

Murayama under fire for backing use of public money in Jusen

TOKYO, Mar 10: Former Japanese Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama drew fire yesterday when he called on his own party to back the government's unpopular scheme to use public money in liquidating failed housing loan firms, report AFP.

Opposition strongman Ichiro Ozawa, meanwhile, called for the dissolution of Japan's lower-house to put the bail-out scheme to a popular vote in snap general elections.

Ozawa's New Frontier Party continued picketing to block the parliamentary debate on a state budget, including 685 billion yen (6.5 billion dollars) to be spent on the process of liquidating the seven loan firms known as Jusen.

Murayama opened a convention of his Social Democratic Party amid growing public and opposition outcries against the Jusen scheme which he drew up with the beleaguered finance ministry and other lead-

ers of the three-party ruling coalition before he quit as premier in January.

There is no other prompt and effective solution to Jusen than the proposal by the government and ruling parties," Murayama told the first convention of the party since it changed its name in Japanese from the socialist party in January.

But he was attacked by many members of the party which has lost much of its leftist identity after joining forces with the scandal-hit Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and a lesser conservative force, new party Sakigake, in June 1994.

One deputy from Hiroshima told the meeting that 90 per cent of the people were opposed to the Jusen scheme.

He added that the Social Democratic Party had been ridiculed as an "auxiliary force" for the LDP which monopolised power for 38 years until

1993 when it lost to a reformist coalition in the last general elections.

Another deputy from Fukushima warned that the party was losing what it had gained in its 50-year history. He suggested that the party should freeze the scheme and spend several months seeing if there was another way out.

The Jusen firms collapsed with more than 70 billion dollars in bad debts run up during the speculative "bubble economy" investment boom in the late 1980s.

Ozawa, the opposition leader, said that "the best solution" to the Jusen impasse would be the dissolution of the House of Representatives and early general elections before its term ends in July next year.

"Leave out the 685 billion yen for now, pass the budget quickly and consult the will of the people by dissolving the lower house," Ozawa said in a television panel discussion.

He said that if the ruling coalition wins, "it can do whatever it wants to do."

The three coalition parties command a comfortable majority in the lower house. But Ozawa's new frontier party, which was formed by LDP renegades and anti-LDP forces in December 1994, made the biggest gain in Senate elections last year.

Members of Ozawa's party took turns in picketing outside the chamber of the lower house budget committee for the sixth straight day, insisting that the ruling parties should take out the liquidation scheme from the 75 trillion yen (715 billion dollar) national budget for the year beginning on April 1.

With no clear prospects for passage of the budget, Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto's Liberal Democratic Party, the biggest force in parliament, has decided to seek a stop-gap budget, LDP officials said.



Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad adjusts the seat of the country's first multi-utility vehicle Perodua Rusa during a launching ceremony late Wednesday in Kuala Lumpur. Three variants of the Perodua Rusa are being manufactured costing between 13,700 and 15,900 US dollars. —AFP/UNB photo

Garments export rises 44.3 pc in Philippines

MANILA, Mar 10: The Philippines' exports of garments and textiles surged 44.3 per cent in the first two months of 1996, due to increased purchases from the United States, Canada and European countries, reports Xinhua.

According to the country's Garment and Textile Export Board (GTEB), earnings from exports of garments and textiles reached 403.891 million US dollars in the period as against 279.939 million US dollars in the same 1995 period.

GTEB officials said they are confident that the garment industry could maintain this remarkable growth throughout the year.

S'pore, Malaysia, Indonesia agree to expand growth triangle

JAKARTA, Mar 10: Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore agreed Thursday to expand an economic cooperation area to include larger areas in Indonesia and Malaysia, reports AP.

The agreement on the "growth triangle" that reaches across the Strait of Malacca came at the conclusion of a two-day meeting in the West Sumatra city of Bukittinggi among senior officials of the three countries.

Under a 1994 agreement, the area included Indonesia's Riau Islands, Singapore and Malaysia's Johore State. It was intended to focus cooperation activities.

Added to the area Thursday were West Sumatra and Malacca provinces in Indonesia, and Negri Sembilan and Pahang states in Malaysia.

The statement said the countries also agreed on 15 joint venture agreements and other deals, mostly between Indonesia and Malaysia.

