

Journalists block Rao's move to open media to foreign firms

NEW DELHI, Sept 12: Indian Journalists' Union on Sunday put up a roadblock to Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao's latest possible economic liberalisation effort — opening up of the country's media to foreign firms shut out for four decades, reports Reuter.

The present liberalisation policy is again putting up a welcome sign for the colonial powers of yesterday to return to India with the force of media, four unions said in a letter to Rao.

The unions, which included the National Union of Journalists and two main news agency unions, said foreign media companies could use their strong finances and superior technology to cripple the homegrown media.

India resolved in 1955 not to let in foreign media organisations, but is having serious thoughts of undoing the move as part of the economic reform programme launched in 1991.

The government is expected to take a final decision soon on whether to allow for-

foreign companies to set up or have investment stakes in Indian media firms.

Political and media opposition has mounted this month following signals which were taken as indicate of Rao's support to foreign media firms entry.

The ruling Congress Party's spokesman, Chandulal Chandrakar, said earlier this month that many politicians feared foreign media could hinder Indian culture, but changed his stance within two days and said they were welcome.

The move was widely interpreted as a signal from Rao.

Domestic newspaper reports said investment stakes for foreign firms in Indian media companies found support in a committee of senior ministers appointed to examine the issue.

The unions, taking a cue from such reports, said Rao seemed to have made up his mind to allow foreign publications but vowed to carry on a

campaign against the entry of foreign media firms.

They urged Rao to give a serious thought to the entry of foreign media before taking a final decision.

"We may even seek an appointment with the Prime Minister or President to press our case," Kuldip Singh Arora, a spokesman for the voluntary media watch group, which co-ordinated the joint union of-fensive, told Reuters.

Some newspaper barons are believed to be lobbying hard to oppose investment proposals that could usher in well-known world publications to Indian newstands.

Britain's Pearson Group, publisher of the Financial Times, has proposed a tie-up with the Calcutta-based Ananda Bazar Patrika group for a business daily. But Bennett, Coleman and Co, the publisher of the Times of India, says it has the right to use the Financial Times' name in India.

Living Media India, publisher of India Today, wants to

link up with Time Warner Inc to publish an Indian edition of Time Magazine.

Other publications including the International Herald Tribune, Elle, and TV guide, published by Rupert Murdoch's news corp, are also trying to enter the Indian market, say industry sources.

India has some 10,000 publications in 18 local languages, considered a vibrant and potentially profitable market for foreign titles, foreign publications can be sold but not published under the present rules.

The unions said foreign media organisations could distort national interests by emphasising secessionist movements.

India's northern Jammu and Kashmir state and some of its north-eastern areas are facing secessionist problems.

"In the move to allow foreign media to come to India, we see a recipe for the country's emotional disintegration and a system of remote control of its affairs," the letter to Rao said.

S. Korea to allow 4000 more foreign workers

SEOUL, Sept 12: President Kim Young-sam said Monday South Korea will allow 4,000 more foreign workers this year to work at the nation's shoe-making factories to help boost their competitiveness, reports AP.

South Korea's shoe-making industry has suffered a recession in recent years as foreign buyers increasingly shifted their orders to China and Southeast Asian countries where labour costs are much cheaper.

The government will give work permits to 10,000 more foreign workers this year to ease a labour shortage in labour-intensive industries and will allocate the first 4,000 to shoe-making companies, Kim said.

Most of the other foreigners will work at textile factories, government officials said.

Kim made the remarks during a visit to Pusan, a traditional industry base for shoe-making companies, 340 kilometers (210 miles) south of Seoul.

Currently, South Korea sponsors 20,000 foreigners, mostly from China, the Philippines, Bangladesh and Nepal, in an apprenticeship programme to fill low-paying menial jobs.

As South Korea becomes more prosperous, an increasing number of South Koreans have shunned manual labour, forcing many businesses to shut down.

The government also said it will replace the current one-year work visas for foreign workers with two-year work permits to help ease the labour shortage.

Bank of England increases interest rate

LONDON, Sept 12: The Bank of England hiked interest rate by 0.5 percentage points to 5.75 per cent on Monday, despite continuing economic recovery, reports AP.

The rise in the prime rate — the first for nearly five years apart from during a 1992 run on the British pound — was to pre-empt any rise in inflation, Chancellor of the Exchequer Kenneth Clarke said.

Inflation is running at a 27 year low of 2.2 per cent. "To make sure it stays that way we need to act in good time to prevent inflationary pressures taking hold especially since changes in interest rates affect inflation only after a considerable lag," said Clarke.

He added that the Conservative government would take no risks, with the recovery.

The rise was the first since October 5, 1989 — apart from a temporary hike on what has become known as Black Wednesday in September 1992 before Britain pulled out of the European Monetary System which links currencies.

On February 8 this year, Clarke cut interest rates by .25 point.

