

BRIEFS

China raises minimum monthly wage
BEIJING, Sept 22: Beijing has raised its minimum monthly wage by 30 yuan (3.6) to 240 yuan (29) dollars to try to cushion its poorest residents from inflation, officials said on Thursday. The new minimum wage rule took effect from July 1, the newspaper said, replacing the previous minimum wage of 210 yuan (25) dollars implemented on December 1, 1994, the Beijing Youth Daily said. The adjustment was based on price hikes and average income growth, an official from the city's labour department said, reports Reuter.

Japan's donation for Myanmar
YANGON, Sept 22: Japan will give Myanmar 400,000 dollars to build schools in border areas, official media reported yesterday. State-run newspapers said powerful military intelligence leader Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt made the announcement on Wednesday at the opening ceremony of a school for orphans donated by the Japanese government, reports Reuter.

PIA plans to replace ageing jumbos
KARACHI, Sept 22: Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) plans to replace its eight ageing Boeing jumbo jets over the next five years, a PIA spokesman said yesterday. A company spokesman, who did not want to be named, said PIA's 747-200s, which are 20 years old and nearing the end of their lives, may be replaced with new Boeing 747-400s or used Boeing 747-300s from Singapore and Saudi Arabia. PIA is also planning to buy, by 2000, several Airbus A-340s from Airbus Industries and MD-11s from McDonnell Douglas Corp, reports AFP.

MAS plans to buy 25 aircraft
KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 22: Malaysian Airlines System (MAS) plans to buy 25 aircraft at an estimated cost of around 4.0 billion dollars over the next five years, an airline spokeswoman said today. She said she had no other details of the plan. A new Straits Times interview published today quoted MAS Chairman Tajudin Ramli as saying the national carrier did not have enough aircraft to cope with future traffic growth, especially between 1998 and 2000, reports Reuter.

France's public workers to stage strike Oct 10
PARIS, Sept 22: Public workers' unions decided Friday to stage a strike October 10 that could paralyze much of France, protesting a pay freeze the government promised to cut the budget deficit, French radio reported. The decision was made at a meeting of union leaders representing millions of employees including teachers, bureaucrats, postal, power, transportation and telephone services as well as government agencies and other state-owned companies like Air France and the automaker Renault, reports AP.

ME economic summit in Amman next month
GENEVA, Sept 22: A Middle East economic summit in Amman will group political leaders from all over the world as well as 1,500 businessmen, the organisers said Thursday. PLO leader Yasser Arafat and US Secretary of State Warren Christopher will attend, as well as the foreign ministers of Israel, Russia and Egypt, Shimon Peres Andrei Kozirev and Anur Mussa, the World Economic Forum said, reports AFP.

Vietnam's stockpile of tea grows
HANOI, Sept 22: Vietnam's stockpile of tea has grown to 7,500 tonnes following a decision by Iraq to take rice instead of tea for debt repayment from Hanoi, an official from the State Tea Company said yesterday. The tea, worth more than six million dollars and the equivalent of 800 shipping containers, has piled up as Iraq refused to import the commodity, the official from the Vietnam Tea Corp (VINATEA) said, reports AFP.

Saifur inaugurates Tk 7.20cr rebuilt Monu bridge

The Finance Minister, M Saifur Rahman, yesterday inaugurated the rebuilt Monu Bridge over the Monu River on the Moulvibazar-Kulaura road, reports BSS.

Severely damaged during the Liberation War, the 425 feet long bridge has been rebuilt by the Roads and Highways Department in two years at a cost of Taka seven crore 20 lakh, a message from Moulvibazar said yesterday.

Speaking at a big public meeting arranged near the bridge, the Finance Minister said the present tempo of nation building activities in all sectors initiated by the

government have to be maintained in the greater interest of the nation.

Termining the recent 72-hour hartal called by the opposition as "most unfortunate", the Finance Minister said that there was no scope in the Constitution or in parliamentary system to materialise the unrealistic demand of the Awami League chief, Sheikh Hasina, to appoint the chief justice as the prime minister.

He said that in 1990 when the deposed autocratic ruler Ershad resigned the then chief justice could be appointed vice president, as per provisions contained in the Constitution at that time re-

quiring no amendments.

