

WB, IMF pledge to help 1b people living in poverty

MADRID, Spain, Oct 7: The International Monetary Fund and World Bank on Thursday ended a 50th anniversary bash by promising to do more to help the 1 billion people still living in poverty, reports AP.

Michel Camdessus, managing director of the IMF, announced rich and poor nations were close to ending a stalemate over a hefty \$15 billion increase in assistance aimed at weak economies.

I am confident in the coming weeks we will have an agreement on this package, he said in wrapping up a nearly two week long conference of the IMF and its sister agency, the World Bank.

The giant institutions, created out of the wreckage of World War II, lend billions of dollars annually to financially indebted nations.

On the eve of the agencies' annual meetings, poor nations put up unexpectedly stiff opposition to a modest aid proposal by the United States, Germany and other economic powerhouses.

The fight, casting a cloud over the anniversary celebrations, centered on Camdessus' proposal for the equivalent of \$15 billion in new reserves for the IMF's 179 member nations.

The rich nations were only willing to authorize an increase of \$3.4 billion dollar.

The extra money would be used by poor nations and former communist ones in Eastern Europe to buy imports, pay interest on foreign debts and cover other financial needs.

Camdessus refused to say how the differences would be resolved, but he said his proposal remained on the bargaining table.

Separately, World Bank President Lewis Preston, a target of protests by ecologists, complained, "There was a deliberate attempt by some to distract attention from the development agenda during these meetings."

"My message to them is simply this: We will not be distracted. We are more committed than ever before to help the poor," he told reporters.

Finance ministers and central bankers from the member nations used the meeting to press the institutions for changes.

Developing nations called for more money for weak economies. They also said women, the poor and others should play a more active part in designing and running aid projects.

Rich nations wanted the IMF and World Bank to make wiser use of the loans they make. They also called on the IMF to be on guard for danger-

ous economic trends, such as skyrocketing inflation rates.

Overall, the meeting held in a modern glass-and-marble conference center on the outskirts of Madrid, was upbeat.

The global economy is in better shape than it has been for years.

Industrial nations, vital for the world's economic health, are pulling out of a prolonged slump. Inflation rates are low, although the IMF cautioned the United States and other economic giants to act quickly if prices surge.

Mexico and some other nations in Latin America have recovered from the foreign debt crisis that in the 1980s appeared to dash hopes of an economic rebound anytime soon.

And in Asia, China's economy is one of the fastest growing in the world, attracting foreign investment along with the magnetic draw of the "Tigers" of Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea and others.

Still, conference speakers told the IMF and World Bank that there was no reason for complacency.

Poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa, long a recipient of IMF and World Bank aid, is expected to grow by the end of the century.

"The clearest point of consensus emerging from these meetings is that the develop-

ment agenda remains enormous," Preston told a news conference.

He said a billion people live in grinding poverty and nearly 4 million children die annually "because of easily preventable diseases."

"There will be 3 billion more people within the next generation — people with desperate need for clean water, sanitation, electricity and other basic needs," he said.

He said the World Bank has become one of the leading lenders of money for health, education, family planning and environmental protection.

For years, the bank focused much of its lending on road, ports and other infrastructure projects. Critics complained the building programs harmed the environment and displaced poor families in the way of the construction.

Two demonstrators from the Greenpeace environmental group stole the show at opening ceremonies by scaling steel girders to shower fake dollar bills on delegates. Some of the notes, issued by "World Bankenstein," fluttered down while Spanish King Juan Carlos spoke to the participants.

Preston criticized the Greenpeace protesters saying Spanish authorities viewed their demonstration as an insult to their country and monarch. "I have great sympathy for that," he said.

FBCCI polls Salman Panel projection meeting held

By Staff Correspondent

Salman F Rahman, Presidential candidate for the forthcoming election of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FBCCI) yesterday said that if elected he would infuse dynamism in the Federation to enable the apex body to be included in government's economic policy making.

Addressing a projection meeting of his panel at Sonargaon Hotel, the Deputy Chairman of the Beximco Group said that the businessmen, in fact run the country so that their apex body should be strengthened to voice their demands and to point out the problems.

