises such as banking, communications and trading houses.

New industries have allowed Cebu to weather the decline in the island's traditional exports. Last year, the island's last copper mine closed. Still, exports rose by 29 per cent.

Other export zones offering similar incentives have been established elsewhere in the country, including the former US naval base at Subic Bay, 80 kilometers (50 miles) west of Manila.

None have been as successful as Cebu. Foreign businesses cite Cebu's central location, air and seaport facilities and educated, English-speaking workforce as its advantages.

**Angola to develop
economic ties
with S Africa**

LUANDA, Aug 31: Angola will develop economic and trade relations with South Africa on an equal footing, Angolan Minister for Planning and Economic Coordination Jose Pedro Demoras said here yesterday, reports Xinhua.

Demoras made the remarks upon his return from Gaborone, Botswana, where he had attended the Southern African Development Community summit on behalf of Angolan President Jose Eduardo Dos Santos.

He said that in southern Africa, Angola and South Africa are not mutually dependent, but equal, so the two sides are able to develop economic and trade relations on an equal footing.