But, said Rahman, under the present system no amendment to the Constitution was possible, neither it could be suspended under any circumstances.

He said it would be farcical if someone was appointed as the prime minister violating the Constitution and at the same time the Constitution remained functional.

Chaired by the Moulvibazar District BNP president, Advocate Abdul Khaliq, the meeting was addressed, among others, by Sharafuddin Khasru, MP, Ebadur Rahman Chowdhury, a former MP, Advocate Zonaid Ahmed and Wali Siddiqui.



Pribuna Resources Limited of Dhaka (member of KDS Group) and Union Button Corporation Ltd of Bangkok (member of Saha-Union Group) recently signed an agreement forming a joint venture company to manufacture export quality buttons and other garment accessories in Bangladesh. Picture shows Khalilur Rahman, Chairman, KDS Group, Badiur Rahman, Managing Director of Pribuna Resources, Sompop Amatayakul, President, and Sumeth Darakananda, Executive Vice Chairman of Saha-Union Public Company Ltd, on the occasion of the signing of joint venture agreement.

Key UAE bank holds up balance sheet

ABU DHABI, Sept 22: A key United Arab Emirates (UAE) bank closely associated with the collapsed BCCI has held up its balance sheet for a fifth year despite making profits and recovering share prices, bankers said on Thursday.

Union National Bank (UNB), formerly known as Bank of Credit and Commerce Emirates (BCCE), has not issued annual results since 1991, since the Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI) was shut worldwide following massive fraud allegations.

"UNB has made profits every year since 1991 and the price of its share has rebounded upwards. But I don't think it will release its balance sheet because the BCCI problem is completely over," a bank manager told AFP.

"Profits were generated from operations. They are relatively high, but I have no figures."

Stockbrokers said the price of UNB share had surged to nearly 135 dirhams (36.7 dollars) this week from a record low of 88 dirhams in 1991. The shares are being traded almost daily although demand is not high, they said.

Low interest credit for tea growers

Credit will be given at reduced interest rate at nine per cent to increase production and improve quality of tea by planting high yielding varieties of plants, reports BSS.

This was disclosed at a meeting of the parliamentary standing committee on the Ministry of Commerce here Thursday. Commerce and Information Minister M Shamsul Islam was in the chair.

The meeting discussed different aspects of providing credit at low interest, increase of production including special pilot projects and lease out of tea gardens.

The commerce minister gave emphasis on taking necessary steps to strengthen export of tea as a traditional item and said all sorts of cooperation would be provided in producing quality tea locally.

He directed the Tea Board and the Export Promotion Bureau to work closely with the private tea exporters to increase export of tea in the prospective markets including the CIS countries and South Africa.

The meeting discussed the positive aspects of the recent visit of a high-level

Bangladeshi expatriates remit Tk 14 cr

Expatriate Bangladeshis remitted Taka 14 crore during the month of August this year, said a PID handout on Thursday, reports UNB.

The remittance of 31,13,074 US dollars and 2,10,913 pound sterling was sent through postal money orders.

A total of Taka 28,44,47,924 was remitted through money orders till August this year, the handout said.

Bad weather again hits world harvests

LONDON, Sept 22: Bad weather has again hit grain crops in several nations even as world stocks are at 20-year lows and prices soar, the International Grains Council (IGC) said yesterday, reports Reuter.

The London-based IGC monitors stocks and harvests around the globe. Its new monthly report on Thursday cut its estimate of 1995 world wheat output by four million tonnes to 529 million.

It also slashed its estimate of the coarse grain harvest — mainly maize — by nine million tonnes to 815 million, largely on reports of possible frost damage in the US mid-west.

Third World nations are already paying more for food imports. Wheat prices in the Chicago futures pits flirt with 15-year highs near 5.0 dollars per bushel.

IGC Assistant Executive Director Bih De Maria, however, saw no actual supply crunch in the harvest year to June 1996.

Nepalese rupee loses 3.8 pc against dollar

KATHMANDU, Sept 22: The Nepalese rupee lost 3.8 per cent of its value against the dollar as the country's central bank prepared to intervene on the market if the rupee dropped further, banking sources said, reports AFP.

