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DHAKA THURSDAY, MARCH 28, 1996

Emirates Group's Web site goes active

The Emirates Group has joined the World Wide Web with a 40-page site that provides the estimated 40 million worldwide Internet users with comprehensive and up-to-date information about Emirates Airline and its sister company, DNATA, says an Emirates press release.

Maurice Flanagan, Group Managing Director, said: "We are delighted to make this service available to past, present and future customers of the airline and DNATA, who will now be able to access up-to-date information about the Emirates Group directly from their own computers."

Gary Chapman, Chief Director Group Services, said: "The Group's External Relations and Information Technology departments have worked closely together, combining their respective marketing and technical skills, to provide informative pages that look good and are easy to browse through. A careful balance was necessary; too few graphics would have made the pages dull, while too many would have meant an overly long download time."

At present, an estimated 40 million computer users have access to the Internet most of them in the USA, but more and more users in Europe, Asia, Australia and New Zealand are gaining access. Figures from the UK alone, show 10,000 new users per month.

The Emirates Group is among the first in the UAE to set up a Web site, and the company plans to make it dynamic, providing information on flight schedules. All information will be continually updated as part of the Group's information service to its customers. Press releases will also be placed on the site to provide the latest news.

The site already contains more than 40 pages of text and graphics, beginning with the Emirates Group's home page. This contains a brief description of the Emirates group of companies. Buttons with the Emirates and DNATA logos can be clicked for further information on each company.

The Emirates page provides a brief description of the airline, its cargo division, Arabian Adventures, Emirates Holidays and Mercator, with buttons to click for further information about each division and contact telephone numbers throughout the world.

Drinking black tea may reduce risk of stroke

CHICAGO, Mar 27: Drinking black tea may offer protection against stroke, according to a study described in Monday's issue of the American Medical Association's archives of internal medicine, reports Reuters.

Researchers cited the benefits of flavonoids — non-nutritive compounds with antioxidant properties — found in tea and fruits. Antioxidants, such as beta carotene, vitamin C and flavonoids, prevent bad cholesterol from oxidising in the body and may reduce the occurrence of heart disease and stroke.

"Men who drank more than 4.7 cups of tea per day had a 69 per cent reduced risk of stroke compared with men who drank less than 2.5 cups per day," the report said.

Sirving Kell, formerly with the National Institute of Public Health and Environmental Protection in the Netherlands, conducted the dietary study of 552 men, aged 50 to 69, between 1970, and 1985.

Researchers said that while there was an inverse link between black tea consumption and stroke risk, the link between solid fruit and stroke risk was statistically insignificant.

Iran to continue freeze on forex rates

TEHRAN, Mar 27: The Iranian central bank said yesterday it would maintain the freeze on currency exchange rates for the next 12 months, reports AFP.

The bank, quoted by newspapers, said the dollar would remain fixed at the maximum rate of 3,000 rials during the new Iranian year from March 1996-1997.

Threatened with the collapse of the national currency, the authorities closed the open exchange market in May and froze the greenback at two separate rates of 3,000 rials and 1,750. The lower rate is used for the purchase of essential goods only.

The government also required all transactions in hard currency to be done through the nationalised banking system at the official rates.

However, the dollar is traded at around 4,000 rials on the black market despite an ongoing crackdown on illegal money exchangers.

Abuse of Bangladeshi, Filipino, Lankan maids

Colombo asks Kuwait City to solve labour problems

KUWAIT, Mar 27: Sri Lanka's foreign minister Tuesday discussed "practical suggestions" with Kuwait officials to solve the problem of hundreds of Sri Lankan housemaids who have taken refuge in their embassy because of alleged abuse by employers, reports AP.

"The embassy can no longer accommodate these people," Lakshman Kadirgamar told reporters at the end of a two-day visit.

He said there were 230 maids living in the embassy at any given point in time, complaining of "non-payment of wages and harassment."

The embassy of the Philippines and Bangladesh face the same difficulties with similar numbers of maids who

have fled their employers, citing beatings, sexual abuse and non-payment of salaries that rarely exceed 130 dollars a month.

Several maids have in recent years died from severe beatings, and human rights organisations have criticized the government for not doing enough to protect the foreign workers.

About 90,000 Sri Lankans work in Kuwait, 80,000 of them maids, Kadirgamar said.

He estimated that there are some 500,000 Sri Lankan workers in the Middle East. They send home about 300 million dollars a year to their families.

