

Phillips pays \$40m as settlement for Houston blast

HOUSTON, Oct 14: Phillips Petroleum Co. has paid 40 million dollars to the husband and parents of a woman among 23 killed in a 1989 Houston Chemical Complex blast, reports AP.

The settlement, signed by the company in January 1993, was kept confidential for 18 months by agreement of the two sides.

Michael O'Connor of Houston, husband of chemical engineer Mary Kay O'Connor, and his attorney revealed details for the first time in Thursday's editions of the Houston Chronicle.

Rob Phillips, a spokesman for the company at its Bartlesville, Oklahoma headquarters, declined comment to the Chronicle. Phillips officials did not immediately return calls from the Associated Press on Thursday.

O'Connor, 34, had been with the company 12 years and had risen to become operations superintendent, responsible for day-to-day operations. She was the highest-ranking Phillips employee killed in the blast.

Asia-Pacific economic integration on the rise

SINGAPORE, Oct 14: The economic integration of Asian-Pacific nations is increasing, but European firms remain under-represented in the region and risk being left behind, according to Asian leaders participating in an economic conference here, reports AFP.

"Growth poles...are teaching our local peoples the virtues of working together and trading directly as in ancient times," said Philippine President Fidel Ramos.

He identified the areas as Hong Kong, Taiwan and South China, as well as Singapore, Malaysia and Brunei.

Speaking at the three-day Europe-East Asia summit organized by the Switzerland-based world economic forum, Ramos said "inter-regional trade now binds our countries all the way from Japan to Australia."

Long dependent on their

exports to the United States, Asian countries still only realize 43 per cent of their international commerce from their near neighbours.

In contrast, the European Union increased its trading among members from 54 per cent in 1985 to 60 per cent today, said Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong in his inaugural address.

But things are changing quickly.

The Malaysian Minister of International Trade and Industry, Rafidah Aziz, said Asian enterprises are creating a network of company relations with companies in other countries of the region. "The buzz word for the decade to come will be Asian networking," she said.

Asian enterprises are interested in investing in Asia not only to open new markets, but also to increase their competitiveness by profiting from

strengths of each country, she said.

An impetus to economic integration in Asia may be given next month in Indonesia during the meeting of the 17 countries of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, which Ramos expects will decide to liberalize regional commerce.

Ramos also said the creation of a free trade zone including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) must be speeded up. A free exchange zone must be in place by 2003, five years ahead of schedule, he said.

Asian officials say European countries do not yet realize the importance of Asian development. Europe still has to truly discover Asia, said Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad. Too many European industries are "incredibly Eurocentric and often incredibly unaware that they are so."

Japan's tobacco monopoly faces huge leftovers after stock sale

TOKYO, Oct 14: A majority of Japanese investors who won the right to buy the first publicly offered shares of Japan's government tobacco monopoly have cancelled their claims, a bad omen for the stock's future prices, reports AP.

After the first round of a lottery to select buyers for 436,666 shares of Japan Tobacco Inc, the nation's only tobacco and cigarette maker, more than 280,000 remained unpurchased, the Finance Ministry said Friday.

Applications were accepted last month for the initial sale, part of a plan to offer 666,666 of the total 10 million shares.

But analysts say many potential buyers have lost interest, partly because of the stock's high initial price. JT offers its stock for 1.44 million yen (14,380 dollars) per share, while its face value is 50,000 yen (500 per share).

A second lottery, held Thursday, was expected to leave thousands of the overpriced shares without takers.

Some investors worry that the timing of the sale of these leftover stocks could damage the fragile Tokyo Stock Exchange.

IMF chief's Manila visit to be protested

MANILA, Oct 14: Groups opposed to the economic policies of the International Monetary Fund said Friday they will hound the head of the Fund with protests during his visit here next week, reports AP.

Michel Camdessus, managing director of the IMF, is scheduled to arrive in Manila Saturday for a four-day visit that will include talks with President Fidel Ramos and the government's economic officials.

Camdessus, who has twice postponed a visit to the Philippines, will also meet Manila Archbishop Cardinal Jaime Sin and representatives of non-governmental organizations, including militant anti-foreign-debt groups like the Freedom from Debt Coalition.

Coalition President Leonor Briones, said the protests include pickets at venues of all Camdessus meetings.

"It is only right that the top executive of the IMF should come here and we can tell him exactly what we feel about what the IMF is doing in the Philippines," Briones said.

