

# Haryana bans sale of booze

NEW DELHI, July 1: After days of last-minute liquor buying by consumers, a northern state officially went dry Monday, becoming the third one in India to yield to prohibitionists, reports AP.

The move by Haryana's new government was seen as a victory by women's groups and religious organisations that had taken to the streets several years ago to close liquor stores and argue that alcoholism among men was tearing apart many families.

On Sunday, the last day of legal liquor sales, thousands of people rushed to buy booze being sold at up to one-fourth its original prices. The Haryana customers also included shopkeepers from New Delhi, the federal capital on the state's border.

Despite warnings that the ban could cost the state five billion rupees (143 million dollars) in annual tax losses, Chief Minister Bansi Lal, who was elected in April, made possession, consumption, manufacture and the sale of liquor a punishable offense.

Lal's new centrist party swept the state election, ousting the governing Congress Party, by pledging the booze ban to win over the votes of

the populist groups supporting it.

Haryana became the third of India's 26 states to impose a ban on liquor since it became independent in 1947.

Last year, southern Andhra Pradesh state, which served as a role model for Haryana, became prohibitionist at the insistence of women's groups that were smashing liquor stores and fining men who were caught intoxicated on the streets.

The prohibition in Andhra Pradesh and Haryana were a big move for women in India, who often have little freedom in this male-dominated nation, especially in its many villages.

Gujarat, a state on India's western coast, was the first state in India to ban liquor decades ago, following the lead of its most famous teetotaler, freedom fighter Mohandas Gandhi.

Although there are no reliable estimates of how widespread alcoholism is in rural India, where 70 per cent of its 920 million people live, social organisations say many poor men often spend a most of their daily earnings on booze, become alcoholic and often beat their wives and children when they come

home drunk.

Critics of prohibition say that the ban will simply increase corruption as tipplers bribe enforcement officials and policemen to avoid being prosecuted while smuggling in liquor.

That may not be difficult in Haryana, which is surrounded by New Delhi and four other states where liquor is sold.

Critics also say that the ban will simply increase the production of illicit liquor, which is often made by fermenting vegetables and lacing it with industrial spirits. Consumption of such alcohol kills hundreds of people in India each year.

In Haryana, dozens of resorts, executive clubs, motels and highway restaurants that have sprung up recently to cater to New Delhi's upwardly mobile professionals, are furious about the ban.

The hotel owners filed a petition last month in the state's High Court and won a temporary order restraining the government from enforcing the ban on their businesses.

But Haryana appealed to the Supreme Court, which stayed the High Court order while it decides whether the ban is legal.

## US firms should work to keep ASEAN market'

WASHINGTON, July 1: US firms should pay more attention to thriving ASEAN countries if they want to avoid losing out to Japanese and European competitors, US ambassadors to the region said.

It's a question of awareness," said US Ambassador to Malaysia John Malott.

Countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) - Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam - are small in size but large in commercial power, Malott said.

"We need to make American business a lot more aware of the reality of growth, that they need to start paying more attention to Southeast Asia. We are losing a lot to the Europeans," he told reporters here.

US companies also need to learn how to do business in the region, Malott said, which means regular networking, frequent high-level visits, and long-term partnerships.

Both Malott and US Ambassador to Thailand William Itoh suggested that Washington would do well to stop cutting back its diplomatic postings in the region as part of US budget-cutting efforts.

"I'm afraid it creates a perception that the United States is disengaging," Itoh said, citing the recent closure of two US consultative in Thailand.

US Ambassadors to the ASEAN countries have just completed an annual tour of meetings and speaking engagements in the United States, sponsored by the non-profit US-ASEAN Council.

Ernie Bower, President of the Washington-based US-ASEAN Council, said US businesses were also eager for the United States to negotiate tax treaties with Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

## Emirates enters Australia

Emirates, the latest international airline to enter Australia, celebrated its inaugural service at the Melbourne Tullamarine Airport on June 26, with a full contingent of VIPs from Dubai and Australia, says a press release of Emirates.