"So often in the past, accelerating inflation has prevented us from enjoying sustained growth," Clarke said Monday.

Beijing to charge high fees for outsiders to live in capital

BEIJING, Sept 12: Beijing's city government has decided to charge new residents as much as 11,600 dollars to move into the capital, an official report said Monday, according to AP.

The new regulation, which is to go into effect November 1, is an attempt to control the massive influx into the capital from elsewhere in China, the Xinhua News Agency reported.

Under China's household registration system, each citizen is registered as living in a certain city or village. Until the 1980s, Chinese were not allowed to travel or move without official approval.

However, as controls on personal freedom relaxed, travel restrictions also were eased. That has caused a massive migration of peasants into urban centres such as Beijing and Shanghai in search of better lives. In many cases, they live in peasant ghettos or on the streets, and have been blamed for rising crime in the cities.

Nationwide, about 80 million peasants have left their farms for the cities. In Beijing, there is an estimated "transient population" of 1 million.

Those who find work can get permits that allow them to settle in Beijing, but now the city government plans to charge for that privilege.

If employers plan to hire workers from outside Beijing, they must pay 100,000 yuan (11,628 dollars) for each to obtain a permanent residence permit, or they can ask the employees themselves to pay.

Chinese president says Market economy doesn't conflict with socialism

PARIS, Sept 12: Visiting Chinese President Jiang Zemin said yesterday that planning and the free market are economic means, rather than an essential difference between socialism and capitalism, reports Xinhua.

Just as planning exists under the capitalist system, so the market exists under the socialist system, Jiang said.

The Chinese president was speaking to local journalists during his five-day state visit to France, the final leg of a tour which began on September 2 and has taken him to Russia and Ukraine.

Jiang stressed that there is no precedent for introducing a market economy under the socialist system, and added that the market economy does not conflict with the existing political system in China in terms of either ideology or the legal system.

Asked whether China will carry out political reforms to maintain its current economic development, Jiang replied that while it was focusing on

building a socialist market economy, his country was also paying close attention to political reforms.

Jiang said, however, "we will not copy the model of any other country."

The Chinese people, especially those who fought for the birth of a new China, are quite familiar with the history of the French capitalist revolution and the declaration of human rights, Jiang told journalists at the state guest house here.

History shows that all progressive things are cherished by the succeeding generations in all countries, Jiang said.

We are living now in a diversified world in which the levels of tradition, culture and economic development differ from the country to another, Jiang explained.

"I firmly believe that when all countries abide by the principles of mutual respect and cooperation, we will be able to usher in a bright world for the next century," Jiang said.

Indonesia requires more rice fields to maintain self-sufficiency

JAKARTA, Sept 12: Indonesia needs a further 114,000 hectares (281,580 acres) of rice fields a year to maintain the country's decade-old status of self-sufficiency, a news report said here today, reports AP.

The rice field expansion was required to meet the increasing demand created by population growth, the Jakarta Post daily quoted an expert in biology and agricultural engineering, Sudoedo Harjoani Joyo, as saying after being awarded a professorship at the prestigious Bogor Institute of Agriculture.

Sudoedo said the expansion was calculated without taking into account the conversion of rice fields into industrial or residential areas, which in Java alone reduced farm area by 40,000 hectares (58,000 acres) a year.

He said rice was consumed by more than 90 per cent of Indonesia's 18 million population, which was expected to grow by 1.6 per cent in the coming five years.

Sudoedo said that at the end of the 1970s, Indonesia's average per capita rice consumption was about 130 kilograms (217.3 pounds) a year.

He said the consumption increased to 147 kilograms (323.4 pounds) in the early 1990s and was expected to jump to 154 kilograms (338.8 pounds) in the next decade.

"That's why we need an additional 108,000 hectares to 114,000 hectares of rice fields annually to maintain rice self-sufficiency," he said, adding that he called for a stronger enforcement of existing regulations which prohibit the conversion of fertile agricultural land into industrial areas.

Asian stock markets close lower

HONG KONG, Sept 12: Asian stock markets closed mostly lower Monday, with share prices plunging in Hong Kong in reaction to renewed fears about mounting inflation in the United States, reports AP.

The Hang Seng Index, the

IBM to sell new mainframe computers this week

NEW YORK, Sept 12: IBM will begin selling new mainframe computers this week and has cut prices on the accompanying software to hold on to customers who may be considering other systems, reports AP.

The six new machines, to be formally announced Tuesday, are the first general-purpose mainframes IBM has built using the same kind of chip found in personal computers. The systems link dozens of chips to perform work in a way that is known as "parallel processing."

The company this year started selling large parallel systems with special purposes for database inquiries and other transactions. Other manufacturers, including Unisys and AT&T's computer subsidiary formerly known as NCR, have made similar transitions in the design of large computers.