"Instead of uplifting the plight of the Filipino, IMF policies in fact worsened the state of the Philippine economy," Briones said.

Briones also challenged the IMF chief to a public debate on its economic policies.

Former army Maj Abraham Purugganan, an official of the military rebel group, Young Officers Union, said his organization will support the protest but declined to specify what action it will take.

The officers union took part in the 1989 coup attempt against former President Corason Aquino. The group is now holding peace talks with the Ramos government.

"We don't need these international creditors in the conduct of our affairs," Purugganan said.

Kazakh parliament agrees to free bread prices

ALMA ATA, Oct 14: The parliament of Kazakhstan voted on Thursday to free the price of bread in a move that the government said was essential to alleviate an economic crisis, reports Reuter.

Deputies also voted after heated debate to compensate state employees and pensioners, many of whom have not been paid for months, for the rise.

Bread currently costs between one and two tenge while a box of matches costs one tenge. The current exchange rate is 50 tenge to the dollar.

Many deputies said their voters would not be able to bear the burden of the new prices.

But Prime Minister Akezhan Kazhegeldin, appointed on Wednesday, said without a price increase bread was likely to disappear from the shops as it was unprofitable for producers.

Deputies, who had turned down the proposal 15 times in the past fearing widespread protests, finally agreed.

The premier said money would be found to pay overdue salaries of health, education and other state workers, but it was not clear where the money would come from.

Bread prices would be freed after the publication of the parliament's decision, expected shortly.

China predicts retail price index to rise by 8 pc in '94

BEIJING, Oct 14: China's State Information Center expects China's overall prices to fall during the next few months, while the retail price index is expected to rise by 8 per cent in 1994 from last year, an official report said Friday, reports AP.

The center said the rise in the retail price index will be 14 per cent to 15 per cent in the fourth quarter of this year, following a 19 per cent rise during the third quarter, the China Securities Daily reported Friday.

China's nationwide consumer price index rose 22.8 per cent between January and August.

Xu Hongyuan, an information center official in charge of such forecasts, said improved distribution, measures to enforce price controls and increased supply of scarce products would help lead to a fall in the retail price index during the next few months.

The report did not provide the formula used to calculate the retail sales index.

China is expected to announce the total value of retail sales for September soon. China's retail sales volume rose 34 per cent to 128.6 billion yuan (15.06 billion dollars) in August from the same period a year earlier.



A team of travel agency managers left Sylhet recently for Britain on a 15-day tour sponsored by British Airways. —Star photo

US speeding up aid to S Africa

JOHANNESBURG, Oct 14: The US government would give promised aid to South Africa more quickly than originally planned, increasing the amount this year to 212 million dollars, officials said Wednesday, reports AP.

Additional spending programme and trade boosted the amount promised over the next three years to 70 million dollars, more than any other country in sub-Saharan Africa, said Cap De of the US Agency for International Development.

"The US government has the perception that South Africa has a major regional role to play and funds going into South Africa will help the entire region," Dean said.

The 212 million dollars allocated by Washington for 1994 almost tripled the 80 million dollar given in 1993 and showed the support for President Nelson Mandela's government elected in South Africa's first all-race election in April, according to Dean.

He said the 1994 allocation was 46 million dollars more than originally planned and came in part through moving forward some of the money planned to be spent later in the three-year period.

Most of the 1994 money would be bilateral grant programmes, while 78 million dollars would be loan guarantees to South African banks, Dean said.

Dutch '94 exports to reach record high

THE HAGUE, Oct 14: If present export growth rates continue, Dutch 1994 exports will peak at a record level of well over 260 billion guilders, Dutch Deputy Minister of Economic Affairs Anneke Van Dok said, reports Reuter.

"After some years of moderate growth and even a nominal decrease, Dutch exports are on their way up again," Van Dok said in a speech to Dutch exporters, a copy of which was made available to the press.

She said Dutch exports had shown an increase of eight percent in guilder terms during the first half of 1994, when price growth had been very moderate.

Van Dok said exports to European Union member states had recovered and trade with European free trade association countries had developed well in the first half of this year.

Exports to Eastern Europe grew by 20 per cent and to North America by 19 per cent, she said without elaborating.

Van Dok warned that growing possibilities to export goods and services to EU countries carried the danger of companies neglecting contacts in markets that were further a field.

"If we want to share in the economic growth in Southeast

Asia, we need to make an extra effort," she said.

Van Dok said an impending factor might be the composition of the range of Dutch exports.

