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410000 visits Lanka

COLOMBO, Dec 30: Despite bomb attacks in the capital, Sri Lanka's tourism industry is poised to achieve its best year with an estimated 410,000 visitors in 1994, officials said today, reports AP.

The industry's previous record was in 1982 when 407,230 people visited the Indian Ocean island, the Ceylon Tourist Board (CTB) expects this year to be surpassed this year. Last year there were 392,000 tourist arrivals.

"Up to December 23, we had an arrival figure of 394,629 which is higher than last year's 392,000. We have calculated that arrivals will top 410,000 by December 31," CTB's marketing director Sarath Jayawardene said.

A series of bomb attacks at hotels in Colombo in April and a massive bomb blast that killed opposition leader Gamini Dissanayake and more than 50 others at an election rally in the capital in November had been expected to hit the tourism industry.

But this had not happened, said Jayawardene.

After the 1982 boom, Sri Lanka's tourism was battered by the Tamil separatist conflict in the north, led by the liberation fighters of Eelam Praskha (left) and an insurgency in the south.

Ethnic riots between majority Sinhalese and minority Tamils in 1983 saw tourist arrivals plummet. Worse was to come as Sinhalese rebels launched an anti-government campaign in 1987.

But after the military put down the southern insurgency in 1989 tourists began to return.

Tourism is the country's main foreign exchange earner.

Ramos signs \$15.6b budget for '95

MANILA, Dec 30: President Fidel Ramos signed a \$15.6 billion (15.6 billion US dollars) budget for calendar 1995 today and said bipartisan cooperation in the Philippine Congress would boost the economy in the coming year, reports Reuters.

"If we set our minds to providing sensibly and equitably for the needs of our common future, we can rise above passing and petty political concerns," Ramos said in a speech after signing the budget into law at the presidential palace.

"I believe that this budget serves that purpose well."

The budget is 5.58 per cent higher than the 362 billion peso (14.77 billion dollars) budget for 1994. The government had originally asked for a 1995 budget of 384.7 billion pesos (15.7 billion dollars).

Chinese farmers suffering from illegal levies

BEIJING, Dec 30: Chinese farmers are still suffering from "trampant" violations by local officials, especially the imposition of illicit levies, according to the result of an official survey published Friday, reports AFP.

Inspection teams that toured southeastern Fujian province between June and September reported rampant violations of the law, with local officials finding "secret means" to increase the farmers' burden, the China Daily said.

The central authorities moved last year to eliminate illegal taxes on farmers, which had included such spurious levies as farm cattle insurance, road construction tax and even some items for which there were no official names.

The report also listed other abuses, including "defaulting on special farming funds, spreading abandonment and illegal takeovers of farmland."

China's agricultural sector has been overwhelmed in the past two years by the rapid growth of towns and cities, losing an estimated 747,000 hectares (1.8 million acres) of farmland to development zones.

At the same time, financial input by prefectural, county and city organs was 8.1 per cent lower than required by law, the report noted.

Rural discontent is a major concern for the Chinese authorities, who were shocked by a series of riots last year among farmers angered by the illegal levies and the growing discrepancy between rural and urban incomes.

Farmers in Fujian had succeeded in seeking legal redress for official abuses, the report said, citing 86 cases of peasants suing local government organs for "what they thought were extra burdens."

DSE ends '94 with around 115pc rise in price index

By Sohail Manzur

The Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE), the only bourse in the country, is going to end 1994 with around 115 per cent rise in the price index compared with that of 1993.

At the close of trading on Wednesday, the index was 845.65 points compared to only 391.77 points on December 30 of 1993.

Trading could not be held at the DSE on Thursday due to a country-wide eight-hour hartal enforced by the major opposition parties in Bangladesh after resignation from the parliament protesting government's refusal to hold elections under a neutral caretaker government.

According to market operators, for the DSE, 1994 was the most hectic year, as the bourse witnessed a bull-run in most of the times during the year.