IBM is positioning the new models, which it calls the System 390 Parallel Enterprise Servers, to compete against so-called minicomputers that run a different kind of software known as Unix.

The company has sold earlier System 390 models to more than 45,000 customers, some of them more than a decade ago. The new models are far smaller in physical size, a reflection of advances in technology, and use less energy because they are cooled by air rather than water.

"The thing we're most excited about is that this will actually go back and touch the customers who are on what we would call old mainframe technology," said Nick Donofrio, Senior Vice President and chief of IBM's large-scale computer division.

IBM feels pressure to keep its big machines competitive with Unix-based systems by Hewlett-Packard Co and others who are aiming at the huge market of mid-sized companies.

"We're attempting to make ourselves our own best alternative," Donofrio said.

Iran, Pakistan talk on gas transfer

TEHRAN, Sept 12: Iran and Pakistan on Sunday discussed the possible transfer of Iranian natural gas through Pakistan and the building of a refinery there, Iran's official news agency Irna reported, says Reuter.

It said visiting Pakistani President Farooq Leghari called at talks with President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani for the transfer of Iranian natural gas to India through Pakistan.

Rafsanjani at the talks said Iran and Pakistan had the potential to further expand their mutual ties and that plans had been agreed for the construction of a refinery by Iran in Pakistan as a joint venture, Irna added.

The agency did not give details.

Rafsanjani said the plan to transfer Iranian gas to Pakistan was being studied, it added.

Leghari arrived in Iran on Saturday heading a delegation of high-ranking officials including the Industry and Oil Ministers.

Tonga's economy likely to grow by 4.7 pc

WELLINGTON, Sept 12: The kingdom of Tonga's usually frail economy was expected to grow by 4.7 per cent this year, the central national reserve bank of Tonga said in its latest published quarterly bulletin received here today, reports AP.

The report said strong growth in the economy of the archipelago north of New Zealand and east of Australia will come on the back of a hefty squash harvest, a booming construction sector and a buoyant tourism industry.

The bulletin also showed that Tonga is dependent on the export of squash to Japan.

The bank said that in the last quarter of 1992 the 9,936 tonnes of exported squash earned 8.67 million pa'anga (6.4 million US dollars) out of total export earnings of 16 million pa'anga. It said that at the end of 1993 Tonga was able to export in excess of 17,000 tonnes.

Hanoi plans to modernize railroads

HANOI, Sept 12: Vietnam plans within 10 years to modernize its railroads, more than double its shipping fleet and build new highways costing 3.4 billion dollars, an official report said Monday, according to AP.

But Hanoi has little cash to pay for the improvements and will probably ask the World Bank and other agencies for most of the funds.

The state-run Voice of Vietnam radio said Vietnam's Ministry of Transport and Communications has prepared a master plan to upgrade 3,000 kilometers (1,865 miles) of highways and secondary roads, including Highway 1 — the country's main north-south artery.

Repairing the roads after years of neglect due to warfare and poverty has become a national priority. The United Nations rates half of Vietnam's roads as poor or very poor.

China's industrial output rises by 17.6 pc

BEIJING, Sept 12: Reflecting the fast growth throughout China's overheated economy, industrial output rose to 133.5 billion yuan (15.5 billion dollars) in August, a 17.6 per cent increase over a year earlier, it was reported Friday, says AP.

The State Statistical Bureau said total industrial production during the first eight months of the year had risen 15.9 per cent over the same period a year earlier to 1,017 trillion yuan (119 billion dollars).

August's total industrial output represented a 2.6 percentage point increase over July's 15 per cent growth, to 132.0 billion yuan (15.3 billion dollars), and was one of the highest increases recorded in recent years, the official China Business Times reported.

The State Statistical Bureau attributed the sustained growth this year mainly for foreign-funded enterprises and collective and private firms.

But the output of state enterprises lagged far behind, rising only 5.3 per cent in August over the year earlier to 83.1 billion yuan (9.7 billion dollars).

State enterprises are suffering from lagging sales that are swelling warehouses, operational losses and a severe shortage of working capital.

Big four economic powers plan to pledge allegiance to open markets

LOS ANGELES, Sept 12: In keeping with a long history of good intentions, the big four economic powers planned Sunday to pledge their allegiance to open markets even as the United States and Japan raced to avert a possible trade war, reports Reuter.

Trade Ministers from the United States, Japan, European Union and Canada were to end their session in the late morning closing a convivial three-day talking shop that was overshadowed by tense trans-Pacific negotiations.

The US-Japan spat hogged the limelight as negotiators met under a September 30 US threat to impose sanctions on Tokyo should it refuse to open its markets. Talks were cooperative, but the odds of a deal remained less than 50-50, said a Clinton administration source.

GCC states urged to learn from Asian economic giants

ABU DHABI, Sept 12: Gulf Arab states should copy the development experience of Japan and other Asian Economic giants if they want to achieve adequate growth in non-oil sectors, a former World Bank expert said Sunday, reports AP.