He introduced the 15-member panel for the Executive Committee to the packed Ball Room of the hotel amid cheers. The members of the Salman F Rahman Panel are: Niaz Rahim, AKM Anisul Islam, Muhammad Ayub, Amin Lasker, Abser Karim Chowdhury, Alhaj Fazlur Rahman, Alhaj Delwar Hossain, Arif Halder, Sheikh Shah Jalal, Tarek Kamal, M A Kamal, Abul Hossain, Syed Abu Siddique, Taher Sobhan and ATM Ahsan Habib Khan.

The election will be held on October 17.

Salman Rahman said that in the changing economic circumstances, the apex body like FBCCI can play an active role in building up the country's economy.

The 43-year old businessman said that two positive decisions in 1981 opened the door of Bangladesh' s economic industries which now earn two billion dollars annually.

He pledged to set up a well-equipped secretariat for the FBCCI to facilitate the business community.

FAO appeals for achieving food security in Asia

MANILA, Oct 7: The UN-sponsored Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) conference ended here today with a call for Asia-Pacific to achieve food security and confront the effects of disastrous ecological changes in the region, reports AFP.

Most Asia-Pacific countries had made "impressive progress" in food production and economic performance, said Philippine Agriculture Secretary Roberto Sebastian in his closing remarks at the 22nd Asia-Pacific FAO conference.

AB Bank earns Tk 257.29 m profit in '93

Arab Bangladesh Bank Ltd (ABBL) has earned an operating profit of Taka 257.29 million in 1993 registering an increase of 22.99 per cent to that of 1992, says a press release.

This was announced at the 12th Annual General Meeting of the bank at a city hotel recently.

Complying with the requirements of Bangladesh Bank, the bank retained a divisible surplus of Taka 21.74 million.

It approved the issuance of Bonus Share in proportion of one share for every ten shares held. This Bonus, if converted into the face value of shares, would amount to a return of 10 per cent.

The meeting was presided over by M Morshed Khan, Chairman and attended, among others, by Ramzul Seraj, Vice Chairman, Salman F Rahman, Directors, A K M Ghaffar, Adviser and A Rahim Chowdhury, President & Managing Director of the Bank.

9 Japanese electronics firms accused of bid rigging

TOKYO, Oct 7: Nine Japanese electronics firms, including industry leaders Hitachi Ltd and Toshiba Corp, are suspected of rigging bids on hundreds of millions of dollars in public contracts, Japan's fair trade watchdog said Thursday, reports AP.

The case could turn into the latest in a series of recent scandals illustrating the wide extent of "dango", or bid-rigging, which has been rampant in the construction industry.

The United States, considering dango a symbol of the Japanese market's intransigence to outsiders, has de-

manded that Japan's Fair Trade Commission crack down on the practice.

The latest case involves electronic equipment for sewage systems contracted by the Japan Sewage Works Agency, an affiliate of the Construction Ministry.

Fair Trade Commission spokesman Kenji Sugiyama said the commission is investigating whether the nine firms held a "draft" similar to those in professional sports leagues in which the companies took turns selecting public contracts.



Salman F Rahman (sitting 3rd from right), a presidential candidate for FBCCI polls scheduled to be held on October 17, seen along with the members during his panel projection meeting at Hotel Sonargaon in the city yesterday. — Star photo

US, S Arabia fail to agree on funding for buying US jets

JEDDAH, Saudi Arabia, Oct 7: The United States and Saudi Arabia failed to agree on funding for the purchase of 60 US wide-bodied jets by the Saudi national airline during talks here Thursday, US Treasury Secretary Lloyd Bentsen said, reports AFP.

Speaking to reporters shortly before leaving Jeddah at the end of a two-day visit, Bentsen said he had discussed with Saudi Finance Minister Mommamad Abul Khail possible funding from the US export-import bank for the purchase by Saudi.

"I don't think anything was arrived at in the way of conclusion, but we're discussing that as a possibility," he said.

Saudia signed a six billion dollar contract in February to buy 60 US wide-bodied jets from the two US aircraft giants Boeing and McDonnell Douglas.

But recently Riyadh asked Washington to defer payment for the Saudi contract and a four-billion dollar contract won by the US group AT and T to expand the Saudi telecommunications network.