Besides the rise in the share prices, trading also increased significantly during the year. At the close of business this year, some 31,845 shares and debentures worth Taka 3.94 million were traded on the DSE floor as against

only 13,786 shares and debentures of Tk 1.77 million traded at the close of business in 1993.

Turnovers in both the volume and value were the highest in November, when the market capitalisation of the listed companies hit the one billion dollar (Taka 40 billion) mark for the first time.

The market capitalisation picked up to Tk 42.98 billion at the end of November, but started to fall again from the beginning of December.

At the close of trading Wednesday, the market capitalisation stood at Tk 40.83 billion, as against only 17.82 billion on December 30, 1993.

The price index was also highest in November as it picked up to 892.44 points on the last day of trading during the month.

Some 10 securities were listed with the DSE in the current year with five more issues in the pipeline. The five new issues were floated in December and are under the process of listing.

Mostafa Ahmed Sadeque, a member of the DSE, talking

to The Daily Star yesterday, said a sharp decline in savings rate of the banks has contributed to the diversion of huge funds to the stock market from the banks.

"The mass people have got the taste of a good return of their investment by doing business in the stock market," he said, adding strengthening of monitoring by the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) is another factor that has built the confidence of people about the fate of their investment.

Besides, the foreign investors have also got interested in the country's emerging bourse due to some deregulatory measures undertaken by the government including exemption of tax from capital gains, removal of the ceiling on investment and withdrawal of restriction on repatriation of profits.

Some 163 securities of 154 companies are presently listed with the DSE. The foreign investors have so far injected about 250 million US dollars into the market.

Decision to raise fund for water development

About seventy three river protection and development and town protection projects are being implemented in the current financial year under the supervision of Bangladesh Water Development Board at a cost of Taka 40 crore, reports ESS.

This was stated at the 20th meeting of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Water Resources held at Sangsad Bhaban Wednesday. Agriculture and Water Resources Minister Major General (ret) Majid-ul-Haq presided over the meeting.

The meeting discussed yearly requirement of a minimum of Taka 120 crore to implement successfully all important projects in the water development sector. But due to shortage of allocation only some important and welfare oriented projects are not being implemented.

The meeting took decision that necessary steps will be taken by the Water Resources Ministry to increase the budget allocation in the current, revised budget and in the budget of the next year.

The meeting also discussed the Naogain town protection project and took decision to start the construction work as soon as possible. The meeting instructed the officials of Water Development Board to identify physically and discuss with local people's representatives before sending proposals of any development project for approval.

Members of the committee: State Minister for Water Resources Mosharraf Hossain Shajahan, L K Siddiqui, Alhaj Shamsuddin Ahmad and Secretary of Water Resources Ministry M Nazrul Islam were present.

Audacious thieves

RIO DE JANEIRO, Dec 30: Audacious thieves in a remote Brazilian town made off with 155 pounds (70 kg) of gold by tunnelling directly into a vault from a nearby hotel room, Brazil Television reported, yesterday, says Reuter.

No one at the hotel in Itaituba, in Para State — the heart of Brazil's wadcat gold mining rush — thought anything odd about the four men who shared a room for a month, Globo Television said.

Every night however the gang was busy digging a 20 foot (6 meter) tunnel into a neighbouring safe deposit company, piling earth into bags in the room which they draped with plastic sheeting to reduce the noise of their work.

After using hydraulic drills to break the floor and surface, the thieves helped themselves to the gold and left the way they went in.

Globo did not say when the robbery took place.



Handout photo shows Solicitor Ronnie Fox as he tries out the "office on an arm," a complete communications console designed to keep business in touch with each other. The design concept has been built by technologists at BT (British Telecom) as a demonstration of how telephone, videophone, fax and computer can all come together.