The cooperation between Indonesia and Malaysia includes research in oil, training and human resources development, construction of an optical park on the island of Batam and a joint venture in a 300 million dollar cement plant in West Sumatra.

Yeltsin signs decree on land reform

MOSCOW, Mar 10: President Boris Yeltsin signed a decree Thursday aimed at stimulating long-stalled land reform by lifting restrictions on buying and selling land, reports AFP.

The decree affects the 40 million Russians who own private garden plots, along with 12 million workers at former collective and state farms.

Land reform in Russia began under the Soviet regime, but there has been heavy opposition in the countryside, particularly from local authorities. The lack of effective privatization in the farm sector has stalled agricultural reform.

Yeltsin's government committed to moving quickly on land reforms when it signed a 10.2 billion dollar loan agreement last month with the International Monetary Fund.

The new decree is aimed at bypassing a land reform bill that has been stalled in the Communist-dominated parliament. The communists oppose the privatization of land.

Yeltsin's decree guarantees Russians ownership of garden plots they obtained before 1991, prohibiting local authorities from forcing them to buy or lease the lands.

For workers at former collective and state farms who were given shares in land and other property when these farms were privatised, the decree ensures that they have full rights to dispose of those stakes as they choose, buying, selling or bequeathing them.

China's jobless problem mounts

SHANGHAI, Mar 10: China's unemployment problem is mounting as new workers enter the job market, the Shanghai-based Business Daily said Thursday, reports Reuter.

"Although official figures show the unemployment rate is under three per cent, there is a serious problem of unregistered unemployed people," the paper quoted Gu Shengzhu, a consultant to the Chinese government, as saying.

Gu said collective enterprises in rural areas had been unable to absorb all labour since the early 1990s, resulting in a growing floating population of 80 million people.

He estimated another 72 million young people would enter the labour market in the next five years.

He said state and collective firms in urban areas had about 40 million workers they did not need. They were expected to be gradually dismissed in the next few years, he said.

Gu urged the government to take measures to ease the problem, including allowing earlier retirement.

Beijing, fearing instability, will not allow firms to dismiss surplus workers gradually, analysts say.

UN sends Thai rice to hungry North Koreans

BANGKOK, Mar 10: Thailand, the world's biggest rice exporter, is providing 5,635 tons of the grain to help ease a food crisis in North Korea, reports AP.

The emergency supplies, arranged by the United Nations' World Food Programme, were being loaded aboard a Chinese freighter for shipment, a port agent in Bangkok said Thursday.

The UN agency paid for the rice with donations from the United States, Australia and the four Nordic countries.

North Koreans face possible starvation after the worst floods in the country's history devastated rice-growing areas last summer. North Korea's Communist government, which for decades promoted the idea of national self-reliance, has made an unprecedented appeal for foreign aid to help avert a famine.

The World Food Programme arranged a first emergency shipment of 6,540 tons of low-grade rice - also from Thailand - last November.

The World Food Programme said it plans soon to send a third shipment of at least 3,000 tons.

But North Korea's needs, estimated at 1.2 million tons, dwarf the agency's contributions so far. Millions of children and pregnant women could starve by summer unless donor countries provide more food aid, the agency warned.

Pak customs seize over 3 tonnes hashish

ISLAMABAD, Mar 10: Pakistani customs have seized more than three tonnes of hashish in the first big drug haul in the country this year, a newspaper reported Tuesday, says AFP.

The hashish was found in two trucks taking the contraband to the southern port city of Karachi for shipments to foreign destinations; customs officials told the Urdu-language daily Jang.

The officials estimated the value of the seize hashish at 160 million rupees (4.5 million dollars) in illegal drug markets abroad.

The trucks were intercepted at a checkpoint near the town of Gujranwala in Punjab province two days ago, the report said, adding the drivers had been arrested.

According to the UN International Narcotics Control Board's 1995 report released last week, Afghanistan and Pakistan remain major supply sources for illicit drug markets in Europe.

The report says the abuse of cannabis and cannabis resin continues to be substantial in Pakistan and Afghanistan and has increased in the neighbouring central Asian states.

New vineyard site in Australia announced

ADELAIDE, Australia, Mar 10: French wine and spirits giant Pernod Ricard recently announced a new vineyard and manufacturing site in the Barossa Valley to exploit the potential of the Jacob's Creek label to be the world's best, reports AP.

