

China postpones delivery of two lakh tonne US wheat

WASHINGTON, Apr 5: China has postponed delivery of 200,000 tonnes of soft winter wheat that was to have taken place by this May until the June-May trade period of 1996-1997, the agriculture department said here yesterday, reports AP.

Joe Victor of the brokerage firm Allendale attributed the Chinese move to higher prices for wheat shipments made before the end of the current trade year than for those scheduled to take place this summer.

Wheat currently being loaded aboard vessels in the Gulf of Mexico costs 5.93 dollars a bushel compared with 5.03 dollars for wheat to be loaded in July.

Victor said China was in no hurry at the moment to receive additional shipments, as an order of 500,000 tonnes was already on its way there. In addition, following the discovery several weeks ago of an infection known as karnal bunt fungus in a small sampling of US wheat, China has decided to restrict its purchases to grain loaded before April 1.

Farming in air!

SINGAPORE, Apr 5: Vegetables to be grown in the air in land scarce Singapore as part of a bid to produce pesticide-free, quality crops and reduce the city state's food import bill, reports AP.

Devised by local scientists, the 'aeroponics' technology for growing vegetables in the first to be developed for large scale crop production in the tropics, officials here say.

Initially only temperate and sub-tropical crops will be produced beginning with salad greens such as lettuce, Chinese kale, spinach and cocktail tomatoes, said Ricky Lau, Managing Director of Tropical Aeroponics Pte. Ltd.

Lau's company, which adopted the technology from Singapore's Nanyang Technological University (NTU), is setting up a 5.6 hectare (13.8 acre) aeroponics farm which could begin production as early as June.

Under the soil less cultivation system, seedlings will be planted in troughs made of styrofoam with their roots suspended in the air beneath an insulating cover scientists said.

Under the cover, air will be cooled through machines to simulate the conditions of the temperate and sub-tropical homes of these plants.

Growth is supported by supplying the roots of the vegetables with nutrients and moisture in the form of mist, dispensed through sprinklers, the scientists said.

Citibank workers stage protest

JAKARTA, Indonesia, Apr 5: Hundreds of workers of Citibank of the United States staged a slowdown protest Thursday, demanding an annual bonus, reports AP.

Some 380 employees went on strike with slogans such as "We Want Bonus 77 Billion" and "We Want General Increase."

Hidayatullah Badjuri, chairman of the government-sponsored union at the bank, cited a report by the local magazine Infobank that Citibank's Jakarta office earned 77 billion rupiah (32.7 million dollars) in 1995.

Only some of the bank's managers receive annual bonuses now, but the union wants bonuses for all employees.

Edwin Gerungan, a bank manager, said bonus policies were set by the bank's headquarters and the demand could not be met. He said regular pay raises were being negotiated.

NZ govt may sell forestry corp in 5 months

WELLINGTON, Apr 5: Finance Minister Bill Birch said today he expects the government-owned forestry corporation would be sold in four to five months, time reports AP.

He said the government was calling for international tenders for the corporation which owns cutting rights to 188,000 hectares (464,360 acres) of exotic plantation forest in the central north island, including the Kaingaroa forests — the world's largest man-made forest.

The holding accounts for about 12 per cent of the country's total planted forests and has a projected book value of 2.1 billion New Zealand dollars (1.43 billion US dollars) on June 30, 1996.

Birch said the government had decided to open the tender process because of the value of the forests and the opportunities it would create for New Zealanders.

"There'll be a transparent sale process which will take four to five months," he told a press conference.

"We want to make the most of the value of the crop by being certain we have investors participating in processing and adding export value to be trees and providing jobs for New Zealanders," he said.

UK's cattle farmers grow desperate over beef crisis

LONDON, Apr 5: Britain's cattle farmers and dairymen are growing desperate over the beef crisis, their leaders said Thursday, but the government held out little hope of getting the export ban on British beef lifted, reports AP.

Britain, attempting to overcome a panic over 'mad cow disease' in its beef and dairy herds, has agreed to the slaughter of all cattle over the age of 30 months — the animals most likely to be infected. Some argue for the destruction of even more animals to renew consumer confidence.

"We've had farmers ringing us and saying 'If they try to shoot my cows, they'll have to shoot me first,'" farmers union official Anthony Gibson told BBC Radio.

There are some very angry beef producers out there demanding to know what the government is going to do to protect their livelihoods," said Gibson, southwest regional director of the National Farmers Union.

Britain won 70 per cent financial compensation this week from the European Union for a partial cull of the herd, but could not persuade the trade block to lift its total ban on British beef exports.