The ceremony, hosted by Emirates' Chairman Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum, also markets Emirates as the first scheduled carrier to enter Australia with a Boeing 777 aircraft.

Sheikh Ahmed said: "Emirates would like to thank the Australian government and the federal government of the state of Victoria particularly Jeff Kennett - for their support, and the many officials and individuals who have paved the way for our entry into Australia."

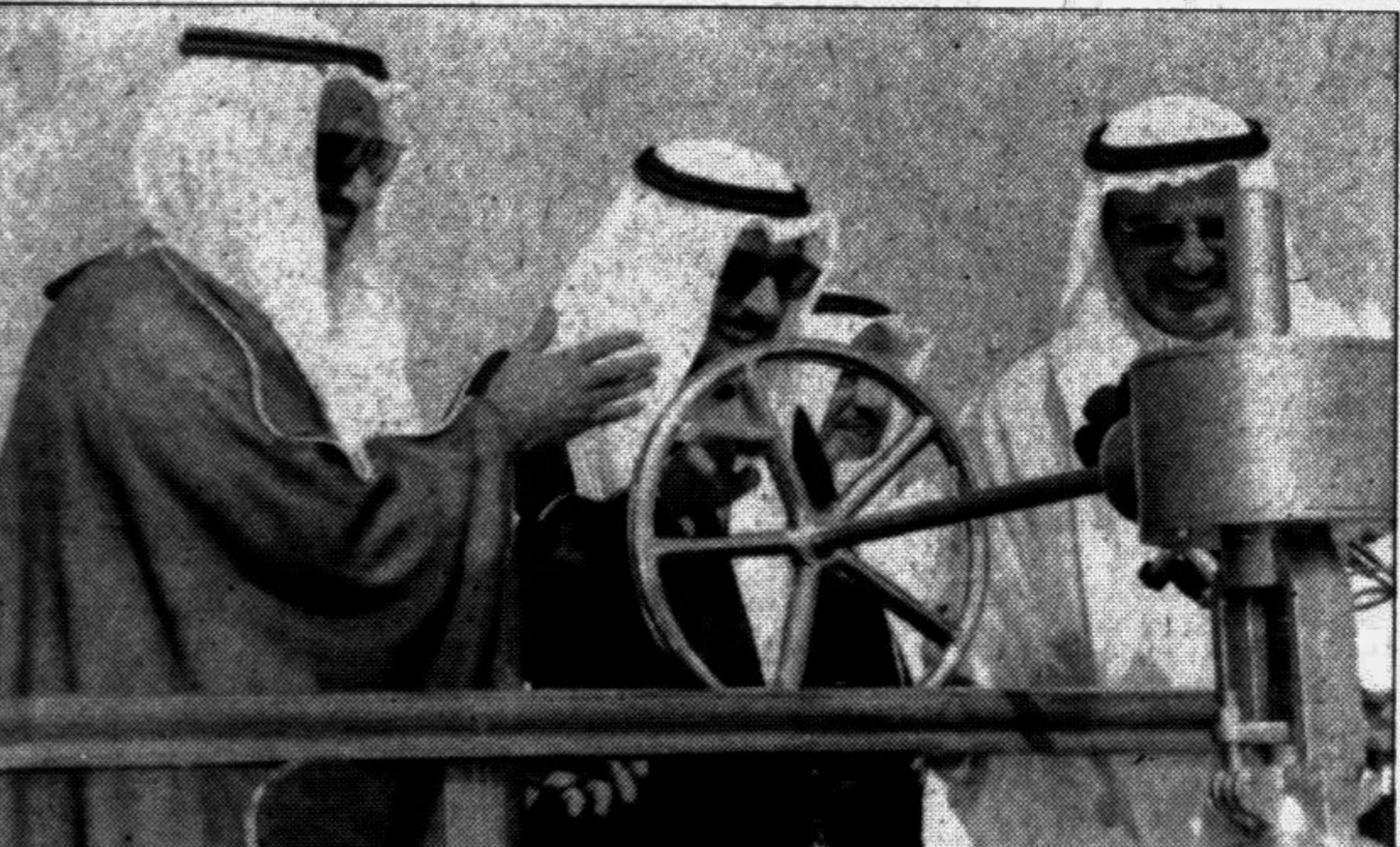
Confidence that world growth would accelerate pushed the Aussie up Tuesday to a high of 79.23 US cents. But before the close Wednesday it was at 79.21 US cents and drifted off to close at 78.80 US cents here on Thursday.