Group chairman Patrick Ricard said the new initiatives will be undertaken at Orlando Wyndham's Barossa Valley winery.

One of the main commitments given by Ricard was a 3 million Australian dollars (2.28 million US dollars) high-speed bottling line to be installed at the Rowland Flat winery within three years to complement one commissioned two years ago.

In combination, the two lines will fill, label and package wine at 44,000 bottles per hour.

"We firmly believe Jacob's Creek has all the necessary attributes, including quality and value for money, to become the world's number one brand," Ricard said.

Orlando produces two million cases of Jacob's Creek per year, with 75 per cent exported.

France to toughen immigration laws

PARIS, Mar 10: With the number of expulsions of illegal aliens declining, France plans to toughen immigration laws and to further limit political asylum, newspapers reported Wednesday, reports AP.

A proposed law would establish a list of people who receive foreigners in their homes and extend the period illegal immigrants may be held in preventive detention, the Paris dailies Le Monde and Liberation reported.

The law, still under study within the government and subject to changes before it is submitted to Parliament, would also do away with the automatic renewal of 10-year residency cards.

The government's increasingly tough attitude comes just days after a confidential Interior Ministry report concluded that the number of illegal immigrants expelled last year dropped 10 per cent compared with 1994.

The drop in the number of people being kicked out of France came despite well-publicised charter flights filled with illegal immigrants.

The conservative government of Prime Minister Alain Juppe, under pressure to crack down on illegal immigration, decided last year to institute charters to send the immigrants home. To date, some 60 people in 14 charters have been flown back.

The main reason for the drop in the number of people expelled was war-wracked Algeria's refusal until last October to take back its citizens illegally living in France, the North African nation's former ruler.

Algerians account for between 30 and 40 per cent of all those subject to expulsion. Illegal immigration was a

key issue in last year's presidential campaign. Jean-Mari Le Pen, leader of the far-right National Front, won 15 per cent of the vote on promises to expel 3 million illegal aliens.

With unemployment at 11.8 per cent and growing, many in France blame immigrants for the jobless rate, crime drugs and other social problems.

Under the government's plan, temporary lodging permits granted to people who wish to receive foreigners in their homes would be strictly controlled. These permits are necessary for any foreigner from outside the 15-member European Community and other countries such as the United States who is staying with a family.

The controls are essentially aimed at citizens from Arab nations and the former French colonies in Africa.

The proposed law would establish lists of people who

receive foreign visitors. Under the proposed law, local mayors would be empowered to deny the temporary lodging permits to people suspected of hiding illegal immigrants in their homes.

Among other restrictions, hosts would have to inform authorities when their guests left the country, according to the newspaper reports.

The proposal would also allow authorities to hold illegal aliens in preventive detention for more than 10 days as is currently the case.

The government also wants to rescind the automatic renewal of 10-year residency cards if it considers that a person presents "a menace to public order."

Until now, renewal of the 10-year permit could be denied only on grounds of polygamy or a resident's non-declared absence from France for more than three years.

'Quarter of China's rural workforce redundant'

BEIJING, Mar 10: More than 27 per cent of China's 450-million-strong rural workforce is redundant, the Xinhua news agency quoted an agricultural official as saying, reports Reuter.

Of China's 450 million rural workers, only 200 million are actually needed for farming while 126 million are employed by rural industries, leaving 124 million surplus labourers, Xinhua quoted Vice Minister of Agriculture Wan Baorui as saying in an overnight report.

Farming in China has traditionally been dominated by millions of family sized plots

but the government is encouraging the organisation of large-scale cooperative farms, a move that boosts efficiency, but creates large numbers of surplus farmers.

China gave the go-ahead for semi-private rural enterprises in the late 1970s to harness surplus farm labour and increase industrial output, thus saving the state an estimated 3.78 trillion yuan (455 billion dollars), Wan said.

China has said it will grant 45 billion yuan (5.42 billion dollars) in loans to rural enterprises in 1996, an increase of 14 per cent compared with 1995.

Australia to lose direct air link with Guam on March 31

SYDNEY, Australia, Mar 10: Australia will lose its direct air link with Guam on March 31 when Continental Micronesia halts its thrice-weekly flights from Sydney, reports AP.