The US treasury said last week the kingdom was facing difficulties arising from a shortage of liquid assets linked to the fall in oil prices.

Bentsen urged Saudi Arabia to cut its public spending to narrow a budget deficit that has widened with the drop in oil revenue and debts linked to the 1991 war to oust Iraq from Kuwait.

Bentsen said he praised Saudi officials for tightening

the budget. Earlier he told US businessmen here Saudi Arabia was willing to allow more investment in a growing private sector to help trim its budget deficit.

"I came away with the firm belief that investments here are secure and that the Saudis

Bumper crop in China

HARBIN, Oct 7: The 60,000 ha rice crops in northeast China's Heilong Jiang province yielded a bumper harvest this year, reports Xinhua.

Agricultural officials in this provincial capital said the per ha output of the sparsely transplanted crops averaged at 7,500 kg, more than that of the crops cultivated in the conventional way.

Agricultural experts here called the achievement a major break through in rice growing in China's high altitude area.

Agro-technicians of the province began to experiment with the transplanting method in Ningnan county at the end of the 1980s and started to produce good results three years later.

The new method calls for transplanting only 50 rice seedlings on a square meter, only half of the stands of the conventional standard. It saves seeds by some 40 per cent, uses less seedling cultivation land, and reduces the cost and labour involved in seedling transplanting.

are interested in additional investment," Bentsen told the group after talks with King Fahd and Saudi ministers.

The Saudi Arabia Basic Industries Corporation (SABIC) is "already 30 per cent private, going increasingly that way," Bentsen added. "I suspect investors will want a larger share of SABIC since it's growing and profitable operation."

"Privatization must continue so that a source of potential future government debt is eliminated," Bentsen said.

Saudi Arabia, the world's largest producer and exporter of oil, is a key ally of Washington in the Gulf and an important export market.

Saudi Arabia's decision last week to lift the secondary Arab boycott on firms doing business with Israel will clear the way for more US companies to deal with the kingdom.

Bentsen said King Fahd accepted an invitation from US President Bill Clinton to visit the United States, although no dates were discussed.

Saudia Arabia, which produces eight million barrels per day, saw its oil revenues slump to below 40 billion dollars last year, compared with 116 billion in 1991.

The slump, aggravated by a weak dollar, led Riyadh to rein in public spending and embark on a privatisation programme.

Bentsen also said the two sides wanted to continue UN sanctions on Iraq, imposed after it invaded Kuwait in 1990.

US regards India as emerging economic power: Brown

WASHINGTON, Oct 7: President Clinton's administration regards India as an emerging economic power and a major partner, US Commerce Secretary Ronald Brown said Thursday, reports AP.

The end of the Cold War "provides the best chance we have had in years to deepen our bilateral ties" with India, Brown said in a speech to the US India Joint Business Council. "This administration sees India as becoming an important partner," he added.

"Mature and productive economies like the United States will continue to prosper," Brown said, "but other nations — like India — are poised to emerge as major economic powers."

Europe and Japan "will continue to be our largest markets for decades to come," the secretary said, but India and nine other "BEMs" — Big Emerging Markets — "hold far more promise for large incremental gains in (US) exports."

Brown predicted exports to the ten would exceed those to either Europe or Japan by the turn of the century and to Europe and Japan combined by the year 2010. He named the other nine as South Korea, Indonesia, Turkey, South Africa, Poland, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico and "the Chinese economic area."

Brown said his planned trade and development mission to India in January accompanied by about 25 US company leaders should be "one of the most significant" he has made since joining Clinton's cabinet.

In stops at Bombay and New Delhi, where US commercial offices are opening, and in the high technology city of Bangalore, South India, the mission will scout opportunities for participating in New Indian infrastructure projects whose estimated value could reach \$100 billion by 2000, Brown said.

He praised Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao's government for taking many difficult decisions to open up the Indian economy. But he said more progress is needed and his mission will discuss "the barriers that do remain in our commercial relationship."

Indian import tariffs "are still among the highest in the world," Brown said, and US companies remain concerned about weak protection of patents and trademarks against piracy and bureaucratic obstacles to investment.