The ban was imposed after Britain's March 20 announcement of a possible link between the cattle brain disease bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) and a similar fatal human disease.

In France, the newspaper Le Monde said the government was considering killing 70,000 to 80,000 calves of British origin after the European Commission agreed to compensate such a move.

A spokeswoman at the French Agriculture Ministry told the Associated Press the government had not yet made a decision.

While the British beef industry has almost halted, Ireland's has made gains because of a very low incidence of the disease and a policy of killing entire herds where BSE is found.

Ireland announced Thursday that three Swedish retail chains have decided to stock and promote Irish beef. In Dublin, McDonalds confirmed it would continue to use all Irish beef, and two major British supermarket chains decided to identify and promote the Irish beef they sell.

Agriculture Minister Douglas Hogg held out little hope of the export ban being raised before the next scheduled EU review at the end of the month.

"I think they had unbiased expectations as to what one can do," he told BBC radio, describing his talks with European agriculture ministers in Luxembourg this week.

There was constant talk, for example, of eradicating BSE in a very short period of time as a condition of lifting the ban. Now that is simply not possible."

National Farmers Union president Sir David Naish, who met Wednesday night with Hogg and Prime Minister John Major, said the prime minister had called the beef crisis one of the most serious problems he had known in his political career.

"There are people with very, very major problems," Naish said.

George Lyon, Vice-President of the Scottish National Farmers Union, called on the government to add to the European measures, which he says "do not go nearly far enough" to help farmers, processors and connected industries.

"We are looking ruin within days unless a comprehensive package is put in place," he said.

Sainsbury's, a major British supermarket chain, offered a ray of hope, announcing its beef sales had returned to 80 per cent of normal on Tuesday and Wednesday.

It had cut prices in half last week and sold out stocks in all 363 stores, then returned prices to normal on Tuesday, with its beef labelled by origin in Ireland or approved British farms.

Gregory Chow, Manager of Tropical Aeroponics Pte Ltd, opens the troughs made of styrofoam to expose the roots of the butterfly lettuce grown in an experiment in the run-up to the launching of Asia's first commercial farm using aeroponics technology in Singapore Thursday. Under the technology, vegetables will be grown in the air in land-scarce Singapore as part of a bid to produce pesticides-free, quality crops and reduce the city's food import.

— AFP/UNB photo



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Palestinian Authority runs up \$69m deficit

NABLUS, Apr 5: The Palestinian Authority ran up a deficit of 69 million dollars in the first two months of 1996, and the Authority's finance minister predicted a worsening economic situation for the Palestinians, reports AP.

"If we continue like this, we'll end with a deficit of 300 million dollars this year," Mohammed Nashashibi, minister of finance in the Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority, said Thursday.

The Palestinian Authority's deficit for 1995 was 107 million dollars.

Nashashibi blamed the financial troubles on an Israeli imposed closure on the West Bank and Gaza Strip and donor countries who have failed to meet financial aid commitments to the Authority.

"I am sorry to say that since November we have received no money from the donors to support any project and no

funds for our budget," Nashashibi said. Donor countries had promised 876 million dollars at a conference in Paris three months ago.

Israel imposed a closure on the West Bank and Gaza after a series of suicide bombings in Israel claimed by Islamic militants killed 56 people between Feb. 25 and March 4.

The closure bars thousands of Palestinian labourers from their jobs in Israel and Nashashibi says the Authority needs aid in order to create jobs for many of the 2.2 million Palestinians living in the areas.

"We have a big responsibility now to provide jobs for 80-90,000 Palestinian workers but we need 100 million dollars to invest in job-creation projects."

The Palestinian Authority has said the closure costs their economy 6 million dollars a day.

Vietnam begins aid drive for Cuba

HANOI, Apr 5: Authorities began their annual aid drive for Cuba on Thursday, with official newspapers instructing public employees to donate two days' wages and urging everyone else to give as much as possible, reports AP.

Please give some money to help the Cubans," appealed a front-page article in Nhan Dan (The People), the Communist Party newspaper. It reminded Vietnamese of Cuban help for Communist North Vietnam during the Vietnam War.

The Fatherland Front, a party-directed social organisation that is running the drive, said the funds will be used to buy rice to ship to the far-off fellow socialist nation. It said officials in city wards will visit each family to appeal for donations. Companies also will be expected to give, with prizes for those that overfulfil their pledges.

The APEC card was intended to cut down on visa and immigration requirements, he said.