The service began April 15 last year in the hope of attracting Australians to holidays on Guam and nearby islands in Micronesia.

But a spokesman for the airline recently said passenger loadings had proved disappointingly light and it had been decided the flights were not viable.

Continental Micronesia is a subsidiary of Continental Airlines, which itself withdrew its services between North America and Australia on October 31, 1993.

Airline sources said Continental did not rule out the possibility of re-examining the trans-Pacific and Guam services in the future.

5000 Romanians protest gov't policies

BUCHAREST, Romania, Mar 10: Labour unrest dogged Romania again Thursday as some 5,000 metalurgy workers took to the streets of Bucharest to protest government policies that have eroded their living standards since 1989, reports AP.

In a dramatic march through the city centre, workers from various cities played funeral songs, carried black flags and shouted, "We are the slave of God, not of the government," as they approached government headquarters.

They carried a funeral cross inscribed "Trust, Born 1989. Died 1996." Romania overthrew communism in 1989.

Since then, Romanians have faced a steady drip in their living standards. The government has tried to introduce market reforms such as privatization of state-owned industries. These measures have led to unemployment and increasing prices.

In another sign of discontent, Bucharest's subway was closed again Thursday as workers protested low wages and poor working conditions. Union leaders told workers Wednesday to suspend their action. Their orders were ignored and the subway was closed for a fourth day.

The Alfa trade union group, which organized Thursday's protest, is asking the government to pay compensation for a period this winter when they were sent home after power cuts stopped work.

The government had said that employees who work for companies that have no debts to the state electricity company will be paid 75 per cent on their salary for that period.

coalition cabinet is announced later this week.

Hewitt said the industry crisis meeting should discuss export markets, the dumping of US supplies in Key North Asian markets, and consider the federal funding of meat inspection to ease costs for producers.

The meeting should also address tighter crop chemical controls and increased funding for residue testing, as well as a "system of improved market forecasting to stabilise the industry," he said.

He said the industry faced a collapsing export market which had seen export prices nearly halve.

Producers are facing not only their worst crisis since 1974 but also a major crisis of confidence," he said.

"The incoming minister must act immediately to give the industry some direction."

Brazilian Senate to probe central bank's ability

BRASILIA, Brazil, Mar 10: The Senate decided Wednesday to open a full-scale investigation into the central bank and its ability to oversee the country's banking sector, a move that some analysts fear could threaten the future of Brazil's economic stabilisation programme, reports AP.

Congressional approval of the investigation grew from the central bank's failure to detect the irregular accounting procedures a top commercial bank used to hide a multi-billion-dollar debt.

"Brazil's central bank sets banking norms and supervises the entire country's financial sector."

Last week, the central bank said it had discovered that for the past 10 years Banco Nacional, once Brazil's eighth largest bank, had been entering phony loans in its balance

sheets to cover up a 5 billion dollars deficit.

The Banco Nacional's profitable operations were sold to industry giant Unibanco in November. The government took over its unprofitable operations.

The congressional investigative committee wants to find out just how widespread is the use of the irregular accounting procedures by the country's banking system.

It will scrutinize bank balance sheets and subpoena Finance Minister Pedro Malan, central bank President Gustavo Loyola and directors of most major Brazilian banks.

"Account holders have the right to know what kind of institution they're putting their money and we will give them that information," said Senator Antonio Carlos Valadares.

Exchange Rates Sonali Bank

The following are the dealing rates to public for some selected foreign currencies with Bangladesh Taka as on March 10, '96.

Name of Currency	Selling		Buying	
	T.T. & O.D.	B.C.	T.T. Clean	O.D. Sight Export Bills
US Dollar 1 = Tk	41.1610	41.2010	40.8650	40.7055
GB Pound 1 = Tk	62.8243	62.8853	61.8652	61.4837
D Mark 1 = Tk	27.8358	27.8629	27.3459	27.1773
F Franc 1 = Tk	8.1295	8.1374	7.9860	7.9549
C Dollar	30.2389	30.2836	29.7010	29.5851
S Franc	34.4035	34.4370	33.7966	33.6647
JP Yen	0.3932	0.3935	0.3823	0.3808

A) TT (Doc) US Dollar Spot Buying Tk. 40.7852
B) Usance Rate:
30 days 40.4660
60 days 40.1425
90 days 39.9190
120 days 39.4955
180 days 39.8484

C) US Dollar sight export bill 3 months forward purchase: Same as O.D. sight export Bill buying rate.

Currency	Selling		Buying	
	T.T. & O.D.	B.C.	T.T. Transfer	O.D. Transfer
S Riyal	Tk 10.9752	Tk 10.8275		
UAE Dirham	Tk 11.2071	Tk 11.0559		
Kuwait Dinar	Tk 137.8071	Tk 135.8635		
D Guider	Tk 24.9162	Tk 24.5746		
S Krona	Tk 6.0310	Tk 5.9458		
Malaysian Ringgit	Tk 16.1856	Tk 15.9623		
Singapore Dollar	Tk 29.1739	Tk 28.7624		

Janata Bank

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Name of Currency	Selling		Buying	
	T.T. & O.D.	B.C.	T.T. Clean	O.D. Sight Export Bills
US Dollar	41.1620	41.2150	40.8660	40.7026
G.B. Pound	62.8336	62.9097	61.8642	61.4459
D Mark	27.8380	27.8716	27.3455	27.1606
F Franc	8.1301	8.1399	7.9859	7.9527
JP Yen	0.3939	0.3944	0.3843	0.3827
C Dollar	30.2412	30.2778	29.2518	29.1304
S Franc	34.4062	34.4478	33.7960	33.6557

Janata Bank's selling and buying rates in cash currency for public

	US DLR	GBP	S Riyal	UAE DH.	Kuwait Dinar
Selling	42.3500	62.8336	11.3600	11.3600	136.8000
Buying	41.5000	60.5836	11.0000	10.7600	131.8000

Business briefs

HANOI, Mar 10: The government has authorised bidding for construction of a 350 million dollars coal-fired power plant in the far north.

The government is proposing a build-operate-transfer contract for the 300-megawatt plant in Quang Ninh province, although its few previous attempts at negotiating BOT power plant deals have met with difficulties. One reason is Vietnam's reluctance to guarantee prices or convertibility of earnings into foreign exchange.

Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet has assigned the Vietnam Electricity Corp. and the Ministry of Industry to coordinate bidding for the plant. Tran Vinh Linh, chief of the state company's planning section, said Wednesday.

Linh said he didn't know when bidding will open. He said three foreign companies have expressed interest.

The government hopes the plant will begin operating in 1999. It forecasts that nationwide demand for electricity will double between 1995 and 2000.

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia: Malaysia's first van, produced by Perusahaan Otomobil Kedua (Pd) in collaboration with Daihatsu Motor Corp of

Japan, was unveiled by Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad this week.

The van, named the Rusa, will sell for about 35,000 ringgit (18,000 dollars). The engine and transmission are imported from Japan.

Some 3,000 orders for the van have already been received, according to the automaker's Chairman Raja Mohar Raja Badiozaman. He credited the van's sleek design to the Prime Minister's personal guidance.

Perusahaan Otomobil Nasional is Malaysia's first domestic carmaker, and its Proton models have been on the market for the past decade.

The prime minister, in a speech introducing the van, said the vehicle will help reduce Malaysia's trade deficit.

He said it should ensure that component imports were at the minimum level, speed up planning to replace components imported from Japan and export as many Kancil and Rusa vehicles as possible.

more than 40 per cent in 1995 compared to the previous year.

CANBERRA, Australia: The new conservative government must call a beef industry crisis meeting as a matter of urgency, the Australian Hereford Society said.

Society president Col Hewitt said despite big promises from both sides of politics during the election campaign, Australia's beef industry was all but ignored by politicians and industry lead-

ers.

He said the industry faced a collapsing export market which had seen export prices nearly halve.

Producers are facing not only their worst crisis since 1974 but also a major crisis of confidence," he said.

"The incoming minister must act immediately to give the industry some direction."

The National Party's Deputy Leader John Anderson is likely to be named primary industries minister when the new

coalition cabinet is announced later this week.

Hewitt said the industry crisis meeting should discuss export markets, the dumping of US supplies in Key North Asian markets, and consider the federal funding of meat inspection to ease costs for producers.

The meeting should also address tighter crop chemical controls and increased funding for residue testing, as well as a "system of improved market forecasting to stabilise the industry," he said.

He said the industry faced a collapsing export market which had seen export prices nearly halve.