Cambodian PMs to witness econ pact signing in KL next week

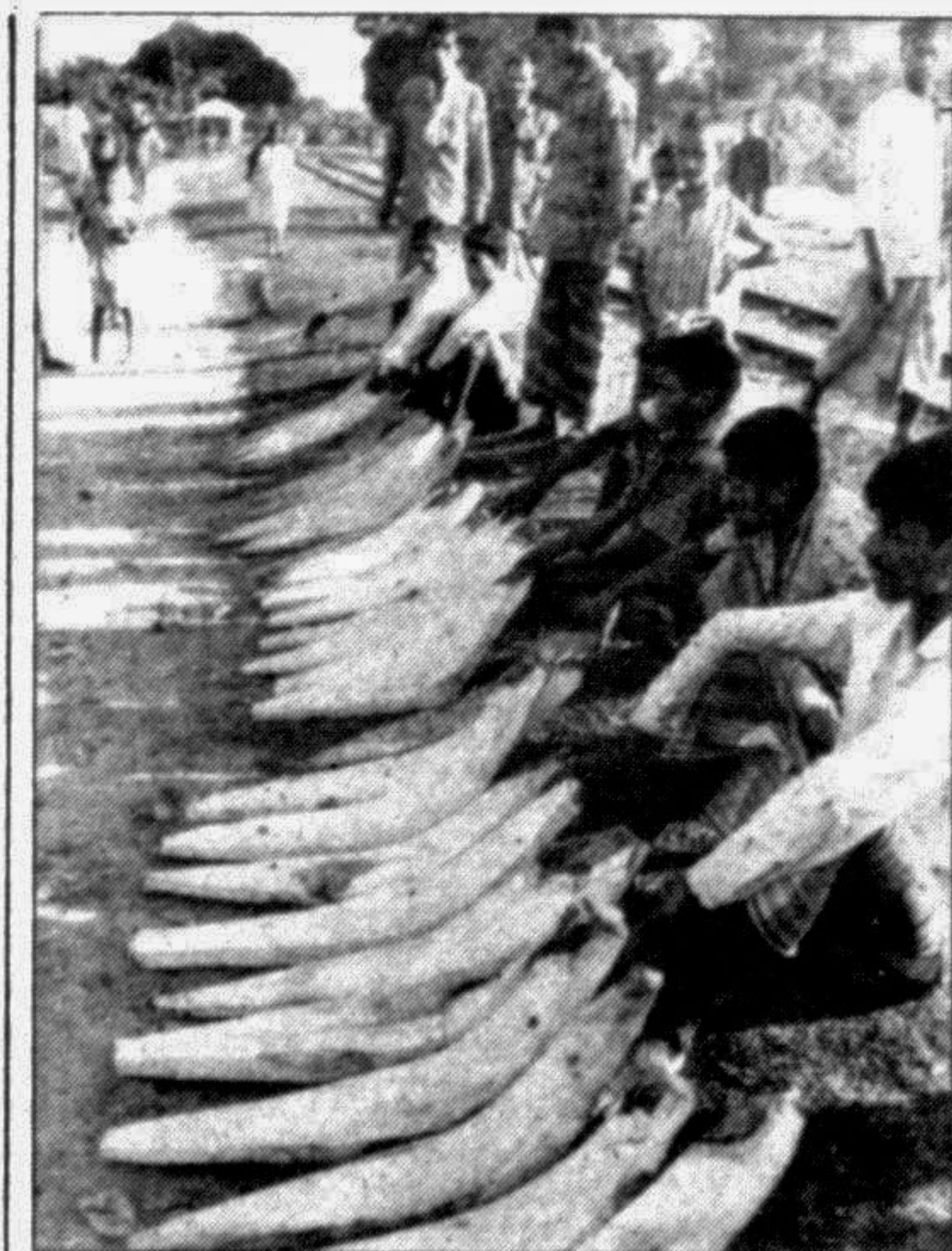
KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 30: Cambodian Prime Ministers Prince Norodom Ranariddh and Hun Sen will arrive here next week on a day-trip to witness the signing of a billion-dollar infrastructure pact with a Malaysian company, officials said today, reports AFP.

They will join Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad to oversee the signing of the agreement Monday between Ariston SDH, BHD and the Cambodian government.

Ariston, a subsidiary of diversified Malaysian Lipland Group, has clinched a deal for an infrastructure project in the southern Cambodian city of Sihanoukville and the outlying islands of Naga and Takiev, company officials said.