Kadirgamar said he suggested to Kuwaiti officials plans to repatriate domestic helpers, establishing a system

whereby employers have to prove they paid their maids, in addition to exchanging lists of employment agents in both countries and expediting police investigations with runaway maids.

"I feel confident that good cooperation will take place now," he said, noting he was assured that the government will open a shelter for runaway maids in June.

He said Sri Lanka has "put before the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development 20 projects... for their consideration."

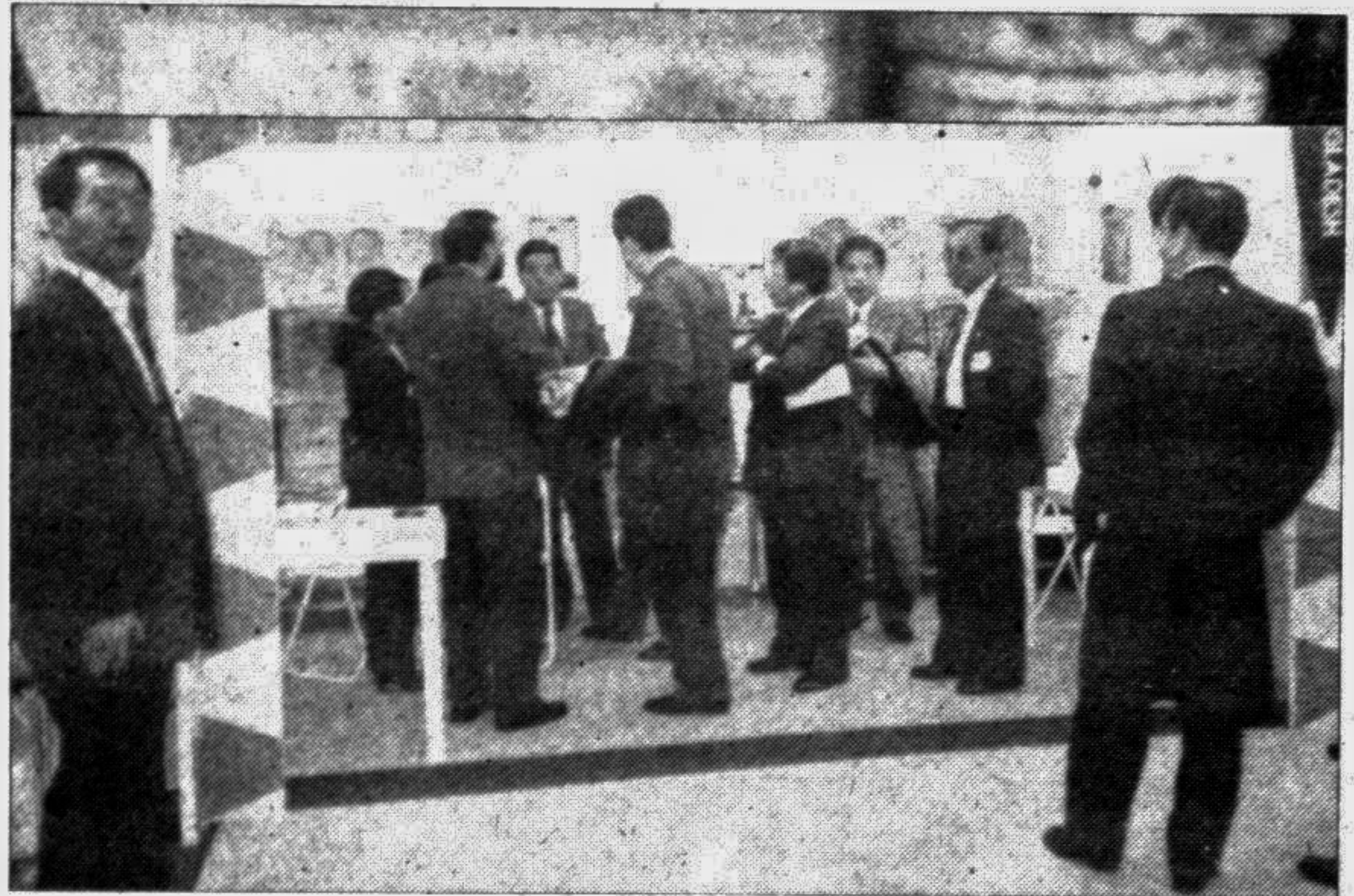
The fund is the government's organization for aiding developing countries by extending soft loans. The proposed projects are worth tens of millions of dollars, Kadirgamar said.