Other initiatives from the conference, which was attended by 40 business people from mainly Asian countries, included encouraging governments to standardise tourism statistics, the improvement of information networks particularly for smaller regional businesses, and the creation of an APEC trade ombudsman. On New Zealand attitudes to Asian immigration, Jeffrey Koo, Chairman of the China Trust Commercial Bank, said New Zealand needed more people.

SYDNEY: Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi (Australia) Ltd. has established a 500 million dollar euro-commercial paper programme arranged by Westpac Banknote Corp. Ltd.

The programme will allow the bank to issue notes with terms between seven and 365 days up to a maximum of 500 million dollars.

The notes may be denominated in Australian dollars, European currency units, New Zealand dollars, Swiss francs, US dollars and Japanese yen.

CANBERRA: Companies from Australia and Malaysia are planning to develop a private hospital sector in Malaysia. Australian Health Minister Michael Wooldridge said.

He said Malaysian company Peremba SMD Bhd will invest about 50 million Australian dollars in the Australian Hospital Care Group.

This venture will enhance Australia's role as an exporter of private health care and management in Asia," Wooldridge said Monday.

—Source: AP.

People can get mad cow disease from eating beef, scientists warn

LONDON, Apr 5: Three separate teams of scientists warned on Friday that people can probably get mad cow disease from eating beef and predicted there would be more cases among those who tucked into sausages and burgers in the 1980s, reports Reuters.

The scientists who include experts on dementia and brain diseases such as Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD), are new to the public debate over beef and brain disease.

The warnings come in the first publication of the report that last month prompted the British government to admit to possible links between beef and CJD, and in two letters to the respected Lancet medical journal.

Dr Robert Will and colleagues at the National Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease Surveillance Unit in Edinburgh described the 10 cases they found that seemed different from other CJD cases in part because the victims were much younger than the average age of 63 at which CJD usually strikes.

After seeing a preview of their findings last month, the government reversed its assertion that there was no evidence people could get CJD from eating cows infected with bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) or mad cow disease.

—Source: AP.

BRIEFS

TOKYO, Apr 5: Japan's Mitsubishi Chemical Corp., the country's largest all-around chemical maker, is in negotiations to purchase German compact disk manufacturer Compact Disk Albrechts, a Mitsubishi spokesperson said Wednesday.

The spokesperson declined to discuss details regarding the price of the potential purchase.

Mitsubishi Chemical, which produces computer hardware including magnetic optical, floppy and hard disks, would be able to branch out from its hardware focus into the software business if the purchase goes through, the spokesperson said.

MANILA: The Philippines consumer price index moved up 0.4 per cent in March from the February level, leaving the year-on-year inflation rate unchanged from a month earlier at 11.8 per cent, the National Statistics Office said Wednesday.

Both market watchers and government officials have been expecting the inflation rate to remain at four-year-high levels through the first quarter of 1996 as the country continues to adjust to a February oil price rise and the January 1 implementation of an expanded value-added tax.

The statistics office said most commodity group price indices were either unchanged or only marginally different from February levels.

Among the food groups, only rice and dairy products registered slowdowns from year-earlier levels, while the prices for corn, fish, meat, and fruits and vegetables moved higher, the NSO said.

WELLINGTON: An electronic business card to ease travel in the Asia-Pacific easier was proposed Wednesday at an international conference to discuss trade and economic cooperation.

The president of the Confederation of Asia Pacific Chambers of Commerce, Aurelio Periquet, said the card would be for business travellers from Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) countries.

The APEC card was intended to cut down on visa and immigration requirements, he said.

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—Source: AP.

India to support Taiwan's entry into WTO

NEW DELHI, Apr 5: India will extend its support to Taiwan for its entry into the World Trade Organisation (WTO), International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other multilateral organisations, a senior government official said yesterday, reports Reuters.

Addressing a meeting of businessmen from both countries, India's Commerce Secretary Tejendra Khanna said India was keen to boost economic ties with Taiwan and will support Taiwan's bid for WTO membership.

"We have the friendliest feelings for Taiwan and it will be seen in the practical actions that we take to support your membership in the WTO ... as also the other international bodies like IMF, World Bank and so on," Khanna said.

Currently, India does not share any diplomatic ties with Taiwan.

Thursday's meeting was also attended by Jeffrey LS Koo, Taiwan's unofficial Ambassador and leading industrialist who was accompanied by 50 other Taiwanese businessmen.

Bilateral trade turnover between India and Taiwan, which was just 400 million dollars in 1992 rose to 935 million dollars in 1995.

The future scope is immense," Khanna said, while inviting Taiwanese businessmen to invest in manufacturing units and various joint ventures.