The Nepalese currency was fixed at 54.5 rupees against the dollar Thursday down from 52.50 rupees against the greenback on Wednesday, a commercial bank source said.

"The exchange of the Nepalese rupee against the dollar is weakest since 1992," the source said.

A senior official of the country's central bank said that the bank was set to step into the market selling dollars in a bid to force down its value.

Traders and businessmen in the tiny Himalayan kingdom were meanwhile rushing to sell their dollars as its value rises, businessmen and bankers said.

Economists here said the main reason for the increase in demand for the dollar here is a weakening of the Nepalese exports caused by restrictions imposed on exports by the country's communist government which fell from Power earlier this month.

They added that another reason for the soaring dollar on the market here was the fluctuation of the Indian rupee against the dollar, which had affected the Nepalese money market.

The Indian rupee fell to a low of 35 rupees to the dollar late last week after trading at around 31 rupees to the dollar since March 1993, when New Delhi relaxed currency restrictions on the current account.

The value of the Nepalese rupee against the pound, German mark, the French franc and the Japanese yen had dropped only marginally by between 1.8 to 2.4 per cent, banking source added.

Dollar recovers in Tokyo

TOKYO, Sept 22: The US dollar regained some ground against the yen Friday morning following its plunge in overseas, but remained below its previous level in Tokyo, reports AP.

Central bank intervention helped the dollar shake off some of the losses it suffered in New York due to disappointment with Japan's fiscal stimulus package and concerns from German officials that Italy and France may not meet the criteria to join a single European currency system.

The dollar recovered the 100-yen level in late morning trading, and was changing hands at 100.75 yen shortly before midday. That was above 98.65 yen late in New York but still below 101.48 yen late Thursday in Tokyo.

Country's agri sector may grow at 3 pc annually: WB expert

The country's agricultural sector has the potential to grow at an annual rate of three per cent if the liberalisation policies are continued and diversification takes place, observes a World Bank expert.

"I believe the sector could grow at a rate of about 3 per cent annually if the deregulation and liberalisation policies are enforced without exception and agricultural diversification takes place," says Saeed A Rana, the outgoing Deputy Chief of the Bank's Resident Mission in Dhaka and head of its Agricultural and Natural Resources Unit.

He has been closely associated with the country's agricultural and water sectors during his five year stay in Bangladesh. Rana and his wife, Nina, leave for Washington later this month.

Underlining the growth potential of the agriculture sector, Rana points out to the rapid growth of the sector in the late 80s and early 90s leading to a near self-sufficiency in rice production in 1992. "This was possible due to the Government's deregulation and liberalisation policies which increased farmers' access to improved technology including shallow tubewells, fertiliser, pesticides, seeds etc.," he says.

The agricultural output, however, declined due to drought and some fertiliser distribution problems during recent years.

Recently approved by the government, Rana considers the strategy for a national water and flood management plan as a "historical step in the development/management of water resources in Bangladesh."

The strategy was developed under the flood action plan (FAP) studies initiated by the government following the devastating floods of 1987-88. Funded by donors, the World Bank coordinated the studies to analyse the past developments and experiences, review the regional flood problems, develop solutions and test the proposed technologies through pilot projects.

By Staff Correspondent

The FAP studies which were originally focused on physical control interven-

were married in 1962 and wanted to return ever since. Nina considers the five



Saeed Rana and Nina

tions as a major solution to deal with floods, have evolved into a more comprehensive approach towards water management and a consideration of non-structural measures like flood proofing, early warning etc.," he notes.

The FAP studies, he says, has thus set a stage for dealing with the complex issues of the water sector with effective participation of all stakeholders including the beneficiaries and the NGOs.

Rana is very optimistic about the prospects of Bangladesh being able to manage its resources for the maximum benefit of the country, as the built-in national cohesion gives it an edge over other South Asian countries.

"Bangladesh is a homogeneous nation of one language, one great culture, with no ethnic problems; and therefore, enjoys an advantageous position amongst the nations of the region for development," he adds.

He notes that Bangladesh has already set enviable examples for others in the areas of family planning, female education and bringing NGOs effectively in the fold of development partnerships.