Dhaka takes part in Osaka fashion trade fair

Bangladesh Export Promotion Bureau in co-operation with the Embassy of Bangladesh in Tokyo, Japan, organise Bangladesh participation in a three-day world fashion fair in Osaka, Japan held from March 5 to 7, says a press release.

Three garments and one jewellery companies participated the fair. M/S Sidko Ltd. and M/S Alanker Niketan have obtained spot orders for shirts and jewellery items worth 5,50,000 and 2000 US dollars respectively during the fair.

A few Japanese companies have shown interest in the garment products of M/S Sidko Ltd and jewellery items of M/S Alanker Niketan specially. M/S Alanker Niketan sold jewellery items worth 16,000 US dollars at the fair, the press release added.



AKM Nizamul Alam (extreme right), Director of Bangladesh pavilion, seen at the fashion fair in Osaka, Japan held recently.

New Coca-Cola plant in Southeast Asia

Coca-Cola has opened one of the most advanced soft drinks production facilities in Southeast Asia, says a press release.

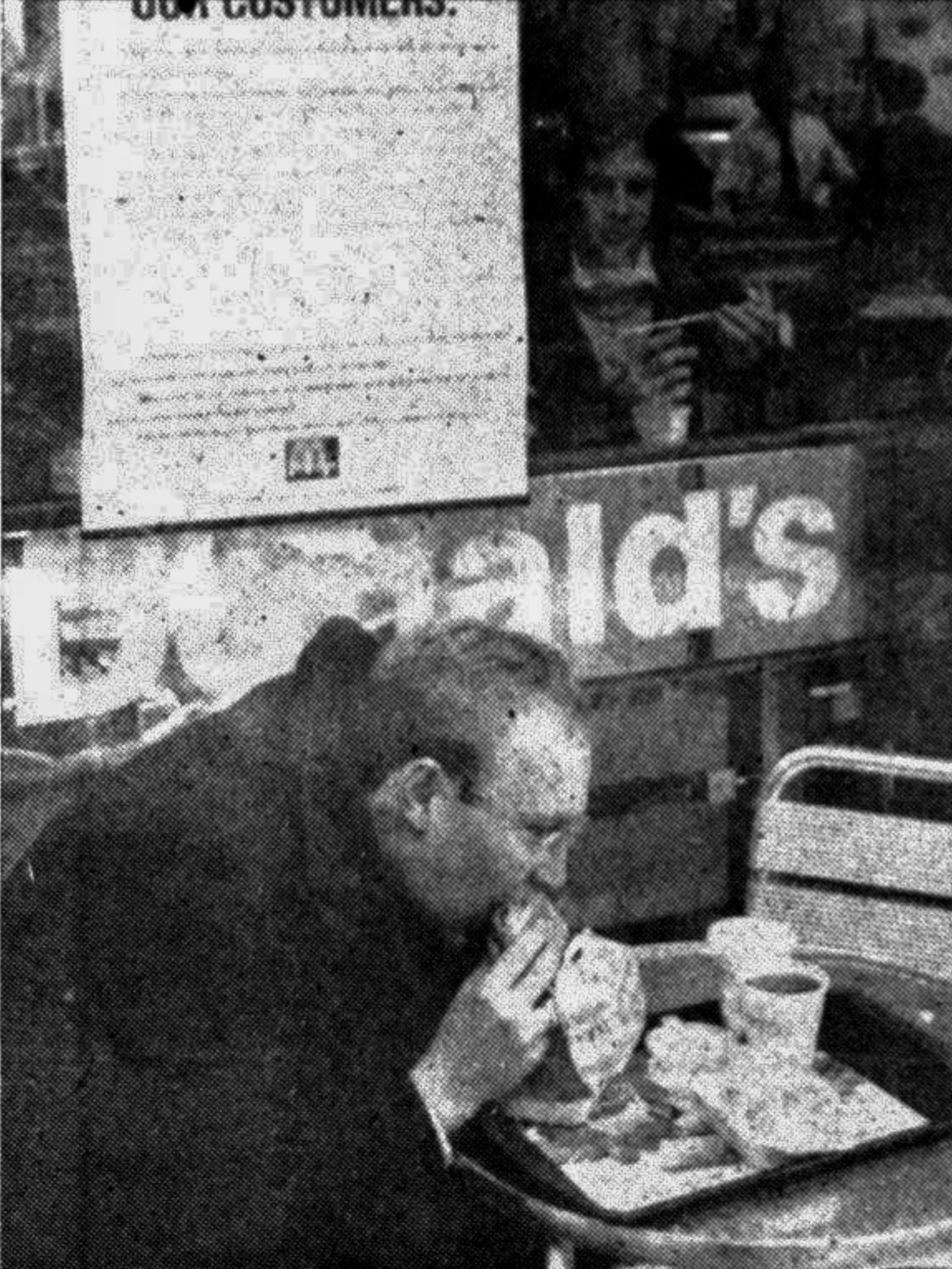
The new 48 million US dollars plant, located in Rangsit on the outskirts of Bangkok, is designed to meet the strong demand for Coca-Cola Company products in Thailand. The modern facility, covering almost 330,000 square metres has the capacity to produce 50 million cases of Coca-Cola Company products this year.