"Dutch exporting companies should bear in mind that the differences between world market demands and Dutch supplies will only increase," the Deputy Minister said.

Earlier this week, a survey by the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture warned that the Dutch agricultural sector faces serious problems as it repeatedly failed to meet changing demands in international markets. Some 10 per cent of the Dutch workforce is employed in this sector and agricultural products account for around one-quarter of total exports.

Last week the Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics said exports from the Netherlands grew by 9.5 billion guilders or 7.5 per cent to 136.1 billion guilders in the first half of 1994.

This year's first-half trade surplus rose to 10.2 billion guilders from 8.8 billion in the year-ago period.

In the full year 1993, Dutch exports totalled 258.2 billion guilders and the trade surplus more than doubled to 23.3 billion.

Mat industry may be set up at Raninagar

NAOOGAN, Oct 14: Raninagar thana, famous for its mat and curtain production, has potentials for setting up mat industries, reports UNB.

Local people, mostly mat weavers, have urged the government to set up a mat-cum-curtain industry in the thana to help the poor villagers improve their living standard.

Raninagar thana, which has a reputation for mat production since the British period, is situated on 65 square miles with a population of more than two lakh.

Ex-finance minister says West should stop lending to Russia

LONDON, Oct 14: The West should stop lending to Russia, former Russian Finance Minister Bori Fyodorov said Thursday in a comment on the rouble crisis, reports AFP.

But he said Moscow was unlikely to undertake necessary economic reforms.

"Without some sort of miracle," Russian President Boris Yeltsin's government was un-

likely to embark on comprehensive reform, Fyodorov told The Financial Times in an interview. "I would wonder whether there will be real reforms, whether real stabilisation will begin," he said.

Fyodorov, a free-marketeer who also served as Russia's representative to the World Bank, added that in such conditions of "drifting medi-

US wholesale prices drop 5 pc in Sept

WASHINGTON, Oct 14: Prices at the wholesale level plunged 0.5 per cent in September, their biggest drop in more than a year, the government said Thursday in a report certain to calm deflation anxieties on Wall Street, reports AP.

The Labour Department said that the decline in its Producer Price Index, which measures inflationary pressures before they reach the consumer, reflected big declines in the price of gasoline and other energy products and a record drop in coffee prices.

The decrease followed two straight months when wholesale prices had risen sharply, up 0.6 per cent in August, the biggest jump in nearly four years, and up 0.5 per cent in July.

Economists said if there are no worrying price pressures in Friday's release of the Consumer Price Index, the Fed will probably leave interest rates alone at least until after the November congressional elections.

In another report Thursday, the Labor Department said that first-time claims for unemployment benefits dropped by 5,000 last week, pushing the four-week moving average down to its lowest level in more than five years.

September's PPI decline was led by a record 10.3 per cent decrease in coffee price, which had soared in the two previous months because of crop damage in Brazil.

Also declining were pork

Taiwan to fine Filipino cargo ship owners

TAIPEI, Oct 14: The owners of a Philippine cargo ship are to be fined Taipei dollar three million (US 114,500 dollars) for breaking Taiwan's prohibition on sailing to Chinese ports, harbour authorities in the northern port of Keelung said on Thursday, reports Reuter.

The Manila-registered MV Isla Negros broke a Taiwan law that forbids cargo liners from docking at both Chinese and Taiwan ports, even if they pass through a third port on the way, Keelung harbour Master You Chi-Min said by telephone.

"If you want to come to Taiwan you can't go to the mainland. We have a law against direct contact," You said.

When inspectors boarded the 2,981 tonne Isla Negros as it lay at anchor off Keelung on October 7 they found entries for the ports of Shekou and Chwan, in China's southern Guangdong province, logged in its ship's record, You said.

The Ministry of Transportation and Communications would impose the fine in the next few days, You said.

Moro rebels occupy irrigation project in Philippines

COTABATO, Philippines, Oct 14: Muslim guerrillas occupied an irrigation project built by a South Korean firm, less than two months after a similar takeover, the local military chief said here today, reports AFP.

Brigadier General Renato Garcia said 150 guerrillas of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) seized the 10-hectare (24.7 acre) Shinsung Corporation site in Carmen town on Thursday, scaring away 21 policemen who were guarding the area.

Korean workers were on vacation and were not at the site when it was seized.

MILF guerrillas occupied the same site in August, trapping seven South Korean workers in the compound for a week. They later agreed to withdraw peacefully.

The MILF, a splinter group of the main Muslim insurgent organisation, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), had demanded in August that the military move away from the site and that some of their members be employed as workers in the project.

Garcia said MILF members who were employed as a result of the August incident had taken part in the new occupation and that the MILF was again demanding a further troop withdrawal.

He said he was asking the MILF leadership to get their men out. If this was not done, the military would attack the forces occupying the project, he said.

Although the MNLF has agreed to a ceasefire and is negotiating for autonomy for Muslim-populated areas, the MILF is not part of the peace talks.



FBCCI polls Ali vying for EC membership

By Staff Correspondent

Mohammad Ali, Chairman of AB Group of Industries, is contesting the FBCCI elections scheduled for October 17 as a candidate for the post of executive committee membership.

A noted industrialist, Mohammad Ali is a candidate in the polls from the panel led by Redwan Ahmed, MP.

A freedom fighter, Ali is the founder of a good number of educational institutions and socio-cultural organisations and a life member of the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society.

In a press release Ali said he would give his sincere efforts to protect the interests of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

Central American alliance formed to protect environment

MANAGUA, Oct 14: Representatives of seven Central American states Wednesday formed a regional alliance for protecting the environment that US Vice-President Al Gore hailed as leading the world, says Reuter.

The Central American alliance for sustainable development, signed by six presidents and a representative of the prime minister of Belize, is aimed at harnessing the region's rich natural resources while protecting them at the same time.

The alliance calls for protecting forests and endangered species, reducing pollution to air, water and soil and promoting environmental education.

"You lead the World in this effort," Gore said.

World's highest value bank note in circulation in Japan!

TOKYO, Oct 14: The Bank of Japan, said Thursday it had 372.2 billion dollars worth of bank notes in circulation at the end of last year, more than any other country or region, reports AP.

The figures, based on an exchange rate of 111 yen to the dollar, compares with 324.9 billion dollars for the United States and 342.8 billion dollars for the European Union, the central bank said.

Findings are based on a recent survey by the bank for International Settlements aimed at assessing the potential impact posed by counterfeiting of bank notes, a Bank of Japan official said.

Cash is used widely for many day-to-day transactions in Japan, including the purchase of expensive items such as cars. Cheques are rarely used and although credit cards are more common, many establishments only accept cash.

Despite the high value, the Japanese central bank currently has only three notes in wide circulation — 10,000 yen, 5,000 yen and 1,000 yen notes, worth 100 dollars, 50 dollars and 10 dollars at the present exchange rate.

US grain watering ban to start in February

WASHINGTON, Oct 14: The US Agricultural Department will ban the use of water to suppress grain dust because it can be too easily misused to increase the weight of grain, reports AP.

Agriculture Secretary Mike Espy announced the final rule on Thursday. The ban, first proposed in August 1993, will take effect February.

Overseas buyers had complained about the practice, which also can cause the grain to deteriorate.

Water had been used to prevent dust buildup after a number of fatal explosions in the late 1970s at grain elevators.

But starting in 1992, foreign and domestic grain merchants began complaining about watering. The United States has been the only grain exporter to allow the use of water.

Iran, Indonesia agree to boost economic cooperation

JAKARTA, Indonesia, Oct 14: Indonesia and Iran on Friday agreed to increase air and sea links between the two countries and to strengthen economic and technical cooperation, reports AP.

The informal agreements were reached during talks between President Suharto and Iran's President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, who arrived Thursday for a three-day visit.

Indonesia plans to build textile, mineral water and palm oil factories in Iran, Murdiono, minister at the state secretariat, told reporters.

He said Iran agreed to serve as the entry point for Indonesia's exports of non-oil commodities to the central Asian market.

At a banquet speech Thursday night, Rafsanjani in an apparent reference to the United States said Iran will not accept world leadership claims by any country.

He said the only legitimate world order is one not influenced by "arrogant powers' interference," he said.

He said issues such as human rights have been used by certain countries to strengthen their hegemony and to justify interference in the internal affairs of other countries.

Rafsanjani, accompanied by his wife and Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati, plan to visit a state-owned aircraft factory, IPTN, in the nearby city of Bandung.

Last year, Iran bought four Super Puma helicopters built by IPTN and Indonesia hopes to sell more aircraft to Tehran.



Commodore Mohammad Aatur Rahman (Retd), Chairman of Islami Bank Bangladesh Limited, delivering his presidential speech at a get-together of garments and textile clients organised by the bank at a city hotel on Thursday.