Both Rana and his wife say that they have very much enjoyed their stay in Bangladesh. They visited Dhaka immediately after they

years spent here as the "most interesting part" of her life. "I have never felt as much at home anywhere else as here and I really loved the friendly atmosphere in the social life at Dhaka," she says.

A music lover, Nina found Dhaka to be very conducive to her pursuit in learning classical music and ghazals. But she surprised her friends in one of the recent farewell gatherings by singing the Bangla song "Tumi jey Amaar". She gratefully acknowledges the encouragement and support she received from Asaf Ud Dowlah in her musical pursuits.

Asked about their general impression of the country, Rana responds saying "look at the toiling farmers in the field and rickshawpullers in the cities, disciplined garment workers in the factories, the intellectuals who could establish institutions like Grameen Bank, BRAC, Proshikha and many others — there couldn't be a better mix of talent and resources for development."

He and his wife both wish the country and their friends happiness, progress and prosperity and they hope to visit Bangladesh often.

After his retirement from the Bank job in Washington, they plan to settle in Islamabad, Pakistan.

India expresses disappointment

SINGAPORE, Sept 22: India expressed disappointment today at being left out of the inaugural Asia-Europe summit in Bangkok next year that will set the pace for inter-regional ties into the next century, reports AFP.

"Well, let me say India would like to be a part of that process," Finance Minister Manmohan Singh told reporters on the sidelines of the "economic summit" of government and business leaders from Europe and east Asia.

"We are somewhat disappointed that India is not part of this summit," Singh said.

India, a country of 950 million people, was actively pursuing global integration of its economy and its huge market offered tremendous opportunities to the rest of the world, Singh said.

"The rest of the world would be a net loser if India were to be left out of that ... process of global interdependence of nations," the minister said.

India could serve as a bridge between Asia and Europe because of its deep understanding of western Europe and the western European "mind," Singh said, citing the large pool of Indian students, managers and civil servants trained in that continent.

No future govt will dare reverse economic reforms: Manmohan

SINGAPORE, Sept 22: India's Finance Minister said Friday that no future government will dare tamper with ongoing economic reforms, and that the controversy over the Enron power deal is only an aberration, reports AP.

Minister Manmohan Singh said India, in a bid that to reassure investors, is willing to sign credible bilateral investment protection treaties, and that he had in fact spoken to the US Ambassador in New Delhi about it.

Singh said all political parties in India — communists, centrists and Hindu nationalists — realise that the four-year-old reforms that he helped craft are vital for India's future.

The new rules of running the economy have such built-in safeguards that any future government that attempts a

different track will be faced with "fast retribution," Singh said.

"No government will dare to tamper with the reforms process," he told reporters after giving a speech at the Europe East Asia Economic Summit.

More than 500 political leaders, businessmen and economists from 48 countries of Asia and Europe are attending the annual summit, organised by the Geneva-based World Economic Forum, a private foundation.

Fears over the Indian economic reforms have been raised by the possibility of Singh's Congress Party losing power in the next year's general elections.

The opposition parties have often complained that the benefits of the reforms have not percolated down to

the poverty-stricken multitudes in the country of 900 million people.

In a recent setback, a giant power project by the US company Enron was recently suspended by the state government of Maharashtra, governed by a coalition of Hindu nationalists and bitter opponents of the Congress Party of Prime Minister Narasimha Rao.

"I would like to assure that what has happened in Enron is not indicative of things to come. It is an aberration. This solitary incident should not lead to the impression" that India was against foreign investment, he said.

Singh explained the reasons for the Maharashtra government's action, adding that a final decision still hasn't been made on the fate of the 2.8 billion dollars project.



The British High Commissioner to Bangladesh, Peter J Fowler CMG (centre), presenting a cheque to Dr Hamida Akhter Begum, President of Women for Women, at the British High Commission in Dhaka on Thursday as a grant for promoting women's issues. Also present are representatives of Bangladesh Disaster Preparedness Centre (BDPC), Bangladesh Agricultural Working Peoples Association (BAWPA), St Paul's High School in Tangail, HiCare, Shushilan and Arter Aaha. The organisations received grants totalling over Taka 45.86 lakh for their socio-economic development programme.