The project covers infrastructure facilities, property development and tourist attractions including hotels and casinos.

The contract is the biggest yet awarded by the Cambodian government, Ariston officials said.



There are lots of wooden plough frames in the rural markets for sale as the season of land cultivation is on.

Shares slightly higher in London

LONDON, Dec 30: Shares were slightly higher early Friday on the London Stock Exchange, providing a sluggish end to a year that saw prices of big British companies deteriorate by about 10 per cent, reports AP.

The benchmark Financial Times-Stock Exchange 100-share index was up 7.0 points, or 0.2 per cent, at 3,072.6 shortly before midday.

The "footsie," as the index is known, had lost roughly 10 per cent of its value since opening 1993 at 3,418.4. The footsie peaked at 3,520.2 on February 2 then bottomed out for the year at 2,876.6 on June 24.

Friday's volume came to 98.3 million shares just before noon.

\$51.1b budget in Israel

JERUSALEM, Dec 30: Israel's parliament today approved the government's 1995 budget proposal, which calls for outlays of 154.5 billion shekels (51.1 billion dollars). The vote was 58.41, reports Reuter.

Last year's budget, including a supplement approved last month, totalled 138.9 shekels (46.0 billion dollars).

The 1995 budget allocates 1.1 billion shekels (333 million dollars) for implementation of the Palestinian self-rule plan in Jericho and the Gaza Strip, including some 600 million shekels (200 million dollars) for security.

Defence spending next year is to rise from 22.2 billion shekels (7.4 billion dollars) to 26.7 billion shekels (8.5 billion dollars).

Coffee being popular in China!

HONG KONG, Dec 30: Convinced a billion Chinese tea drinkers to set aside the habit of a few millennia in favour of a thick and bitter-tasting foreign brew called coffee was a challenge Stuart Eunsou could not let pass, reports Reuter.

When the inveterate coffee drinker found himself stranded as a student in the country that cliches about tea were created for, Eunsou, now 27, was an immediate market. To exploit it, he and two like-minded friends this year established their own company, Arabica Roasters. This month they will import their first shipment of coffee beans to blend and roast and sell in Beijing.

The average Chinese, according to coffee industry figures, drinks about 1,500 cups of tea a year.

Until recently it was a rare Chinese indeed who began his day with a cup of steaming, home-ground, home-brewed Java.

But now, according to Eunsou, at least one per cent of Beijing's 11 million people do just that, and they own their own apparatus — plungers percolators, grinders — for doing so.

"The potential of the Chinese market is very good (because) coffee is an inexpensive indulgence," Eunsou, Arabica Roasters' Vice General Manager, said in an interview.

Ukraine suffers worst energy crisis

KIEV, Ukraine, Dec 30: Streets lights have been turned off, factories stand idle, hot water is in short supply and television broadcasts have been slashed as Ukraine suffers through its worst energy crisis since independence, reports AP.

Officials said Thursday that the nation's industrial output has fallen by half in the last two months.

"The main problem now is not to raise the industrial output, but to save people from freezing to death," said Deputy Prime Minister Anatoly Dyuba.

Ukraine imports almost two-thirds of the energy it needs, buying oil, natural gas and coal from Russia, Turkmenistan and Poland.

"We don't have money either to buy fuel, or to pay salaries to (energy sector) workers," Dyuba said.

Energy officials have imposed strict conservation measures. Beginning this week, hot water was supplied to apartments in Kiev, the capital, for only three hours a day. Television broadcasts were cut to seven hours a day. Street lights and illuminated billboards have been turned off.

Atlas Bangladesh recommends 41 pc dividend for shareholders

Atlas Bangladesh Limited has recommended a dividend of 41 per cent on the paid-up capital of the company.

The recommendation was made at the 10th annual general meeting of the company held at its registered office at Tongi on Wednesday.

The Chairman of the company AFMS Zaman presided over the meeting.

The company announced the dividend after taking into consideration its overall financial situation.