In an interview to Reuters Koo said he expected Indo-Taiwanese trade to grow to 2 billion dollar in the next three years. Taiwan's total annual trade turnover stood at 178 billion dollars.

India expects Taiwan to invest in automobile parts, agriculture and electronics sectors, Khanna said.

Clinton signs new bill ending farm subsidies

WASHINGTON, Apr 5: President Clinton signed on Thursday a sweeping farm bill that abandons America's depression-era subsidy programmes in favour of a system offering guaranteed but gradually declining payments over seven years, reports AP.

The president said he signed the measure with reservations because it "fails to provide an adequate safety net for family farmers."

"The fixed payments in the bill do not adjust to changes in market conditions, which would leave farmers and the rural communities in which they live vulnerable to reductions in crop prices or yields," the president said.

The massive legislation covers a broad range of nutrition, environmental, specific crop and rural development issues.

While elimination farm subsidies, it also terminates government controls over what farmers can plant or what fields must be left idle.

Clinton said he was "keenly aware that farm legislation is long overdue and American farmers need to know now the conditions under which they are operation."

He said a hallmark of the legislation is the end of government controls over planting.

At long last, farmers will be free to plant for the market, not for government programmes," the president said.

The expansion of planting flexibility will improve US competitiveness in world markets.

The seven-year "Freedom to Farm" bill would end the link between prices and subsidies, instead guaranteeing farmers steadily declining "market transition payments" based on past subsidies.

With farmers knowing exactly how much they will receive from the government, they will be able to plan ahead saving money for hard times, supporters said.

But critics warned that the new system could leave farmers vulnerable when prices or production are down and that it is unlikely to pay farmers who let their land sit idle.

It is estimated that the bill would cut about two billion dollars from farm spending over the next seven years, projected to be 48.8 billion dollars.

'Food supplies to Tamil refugees slow'

COLOMBO, Apr 5: Food supplies to Tamil refugees in northern Sri Lanka have slowed because Tamil tiger guerrillas and a pro-government militia were extorting money from truck drivers, rivals in the conflict said yesterday, reports Reuters.

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebels said in a statement on Wednesday that extortion by the rival Peoples Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) militia had disrupted the flow of food to the north.

It said trucks carrying food and roofing material to refugees had been held up at a north central Vavuniya, north of which is Tiger-held territory, after payments to PLOTE cadres were stopped.

The PLOTE militia, a former separatist group now supporting the army's fight against the Tigers, was not immediately available for comment.

But a rehabilitation ministry official said truck drivers were reluctant to take supplies across as they feared being harassed after the government, which hires their vehicles, stopped the extortion payments.

"The supply of food has not come to a standstill but has slowed," he said. "Mines were extorted by both the LTTE and allegedly by the PLOTE."

Russia fines ROK ship

PETROPALOVSK-KAM-CHATSKY, Russia, Apr 5: A city court in Russia's Far East fined a South Korean ship 100,000 dollars and confiscated 428,000 dollar worth of crabs, a news report said Thursday, reports AP.

The Pacific Kim, owned by the Shing Yang shipping company, was detained by the Russian coast guard on March 11 in an area of the Sea of Okhotsk barred to foreign ships the Interfax news agency said.

On board were 64 tons of crabs without proper documentation, the report said.

The court in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, a city on the Kamchatka peninsula, ruled that the captain of the ship be fined 100,000 dollars and the crabs confiscated, Interfax said.

Bangladesh Railway

Engineering Department (East Zone)

Re-Tender Notice

Tender Notice No CE/E/1996/W-V
Dated : 03-04-1996

Name of work	Quantity	Approximate cost	Site of supply	Cost of tender documents
Supply of stone ballast 38mm to 50 mm size and loading into Rly Wagon.	2,00,000 Cft	40 Lacs	Chattak Bazar	TK 750/-
3. Earnest money	2% of the quoted price.			
4. Eligibility	Registered 'C' class contractors of Bangladesh Rly and 1st class contractors of other Govt Department.			
5. Selling of tender documents date & place	Office of the Chief Engineer/East, Bangladesh Railway/Ctg Divisional Engineer/3/Dhaka and Executive Engineer/Chattak Bazar up to 15-4-96.			
6. Dropping and opening of tender documents date & place	Dropping 16-4-96 at 12:00 hrs. opening 12-30 hrs of the same date on the above mentioned offices.			
7. Contractors of other Govt Department can purchase tender document with prior permission of Chief Engineer/East/Bangladesh Railway/Chittagong on cash payment of Tk 3,000/- (Three thousand) only (Non-refundable) as enlistment fee for this tender only.				
8. Authority reserves the right to accept or reject the tender as a whole or part thereof without assigning any reason.				