Speaking at the opening of the plant on Friday, M Douglas Ivester, President and Chief Operating Officer of the Coca-Cola Company, praised Thailand's booming economy for creating exciting business opportunities. "In the soft drink business, Thailand can be considered a dream market - 60 million people, a hot climate, rapid economic growth," he said.

Ivester added that as opportunities grow in Thailand, the Company has every expectation that the Rangsit plant will be a major asset in enabling the Coca-Cola system to reach more consumers and maximize the high potential of the market.

This state-of-the-art facility is certainly one of the jewels of the Coca-Cola system," he added.

Operated by Thai Pure Drinks Ltd the primary Coca-Cola bottler in Thailand, the new plant is designed to expand its production capacity in line with forecast strong demand. This level of growth should see the plant producing 100 million cases of Coca-Cola within the next few years.



A city worker enjoys a lunchbreak in one of the McDonald's burger bars in London on Tuesday under a new sign informing the public of McDonald's announcement that they will no longer be offering products made with British beef. The British government announced on Monday new slaughterhouse controls but so far fails to order the expected wholesale destruction of cows to control 'mad cow' disease, BSE, which it last week said was probably being transmitted to humans in the form of a new strain of CJD, a fatal and incurable brain disorder that has claimed at least 10 victims. -AFP/UNB photo

Bid to save beef industry from mad cow disease UK may kill thousands of cattle

LONDON, Mar 27: Britain, facing public panic over mad cow disease, seemed likely to bow to domestic and international pressure and slaughter thousands of cattle to try to save the country's beef industry from ruin, reports Reuters.

Prime Minister John Major with little choice but to embark upon an "embarrassing policy up-turn," said a late-night Tuesday meeting with ministers to discuss ways of tackling the crisis.

Consumers worldwide have deserted British beef since government scientists revealed last week that 10 Britons had died from a new strain of the human equivalent of BSE, or mad cow disease, probably contracted from eating beef.

Ministers had flatly ruled out any need to slaughter cattle, but Major told Parliament that he would consider whether some of the country's 11 million strong herd should be killed to restore confidence in British beef.

His hand was forced by the European Commission, which was set on Wednesday to confirm a decision by senior European Union veterinary experts to ban all British exports of beef.

BBC Television said it had learned that the government was discussing several options all of which involved slaughtering cattle, and would make a statement on Thursday, a spokesman for Major declined to comment on the report.

Details of the planned measures could leak out on Wednesday, when Health Secretary Stephen Dorrell and Agriculture Minister Douglas Hogg face a parliamentary committee grilling.

The influential National Farmers Union (NFU) called on the government to set up a scheme to ensure that meat from older cows did not enter the human food chain.

Members of the ruling Conservative Party already split over policy towards the European Union, are unlikely to accept a slaughter with any great grace.

AP says from Frankfurt: US

military officials in Germany have ordered commissaries in the Mediterranean region and Scotland to pull British beef products from their shelves, a spokeswoman said Tuesday.

Gerri Young, spokeswoman for the Defence Commissary Agency in Europe, said the order was based on "a total ban on the export of all British beef," by the European Community Monday.

The order affects commissaries in Italy, Spain, Turkey, Greece and Scotland, the only ones in the region selling British beef before the ban, she said.