The company earned a net profit (after tax) of Taka 10 million during the 1993-94 fiscal year ending June 30, compared to Tk 8.3 million for 1992-93 and Tk 6.1 million for 1991-92, as announced in this year's annual report.

The total paid-up capital of the company remains at Tk 12 million which is divided into 1.2 million ordinary shares of Tk 10 each. In the 1992-93 fiscal year, the company declared a 38 per cent dividend.

The company which was listed with the Dhaka Stock Exchange in 1984, is primarily engaged in the manufacture of Honda motorcycles and mishuks. The company produced 5658 motorcycles and 450 mishuks as against the annual production targets of 7000 and 300 respectively. During the previous financial year, 7800 motorcycles and 365 mishuks were produced against targets of 7700 and 300.

During 1993-94, sales went down to 6053 (annual target 7000) for motorcycles from the previous year's sales of 7329 (annual target 7700), but rose to 454 (target: 300) for mishuks compared to 1992-93 sales of 384 (target: 300).

The reason for low production and sales of motorcycles in 1993-94 given by the Chairman of the company was the strong competition created by other brands of motorcycles available in the market "which has caused an adverse

effect on our sales. The Board of Directors and Management are fully aware of the situation and making all out efforts to increase production and sales, keeping the major market share of Honda for its superior quality."

However there was no mention as to why such strong competition affected sales and production in the year under review, in particular, as compared to previous years.

Although sales and production did not meet targets in the main area of production (motorcycles), figures show that net (pre-tax) profit, which was Tk 16m still managed to

exceed the budgeted net (pre-tax) profit of Tk 12.1m with an achievement of 133 per cent.

According to the chairman, this was "due to improvement of operational efficiency and reduction of expenses under various heads of expenditure." The previous year's net (pre-tax) profit was Tk 13.8m, which was 125 per cent of the target for that year.

The company also carried out a free promotional service campaign during the year under report, "repairing" and overhauling their customers' motorcycles and mishuks.

Corporate Profile: Atlas Bangladesh

Market Section: Engineering; Management: Chairman — A F M S Zaman, General Manager (Head of Enterprise) — S M Elahi Newaz; Registered Office: 265-67, Tongi Industrial Area, Gazipur. (Liaison Office: Company Affairs Dept., BSEC, Bhaban, 102 Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, Dhaka).

Bankers: Sonali bank, ANZ Grindlays Bank, Arab Bangladesh Bank; Auditors: J R Chowdhury & Co. 60/C Purana Paltan.

Company primarily manufactures Honda motorcycles and mishuks. Listed with Dhaka Stock Exchange in 1984. Paid-up capital of Tk 12.0m (1.2m shares at Tk 10 each). Authorised capital of Tk 100m. Reserves and surplus of Tk 47.1m. Fixed assets of Tk 15.6m (Total assets of Tk 100.8m). Number of shareholders is 2804.

Bakhrabad Gas becomes profitable company

Bakhrabad Gas Systems Ltd (BGSL) has earned a net profit of Taka 14.21 crore during the fiscal year 1993-94, says a press release.

This was disclosed at the 14th annual general meeting of the company held at its office on Wednesday.

The Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources Md Badiuzzaman presided over the meeting.

This is the first time BGSL has established itself as a profitable company.

BGSL has also contributed Tk 13156 lakh towards the govt exchequer.

BGSL started commercial marketing of natural gas during 1984-85 fiscal year.

During this financial year, BGSL started supplying gas to 210 MW power station at Razuan and to Karnaphuli Fertilizer Company (KAPCO) in Chittagong.

It was informed in the meeting that the expansion of gas supply network under the Third Natural Gas Development Project has been started with the financial assistance of Asian Development Bank.

The project is expected to be completed in June, 1997.

Cigarette firms target children in developing countries

Everyday up to 4,000 children around the world take up smoking.

Anti-cigarette campaigners says young people are becoming the target of the tobacco giants' massive advertising machine, which has the most impact on the developing countries where 75 per cent of the world's 15-24-year olds live.