However, the Indian government approved 1.2 billion dollars worth of new US investment last year, more than double the 1992 level and roughly equal to the total from 1951-91, he said. US exports to India hit a record 2.8 billion dollars last year and "in a growing, more open Indian economy" should reach an annual level of 5 billion dollars, Brown said.

Nepal urges swift conclusion of Arun Dam aid package

MADRID, Oct 7: Nepal is requesting that lenders conclude the aid package promised for the Arun Hydro-electric project as soon as possible because further delay could harm the economy, Nepal Rastra Bank Governor Har Shankar Tripathi told the IMF annual meeting, reports Reuters.

"I take this opportunity to request the financing donors and institutions to conclude their assistance package to this project at their earliest opportunity," Tripathi said.

He said further delays would yield cost overruns of nearly 25 million US dollars a year.

The 764 million US dollar project plans to dam the Arun valley, deep in the Himalayas. It is being opposed by environmental groups who claim it would threaten the livelihoods of local tribes and destroy rare animal species.

Serve The People disburses loan in Kustia

The Serve The People, a non-government organisation, disbursed loan to the villagers of Bahirchar Adarsha Gram under Bheramara Thana of Kustia on Monday, says a press release received in Dhaka.

The NGO has been engaged in socio-economic development activities in three Adarsha Grams of Kustia district in association with PPMU, Ministry of Land.

The Additional Deputy Commissioner of Kustia, Khorshed Alam, disbursed the loan in a simple function held at the Adarsha Gram Community Center. It was also addressed by M Raihan, TNO Bheramara, Begum Shahzadi and Syed Ahmad Faruque, the Chairperson and general secretary of the organisation respectively and the local UP chairman.

Lawmakers want more Americans work on cruise ships

WASHINGTON, Oct 7: Safety on cruise ships is a growing concern, lawmakers said Thursday. They also said they want more Americans working on the vessels that dock in American ports, reports AP.

The industry was hit last summer with a major outbreak of gastrointestinal disease and an episode of Legionnaires' disease that killed an American passenger.

At a hearing Thursday, Rep. William Lipinski, chairman of the House Merchant Marine subcommittee on, said members of his panel "have concerns about the cruise line industry."

"We intend to continue to monitor this situation," said Lipinski.

Lipinski and Rep. Gene Taylor suggested that the large number of non-American crew members on cruise ships could be hindering effective communication between passengers and crew. The concentration of people whose native language isn't English could make it difficult for them to

give clear instructions in an emergency, they said.

"The language barrier can be a very, very serious problem," Lipinski said. "We want to try to get more US citizens (working on cruise ships). It's an area where American citizens could gain employment and that's something we desperately need in this country."

It was the subcommittee's second hearing on safety in the cruise ship industry, which is growing rapidly and carries some 4 million passengers a year from US ports.

"Lawmakers questioned the sole witness, Albert Wallack, senior vice president of passenger services for Celebrity Cruises Inc, about the outbreak of Legionnaires' disease last summer on Celebrity's ship Horizon.

At least 50 people are believed to have been infected on the Horizon during nine trips between Bermuda and New York City between April and July. A passenger on a July 2 cruise died two weeks after contracting the disease, a type of pneumonia that is treatable

with antibiotics but is fatal in 5 per cent to 15 per cent of cases.

Wallack said the outbreak has been traced to whirlpool baths on the ship. The whirlpools on board all Celebrity ships have been taken out of service permanently, and the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have given the Horizon a clean bill of health, he said.

Last summer, in addition to the Legionnaires' outbreak: — About 600 passengers and nearly 400 crew members aboard the Viking Serenade fell ill in late August with Shigellosis, a gastrointestinal infection that causes diarrhoea, vomiting and fever. The ship cancelled its Baja California cruise.

— Fire broke out on the Regal Empress as it returned to New York City in mid August from a cruise to New England and Canada. More than 1,100 passengers were evacuated when the vessel docked. Nine minor injuries were reported.



Khorshed Alam, Additional Deputy Commissioner, Kustia, addressing the loan recipients of Bahirchar Adarsha Gram. M Raihan, TNO, Bheramara and Shahzadi Begam, Chairperson of Serve The People, are also seen in the picture.



The 12th Annual General Meeting of Arab Bangladesh Bank Ltd was held at a city hotel recently with Chairman M Morshed Khan presiding.