US beef is provided to troops in central Europe, England and the Middle East. But Young said customs problems stemming from controversy

about some American beef containing growth-enhancing hormones prevented the commissary from offering US beef in the Mediterranean region. In Scotland they had been selling local beef.

The scare over British beef was generated by an official announcement in Britain last week that "mad cow disease" — formally known as bovine spongiform encephalopathy — was the most likely source of a similar brain degeneration, Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease, that has struck 10 young Britons. At least eight have died.

The military's unofficial Stars and Stripes newspaper on Tuesday quoted a retired US naval officer in Naples, Italy who was upset to find British beef being sold by the Aviano commissary.

World grain reserves too low: FAO DG

RABAT, Mar 27: The Director General of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation said on Tuesday world grain reserves were too low to guarantee global food security and he pleaded for action to avoid disaster, reports Reuters.

After a renewed period of bumper surpluses we are now back to a situation where the world's grain reserves have fallen below the level considered necessary to guarantee global food security, Jacques Diouf told the opening session of a regional UN FAO conference in Rabat.

"We are all living today in a state of impending disaster," he said.

Representatives from 29 countries are attending the five day conference to prepare for the November 13-17 world food summit in Rome.

"World prices have soared and the low income food

deficit developing countries will have to pay out an additional 3.0 billion dollars this year for their food imports, he said.

Diouf, the first African to head the Rome-based FAO, said 800 million people in the developing world suffered from chronic malnutrition, nearly 200 children under five were affected by severe or chronic protein deficiency.

The FAO has said that if no action was taken to reverse the present trends in food deficiency the number of chronically undernourished people may be at 730 million by the year 2010, more than 300 million of them in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Although food production in countries of the near east had risen sharply in the last 20-30 years, this has been met by a sharp rise in population growth, Diouf said.

Country losing world's confidence

By Syed S Kaiser Kabir and Safi Khan

Even if the political crisis ended today, the road to recovery for industry is going to be laborious. This is particularly true for industries which have business links with the outside world. The reason is simple: What businessmen feared has come true, viz., Bangladesh is a dangerous place for business. This is a place where jungle-law prevails. The main port can be closed, factories prevented from producing, the movement of essential goods blockaded, persons beaten up for going to work, and so on. This is a nation

that too over a long period of time. As it is, the business community faces resistance in the world markets because of the negative impressions foreigners have of our country. If an investor lands at Zia International Airport and is immediately greeted with a lack of governance, hartal or strike, then how on earth can we possibly change this image? One cannot even imagine the frustrations that business people must feel when they see a life's work destroyed in a matter of few weeks. Rebuilding will be a monumental task. According to Feroz Rahim, Director of Rahimafrooz, "The major challenge for Bangladesh's future will be to restore confidence among the investors."

Bangladeshi politicians have singularly failed to appreciate that markets, particularly large overseas markets, have no sympathy for inefficiency. Says Syed Nasim Manzur, Director of Apex Footwear, "Japanese retailers become very upset if there are empty shoe shelves. One must remember that there are other countries where the Japanese can get their shoes from."

Our competitors in India, Pakistan, Vietnam, etc. are not likely to sit quietly as Bangladeshi businesses collapse. Indeed, they can be expected to do their utmost to capture our fallen markets. "Our com-

petitors are going to gleefully broadcast to the rest of the world," says Manzur. "We told you don't get lured in by cheap labour, Bangladesh is a bad place to do business!"

The situation has turned ridiculous. Tanneries are about to close due to scarcity of salt which is used to preserve raw skins and hides. Seafood exporters are transporting live crabs by rickshaw vans at 1 am to the airport. A shoe exporter had to remake and despatch by air cargo 12,000 pairs of shoes because the original consignment is stuck at Chittagong Port. Many garment

manufacturers are opting for the same tactic. However, the price is high. The rule of thumb is that if a consignment of garments meant for shipping is sent by air, then it takes three further consignments just to break even.

It will probably never be possible to fully estimate the magnitude of the losses that are occurring with each passing day. This is because it is not only the current production which is being lost but also potential opportunities that are being wasted. In all likelihood, Bangladesh has been pushed back by a few years.