More stringent legislation and growing health awareness in the West have prompted the industry to turn its sights on Africa and Asia with their huge potential markets.

"The head of the World Health Organization's Tobacco or Health Programme, Dr Juan Menchaca, points out that the combination of a rapidly expanding population and low education levels makes Africa particularly vulnerable."

"African governments are unable to shut out tobacco investment, creating room for competitive pricing and increased smoking amid economic decline," says Dr Menchaca.

At the moment Africa's tobacco consumption is the low-

est in the world. But the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization FAO projects an annual increase in consumption of 1.9 per cent up to year 2000, a rate outstripped only by the 3.1 per cent a year growth forecast for Central Asia.

In Asia, United States tobacco companies combine marketing campaigns that would not be allowed at home with threats of economic retaliation if imports are restricted.

These tactics have won the biggest prize of all. From 1995 China will open its doors to US tobacco after a decade-long stand-off. The carrot that finally worked was the reward of "most favored nation" trading status.

China is the world's biggest tobacco market with 300 million smokers, but it is estimated that 50 million Chinese children alive today will die from tobacco-related causes.

Apart from lung cancer and heart diseases associated with tobacco, smoking children have been found to be susceptible to coughs, bronchitis and

other respiratory illnesses. They are three times more likely to have time off school and often perform poorly when they do attend.

"The image of cigarettes as embodying the American dream of glamour, wealth and success particularly appeals to young people. Bombarded by advertising campaigns introducing US brands in the 1980s, cigarette consumption among minors in Japan rose by 26 per cent; in Thailand by 24 per cent; and among teenage boys in South Korea by 18-30 per cent."

According to "Infact", the publication of a US anti-tobacco group, Taiwan recorded a 13 per cent increase in student smokers within two years of allowing American cigarettes into the country.

US firms "hired young women to hand out free cigarettes in discos, took advertising magazines targeted at youth, and put up hundreds of billboards — splashing the

Marlboro Man and other Western images across Taiwan," it says.

African governments are waking up to the danger facing their youth. An anti-tobacco project is running in Senegal, one of Africa's top smoking nations. The Senegalese Movement against Tobacco, formed in 1992, has enlisted the support of 3,500 school children around the capital, Dakar.

Many children report that advertising pressure was a major factor in taking up smoking especially after the reversal of the 1985 ban on cigarette advertising.

Children in 42 schools have formed anti-tobacco clubs headed by teachers. "Our approach was dictated by the discovery that many youth jumped into tobacco for lack of alcohol because Senegal is largely an Islamic country," says the Senegalese Movement's Dione Bandiaky.

"Alcohol is also expensive," he adds.

Despite lack of resources, there has been some success: "We have received encouraging reports of children who have convinced their parents to lower their daily consumption and to stop smoking at home, while others have stopped the habit altogether," says Bandiaky.

In Cameroon, an anti-smoking group published a newsletter for schools around the capital Yaounde, which carried the names of children caught buying selling or smoking cigarettes.

"Parents whose children appear in the magazine are summoned to the schools for counselling," explains Cameroonian cardiologist Professor Walinjom Muna. Failure to show up results in the publication of the parents' names as bad examples."

But action on a much larger scale is needed to counter influence of the transnational corporations.

Anti-smoking campaigners in Africa are demanding a ban on tobacco advertisements and on public promotion, espe-

cially sponsorship of sports. Research has found that young people mostly become aware of brand names through televised sport.

Raising taxes on cigarettes is seen as an effective deterrent, particularly for children.

"The pricing factor should have a strong effect in Zambia because, for instance, when bus fares are increased, Zambians prefer to talk to and from work. I believe children specifically and all smokers in general will find high taxes a disincentive," says Amy Kabwe of the Zambia Anti-Smoking Society.

Supporters of the newly-formed Tobacco Control Commission of Africa advocate a halt to the sale of individual cigarettes, but stress that the police will be unable to enforce such bans unless there is community enforcement.

They also urge education campaigns to discourage adult smokers from discarding lit cigarettes, which they says are often the entry point of street child smokers.

—Depthnews Asia