The six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) already has a developed infrastructure and other advantages absent in those Asian nations before they started to record the fastest growth rates in the world in the early 1960s, Luweis Hubeika wrote in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) daily Al Kahleij.

Hubeika, who served as a senior Middle East economy expert for several years in the World Bank, named Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, Thailand, South Korea, Hong Kong, Indonesia and Malaysia as the principal Asian economic giants.

He said the eight nations registered an annual growth rate of 5.5 per cent between 1965 and 1990, compared with 2.3 per cent in most industrialised countries, 0.2 per cent in Africa and 1.8 per cent in the Middle East and Latin America.

"Gulf states could benefit from the Asian experience. Actually, they can set out from

an even stronger base, which is the existence of an excellent infrastructure and enormous financial capabilities and natural resources which were almost absent in those Asian tigers," he said.

Citing studies by the World Bank and other international institutions, he attributed the economic success of the Asian tigers to political and social stability, strong governments with clear development strategies, the building of a modern infrastructure, intensive training and education programmes and wise financial policies.

He praised the policy of

Rice consumption in Japan slumps

TOKYO, Sept 12: Rice consumption by the average Japanese slumped to a record low between April and June, and it is expected to continue falling, the government's food agency said today, reports Reuter.

"Basically, rice consumption has been declining steadily because of diversification of (the Japanese) Diet," an agency official said.

Monthly consumption per person slumped to a record low of 5.09 kg (11.22 lbs) during the period, 5.7 per cent lower than a year earlier,

concentrating on the industrial sector, which surged from 32 per cent of gross domestic product in 1965 to 45 per cent in 1990.

Other factors behind their success included efficient management and manpower, control of budget deficits, and heavy investment in export oriented industries.

Hubeika said the GCC states — Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain and the UAE — could follow the example of the Asian tigers in pursuing an industrial policy aimed at reducing reliance on unstable oil earnings, which still provide more than 80 per cent of total GCC income.

"GCC states are also seeking to tackle their budget deficits and they now enjoy political, economic and social stability," he said.

The success of any future economic moves hinged on the training of an indigenous labour force to replace foreign workers, especially since most member states had now joined the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

Hubeika said the GCC states, which control more than 40 per cent of the world's oil, should also revise subsidies and other domestic economic policies and allow the private sector to play a leading role in development.



Yenny Hurtado (L) from the Confederation of Latin America, Mayan Villalba (C) from Asian Migrant Centre and Patrick Taran from Geneva talk on Sunday on the issue of 125 million migrant women in the world, during the NGO Forum in Cairo, a conference running parallel to the UN sponsored population and development meeting. — AFP photo

Exchange Rates

Following are the Sonali Bank's dealing rates, to public for some selected foreign currencies effective as on September 12. (Figures in Taka)

Currency	Selling		Buying	
	TT & OD	HC	TT Clean	OD Transfer
US Dollar	40.3875	40.4175	40.0400	40.0375
Pound Sterling	62.9867	63.0335	61.2587	61.1785
DM	26.5448	26.5645	25.8224	25.7886
FF Franc	7.7506	7.7561	7.5383	7.5284
C Dollar	29.8466	29.8688	29.0189	28.9809
S Franc	31.8583	31.8820	30.9980	30.9399
Jap Yen	0.4144	0.4148	0.3990	0.3985
Indian Rupee	1.2939	1.3036	1.2722	1.2531
Pak Rupee	1.3210	1.3309	1.2988	1.2793
Iranian Ryal	0.0231	0.0233	0.0227	0.0224
A) T (DO) US Dollar Spot Buying Tk	40.0637			
B) Usance Rates:				
30 Days DA	39.4558	39.1718	38.8879	38.3199
60 Days DA	39.4558	39.1718	38.8879	38.3199
90 Days DA	39.4558	39.1718	38.8879	38.3199
120 Days DA	39.4558	39.1718	38.8879	38.3199
180 Days DA	39.4558	39.1718	38.8879	38.3199
C) US Dollar sight export bill 3 months forward purchase	Tk. 40.0375			
D) US Dollar 3 months forward sale	Tk. 40.6175			

Currency	Selling		Buying	
	T.T. & O.D.	HC	O.D. Transfer	Buying
S Riyal	10.7691	10.7691	10.6300	10.6300
UAE Dirham	10.9973	10.9973	10.8546	10.8546
Kuwaiti Dinar	135.7107	135.7107	133.6989	133.6989
Singapore Dollar	26.9376	26.9376	26.5864	26.5864
1) Guilders	23.2848	23.2848	22.9792	22.9792
S Kroner	5.2773	5.2773	5.2068	5.2068
Malaysian Ringgit	15.8196	15.8196	15.6104	15.6104