This is a sad state of affairs indeed. Until recently, Bangladesh boasted an economic environment that was well suited for investment, both in

fixed and financial assets. Low inflation, high reserves, etc. True, the law and order situation left much to be desired, but it was still workable. International investment bankers, dealing with emerging markets began to recommend the Dhaka Stock Exchange to their clients. Even the largest brokerage firm in Europe, viz., Smith Newcourt, took an active interest. Foreign direct investment increased substantially in percentage terms (although in absolute terms it remained small). Competitors watched the country with keen interest. An economic weekly

of India, in reference to our readymade garments industry, posted a warning, "Watch out for the Bengal Tiger." Of course, the overall situation was far from perfect. The point is, however, that the "right things" were beginning to take place.

What is particularly distressing about this political imbroglio is that it has expanded the frontiers of indecency. Of all the principles that we hold to be true is the right to earn an honest living. Yet, this tenet has been repeatedly violated without remorse. Our livelihood, our future, and our very existence are under severe threat. One must truly question whether the present dispute merits such an immense sacrifice?

Myanmar plans cheap lending to employees

YANGON, Mar 27: Myanmar's ruling military government will make low-interest loans to government employees and pensioners to help cushion the effects of galloping inflation, state-run media reported yesterday, reports Reuters.

IMF agrees to offer Russia \$ 10.2b loan

WASHINGTON, Mar 27: The International Monetary Fund has agreed to offer Russia new loans worth 10.2 billion dollars over the next three years, nearly doubling what Russia owes to the organisation, reports AP.

The total is the second-highest the fund has offered in its 52-year history, exceeded only by a package of 17.8 dollars in new loans to Mexico last year.

"This... programme is ambitious and will help Russia build free markets and achieve the benefits of reform if the programmes macroeconomics and structural reform measures are vigorously implemented," US Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin said Tuesday.

Russia already owes the fund 10.8 billion dollars. The World Bank calculated Russia's total debt last year at 115.9 billion dollars. It estimates that this year Russia is due to pay out 6.9 billion dollars in principal and interest on what it owes.

The loan will provide a major boost for Russia's cash-strapped government as President Boris Yeltsin prepares for the June presidential election. It was immediately welcomed by the Clinton administration.

Yeltsin's government has slashed spending and sharply boosted borrowing in recent months to raise cash. The new loan money will go to meet some of Russia's debt obligations and finance imports.


Sergei Dubinin, the head of Russia's central bank, said earlier Tuesday that his country met all of the conditions the IMF had made for the loan, including abolishing most export duties and taking steps to boost government revenues.

IMF loans are offered on conditions designed to free international trade and rein in spending by the borrowing government. On Monday, Russia agreed to free trade by dropping plans to restrict imports of alcoholic drinks and to ban imports of American frozen chicken.

Approval came from fund's 24-member Board of Executive Directors, representing the 180 member governments, including the United States — the fund's biggest contributor — and Russia itself.

Introducing the new U.S. \$100 note

It doesn't look quite the same,

but it's worth the same.

The new US 100-dollar bill (top) is compared to the old in this information message released from the US Federal Reserve Bank on Monday. The new bill was designed primarily to thwart counterfeiters. -AFP/UNB photo

Loan distribution plan in B'baria

BRAHMANBARIA, Mar 27: A programme has been taken up to disburse loan about Taka one lakh among the landless people in three thanas of the district, reports UNB.

Organisation for Multilateral Welfare and Education — a non-government organisation — will distribute the loan among the male and female distressed people in Sarail, Ashuganj and Sadar thanas on easy terms.

Meanwhile, a loan disbursement ceremony was held at the office of OMWE which was attended by Chairman of Brahmanbaria Pouroshava AL Mamun Sarkar as chief guest.

Lanka's plantation workers begin strike Monday

COLOMBO, Mar 27: Sri Lanka's powerful Ceylon Workers' Congress, representing 600,000 plantation workers, begins a six-day strike next Monday, its President Saumyamoorthy Thondaman said yesterday, reports Reuters.

The workers are pushing for an eight rupee (15 cent) a day pay rise and guaranteed 300 days' work a year in the country's massive tea, rubber and coconut plantations, said Thondaman, who is also rural industries minister.

He described the work stoppage as a "token strike" aimed at restoring rights enjoyed when the estates were set up under British colonial rule last century.

"Bringing the entire industry to a halt is not our intention," he told Reuters.

The government, in which Thondaman is a cabinet minister, has launched an ambitious privatisation of the tea industry and has so far sold off the management of nine of 24 plantations.

Analysts say the cost of tea production in Sri Lanka is one of the highest in the world, with 65 to 70 per cent of that cost going to labour.