Chief Engineer/East
Bangladesh Railway
Chittagong.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Office of the Executive Engineer
Sunamganj Public Works Department
Sunamganj

Tender Invitation Notice

(Tender Notice No. 39/1995-96)

1) Tenders in Bangladesh Form No. 2911 are hereby invited from Public Works Directorate approved Special 1st & 1st class, Chittagong Public Works Zone approved 2nd class and Sylhet Public Works Circle's 3rd class building contractors for the undermentioned work. Tenders will be received in the prescribed tender box kept at the office of the undersigned & Executive Engineer, Sylhet/Moulvibazar/Habiganj Public Works Department up to 12:30 minutes of 23-4-96 and will be opened on the same day at 12:45 minutes before the contractors willing to be present. Each tender should be deposited under a sealed cover superscribing the name of work (by such contractors as have been registered vide rules of VAT Act 1991).

Sl. No.	Name of work	Estimated cost (in Taka)	Earnest money (in Taka)	Prescribed time for completion of work from the date of issuing of work order
1)	Construction of 44 newly created district headquarters in Bangladesh including one at Sunamganj. Sub head: Construction of one unit ground floor (except staircase) of 600 squarefeet residential quarters attached to Sunamganj District Police Line, 1995-96 financial year.	Tk. 4,72,004/-	Tk. 9,441/-	3 (three) months
2)	Tender document of the work containing Bangladesh Form No. 2911, drawing (if applicable), schedule of work, additional terms & conditions and rules & regulations etc. can be purchased on payment of Tk 425/- (four hundred twenty-five) only (non-refundable) per set from all Executive Engineer's offices under Sylhet Public Works Directorate Circle during office hours. Intending Contractor himself or his representative (in case of representative, with authorisation letter having the representatives' sample signature attested by the contractor) can purchase the tender document on production of registration book any day during office hours up to 22-4-96, but tender signed by any one other than the contractor will not be considerable.			

Md. Mohiuddin
Executive Engineer
Sunamganj Public Works Department
Sunamganj.

DPP-6450-28/3
G-425

ILO seeking minimum wages for home workers

NEW DELHI, Apr 5: Third World countries such as India have long been criticized for allowing private companies to create sweat shops where children and indigent adults work in horrid conditions and earn little money, reports AP.

But when it comes to "home workers," the millions of women who do factory-type labour in their own homes each day for low wages, the problem appears widespread in the West and the East.

Take these two typical examples. Fatama Bibi sews garments in her home in a shantytown in western India. A local trader gives her cloth and pays for the stitching. Julie lives in West Yorkshire in Britain. She brings home electronic parts from a factory and assembles them.

They both earn 50 per cent less than what factory employees get for the same job, according to Jane Tate of Britain-based HomeNet International, a non-government relief organization, or NGO.

Their numbers are mind-boggling. China and India officially acknowledge 20 million home workers each. In reality, there are perhaps double that number, the voluntary organizations say.

Italy has an estimated 1.5 million home workers, and the Netherlands nearly 166,000. In India, such workers roll cigarettes in their homes, or

make everything from bangles, envelopes and candles to garments, jewelry, toys, quilts and mattresses.

According to the International Labour Organization, a UN group up to 95 per cent of these workers are women.

Concerned at their plight, the ILO is trying to win support for a convention that would act as an international law to set minimum standards for their pay and working conditions.

But the ILO is racing against time. If powerful countries such as the United States, Germany, Britain, China and India don't support it in the next two months, the ILO effort will fall through, according to Lucita S. Lazo, ILO's coordinator for Rural Women Homeworkers Project.

For the convention to go into effect, two-thirds of the more than 150 member countries have to support it at the ILO's Geneva meeting in June, then each country has to ratify it and adopt laws conforming to it.

Tate and Lazo were in New Delhi this week for a workshop of ILO representatives, other NGOs, and labour unions that sought their support for the draft ILO convention.

The odds are heavily stacked against the convention winning the requisite support," said Renana Jhabvala, a spokesperson of Self Employed Women's Association,

an NGO in India.

The draft convention stipulates a minimum age and wage for home workers and their right to join trade union federations.

The world's most populous nations — China and India, are opposing the convention on the ground that over-regulation of home workers would drive them underground, ILO officials said.

Germany and Sweden believe that an international convention may weaken their own laws. Britain says the many different types of homeworkers shouldn't be regulated as one group.

The US position is less clear. Last year, when she toured South Asia, First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton