

US seeks compromise over China's membership in WTO
JAKARTA, Nov 11: The United States is exploring a possible compromise over the contentious issue of China's membership in the world trade body, US officials said, reports Reuter.

China has staked its national prestige on becoming a founding member of the new World Trade Organisation, which is to succeed the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) on January 1 as the mechanism for lowering tariffs and other trade barriers.

The United States has opposed the timing of Chinese admission, arguing that Beijing must first prove it can live by global trade rules.

But in recent days, the Clinton administration has begun to hint at some flexibility.

A senior US official told reporters: "We are exploring with our friends the possibility that if they (China) get into GATT six months or a year from now, they can be grandfathered in (to the WTO) as founding member ... it (founding member status) would be retroactive."

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said this proposal had not yet been put formally to the Chinese but "we're negotiating seriously" on it with other trading partners.

The official, in Jakarta with Secretary of State Warren Christopher, US Trade Representative Mickey Kantor and Commerce Secretary Ron Brown for Asia-Pacific trade talks, predicted such a compromise would not be sufficient for Beijing.

Market forces to control coal output in China

BEIJING, Nov 11: Coal production and transportation will be ruled by market forces beginning next year, an official report said Wednesday, reports AP.

Coal remains one of the few commodities that the government has not freed to market forces because it is the main energy source for China.

But an official of the Coal Industry Ministry said coal prices next year would be settled through negotiations between buyer and supplier, the Xinhua News Agency reported.

It said supply has exceeded demand this year, but demand for quality coal is going up, driving up prices.

However, inadequate transport lines mean many high energy consumption areas do not have adequate supplies, while huge mountains of coal build up at freight yards and coal mines.

The report said coal output between January and October this year hit 920 million tons.

In a separate report, Xinhua said all of China's thermal power plants are to stop releasing coal ash and cinders into rivers by the end of 1995.

Ten years ago, China had 50 plants that released ash, a by-product of energy generation, into waterways because of lack of storage facilities. Now there are only four such plants left, and new plants under construction do not release ash or residue, the report said.

News Corp, Telstra start joint venture

MELBOURNE, Nov 11: Rupert Murdoch's entertainment and media group News Corporation and telecommunications giant Telstra Corp charged further down the information superhighway today by forming an Australian pay television joint venture, reports Reuter.

News Corp and the Australian government-owned Telstra said the 50/50 joint venture would spend a 300-million Australian dollars (226 million US dollars) initially, and up to one billion Australian dollars (754 million dollars) over seven years to bring cable television to Australian homes.

The outlay is separate from the 3.5 billion Australian dollars (2.64 billion US dollars) which Telstra is spending to expand its fibre-optic cable network in Australia over the next three years.

The move pits News Corp/Telstra against the rival Optus Vision Cable Television Consortium, which includes the seven network.

News Corp Director Ken Cowley said the venture marked the first time in the world a major news and entertainment group had linked up with a major telecommunications company.

Cowley and Telstra Chief Executive Frank Blount told a news conference the as-yet unnamed venture would offer pay television from early next year.

They hoped it would reach four million homes by 1999 with its menu of movies, news, sports, music, games, children's entertainment and ethnic community channels.

The three WTO candidates are outgoing Mexican

President Carlos Salinas de Gortari, backed by Latin America and the United States, former Italian Trade Minister Renato Ruggiero and South Korea's Trade Minister Kim Chul-Su.

According to the diplomats, Ruggiero, proposed by the European Union, has a numerical majority among the 124 members of GATT, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, which is due to be absorbed by the WTO over the next two years.

But they said there had been no wavering in support for Salinas, and Asian countries and Australasia were standing by him, who has mounted what one trade envoy described as a surprisingly vigorous campaign.

It is still possible that a compromise candidate could appear, but things have not got to that stage yet, said one key ambassador.

A new round of consultations conducted by Hungary's GATT Ambassador Andres Szepesi is currently underway.

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APEC ministerial meet opens

Suharto calls for firm agreement to liberalise economic affairs

JAKARTA, Nov 11: Indonesian President Suharto yesterday told government ministers representing half the world's peoples they should chart a path to free trade and investment in the booming Asian and Pacific region, reports Reuter.

He said foreign trade in the vast area had encouraged significant investment flows and opportunities for growth.

He said the world required closer cooperation to accommodate the different stages of development of various nations in the area.

"We should overcome the diversity among APEC economies through cooperation on the basis of partnership," he said.

Suharto added that Chile would become the 18th member of the group at the ministerial meeting.

US President Bill Clinton, Chinese President Jiang Zemin, South Korea's Kim Young-Sam, Japanese Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama and Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating.

APEC advisers have urged the leaders to set up a free trade area by the year 2020, a target enthusiastically endorsed by Indonesia and several other countries. But within the organisation there is a block of sceptics led by booming China and Malaysia.

Suharto, 73-years-old head of one of the world's fastest-growing countries, said the summit next Tuesday would put its stamp on any decisions to free up trade and investment.

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The

summit will bring together major figures such as



The 50-passenger Gatoekoco prototype is rolled out during its launching ceremony in Bandung on Thursday. Indonesian President Suharto christened the high-wing, T-tailed turboprop aircraft, symbolically starting the country's bid to enter the 21st century. — AFP photo.

Japan may feed imported rice to livestock

TOKYO, Nov 11: Japan's food agency is considering selling part of the leftover stocks of rice it imported last year for use as livestock feed or for making glue, officials said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

Analysts said the move could be taken as an insult by Asian countries that experienced sharp price hikes for the staple grain after Japan scrambled to import over two million tonnes to make up for a poor harvest last season.

Much of the grain was passed over by Japanese consumers, who were unaccustomed to foreign rice.

The agriculture ministry announced on Wednesday that leftover foreign rice stocks totalled 980,000 tonnes as of October 31.

Asian stock markets close lower

HONG KONG, Nov 11: Asian stock market closed mostly lower Friday, but share prices rebounded slightly in Tokyo after four days of declines, reports AP.

Tokyo's 225-issue Nikkei Stock Average gained 19.51 points, or 0.10 per cent, closing at 19,284.36. The average has fallen a total of 546.71 points in the previous four days.

But the Tokyo Stock Price Index of all issues listed on the first section was down 2.36 points, or 0.16 per cent, to 1,517.67. The Philippines' Unified Composite Index of 31 selected issues slumped 41.1 points to 2,926.68.

MANILA: Share prices closed lower for the second straight day. The Philippines' Unified Composite Index of 31 selected issues slumped 41.1 points to 1,520.03 the day before.

Shinichi Ichikawa, a strategist with Credit Lyonnais Securities Japan, said Japan's economy needs structural reform, including by Japanese companies, for the market ahead of next month's local elections. The market's Weighted Index rose 38.00 points to 6,482.68.

SEoul: Share prices closed lower on profit-taking. The Korea Composite Stock Price Index fell 4.3 points to 1,122.57.

Meanwhile, the US dollar closed at 97.78 yen, up 0.01 yen from Thursday's finish and unchanged from its overnight New York finish.

In Hong Kong, share prices closed lower for the fifth straight session because of continued worries over possible interest rate increases in the United States.

SINGAPORE: Share prices closed lower in follow-through selling from Thursday. The 30-share Straits Times Industrials (STI) Index fell 7.35 points to 2,322.59.

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysian share prices closed little changed in lacklustre trading. The KLSE Composite Index fell 0.98 of a point to 1,029.87.

JAKARTA: The stock exchange's Composite Index fell 0.532 points, closing at 513.379.

OAA establishes panel to check Western protectionism

SINGAPORE, Nov 11: The Orient Airlines Association (OAA), a grouping of Asia Pacific's top 15 carriers, announced yesterday that it has set up a panel to check Western protectionism and escalating airport charges, reports AP.

The question of level playing fields is a subject that will be discussed by OAA's new aeronautical committee, OAA Chairman Cheong Choon Keng told reporters after the grouping's one-day conference of senior executives here.

Cheong said in his opening remarks at the conference earlier Friday that the OAA was concerned over the possibility of the European Union turning into a protectionist bloc.

Japan Airlines Vice-President Shinzo Suto said at the news conference that the OAA was already seeking "equal" bilateral air agreements between member carriers and those outside the grouping especially the United States.

OAA members comprise Air New Zealand, Air Niugini, All Nippon Airways, Cathay Pacific, China Airlines, Eva Air, Garuda, Japan Airlines, Korean Air, Malaysia Airlines, Qantas, Royal Brunei, Singapore Airlines and Thai International.

The Manila-based OAA, set up in 1966, is a non-profit body which acts as a forum for discussion issues affecting the industry and promoting cooperation among member airlines.

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Beijing takes steps to stop migrant workers

BEIJING, Nov 11: They peddle tangerines on busy street corners, hawk down jackets to tourists, shovel subway tunnels and perch on bamboo scaffolding at high-rise construction sites, reports AP.

Rural migrant workers — one of every 10 people in Beijing — have become a pivotal part of the city's economy, doing the dirtiest and most dangerous jobs for the cheapest pay.

City officials, however, say the flood of newcomers is straining scarce resources and causing crime to soar.

On Thursday the city began taking a census of its "floating population," ostensibly to improve city management. But the census clearly is intended to restore some control over a population officials fear has gotten out of hand.

The floating population has made a huge contribution to the city's economy, but it has also put pressure on Beijing," said Mao Wenzhong, an official of the city's statistical bureau.

"We need to improve our policies, but first we have to understand clearly what the real situation is."

Until China began market-oriented economic reforms in the late 1970s, the government used strictly enforced household registration systems to keep the rural population — now about 800 million people — in the countryside.

In recent years, those controls have loosened, and tens

of millions of peasants have crowded into China's booming cities, working in produce markets, on construction sites and in the homes of city dwellers now able to afford paid servants.

Some 1.65 million migrants have gravitated to Beijing, swelling the population to almost 12 million.

City officials have announced plans to require all non-native Beijing residents working in the city to pay fees of 50,000 yuan (5,900 dollars) each for permission to live here. Institutions hiring 10 or more outsiders would have to pay 100,000 yuan (11,800 dollars).

The new rules have provoked an outcry from even central government institutions alarmed at the fees they will be expected to pay because of staff they have transferred from other parts of the country.

And the rules are likely to prove difficult to enforce, given the ease with which many migrants find jobs and settle into the city.

Many migrant workers live on construction sites or in cramped squatter villages in Beijing's suburbs, evading the household registration system.

Some rent rooms in the jumbled maze of dusty brick courtyard houses. Others, like Shan Xiaoying, a different 18-year-old from western Sichuan province, work as maids in government officials' homes.

Under the accord, the new

UK drive to capture Indian market soon

BOMBAY, Nov 11: British Trade Minister Richard Needham will head a major drive by British companies to capture a share of India's huge infrastructure market in a five-day tour starting on Monday, reports Reuter.

In what British officials say is the largest-ever trade mission launched by Britain's Department of Trade and Industry, Needham will be accompanied by around 100 businessmen during a week of events opening in Calcutta.

It is planning to spend more than 30 billion dollars on reducing a serious electric power shortage and is also opening up major sectors of the economy including mining and road construction.

Britain faces big competition in its former colony from other major European, US, South Korean, Hong Kong and Singapore companies, although analysts say Japanese firms have been more reluctant to become involved in India.

British officials say the focus of "British technology week" will be British expertise in infrastructure, coal mining, industrial design, electronics and banking.

India launched a pro-

GATT chief says

Washington must ratify trade pact this year

GENEVA, Nov 11: GATT Director-General Peter Sutherland said on Thursday that failure by the United States to ratify the Uruguay Round trade pact by year-end could deal a "mortal blow" to the multilateral trading system, says Reuter.

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