On the central Reserve Bank of Australia's trade weighted index, a basket of major currencies, it ended unchanged from the previous week at 58.1 points.

**NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR:** The New Zealand dollar closed at a four-week high against the US dollar on Friday, worth 68.32 US cents compared with its close last Friday at 67.81.

Thursday's reserve bank forecast putting inflation higher than had been expected led to higher interest rates. Which took the Kiwi up on the US currency.

**SINGAPORE DOLLAR:** The



Kuwait's Emir Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmad al-Sabah (C) turns on a golden ceremonial oil valve with Kuwaiti Oil Minister Abdel-Mohsen al-Mudej (L) and Kuwait Oil Company Chairman Khaled al-Fulaij (R) to celebrate 50 years of oil exports from the Gulf state in Kuwait City on Sunday.

- AFP/UNB photo

## Smoking takes heavy toll in Romania

BUCHAREST, July 1: More and more Romanians are smoking themselves to death, and less and less are being born, according to medical and demographic experts, reports AP.

With 30 per cent of the population regular smokers, Romania burns its way through some 30 billion cigarettes a year.

Meanwhile, as potential parents increasingly resort to contraception and abortion, a diminishing birth rate has helped send the population down from 22,810,035 in 1992 to 22,650,000 in 1996, according to figures provided by the Demographic Research Centre.

"The number of deaths is exceeding the number of births," commented academic Vladimir Trebic, writing in the publication Economistul.

In the first quarter of 1996, the number of deaths exceeded "by a long way" that of the same period in 1995, he added.

Part from the effect of the ageing population, the development is the result of more and more tobacco-related deaths, Trebic said.

Although no official statistics have been published, the country's health authorities, who began an information campaign in 1995, have confirmed the trend.

Romania's dwindling youth is most severely effected by the scourge of tobacco. The nation's youngsters are discovering the evil weed at every younger ages — although a fine of 10,000 lei (3.5 dollar) has been introduced to punish those who smoke on school premises.

Schools are the only public buildings where consumption of tobacco is not authorised.

## Kuwait celebrates 50 yrs of oil shipment

AHMADI, Kuwait, July 1: The emir, Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmad al-Sabah, turned a gold-plated spigot Sunday, and thick black crude oil slowly filled a see-through pipe, marking the 50th anniversary of Kuwait's first oil shipment.

A privatisation plan has been facing an unsurmountable hurdle: what to do with the civil servants who are paid the most money for the least amount of work.

Government jobs were seen as one way of distributing the oil wealth to the small population. Kuwaitis today account for just 42 per cent of the 1.57 million people living in the desert emirate.

"We have reached a point where we cannot continue on the same path," al-Saoudoun said. "We have put the country on the verge of an unemployment crisis."

He said it was necessary for the Kuwaiti public to understand that they need to worry about their future.

Kuwait has for decades been putting away 10 per cent of its income in a fund for future generations. But this fund became part of the regular government coffers during the occupation and after liberation, and shrank from 100 billion dollars in the 1980s to around 30 billion dollars.

Our generation is only thinking about itself," said Ali al-Baghdadi, a lawmaker and a former oil minister.

What's after oil is a question that is always on our minds."

But Kuwaitis survived the tough pre-oil life of pearl-diving and trading with wooden boats, and will manage to find the answer to that question, he added.

open in September, filled with discount stores, entertainment and restaurants, the report said.

**All but a handful** of the 999 small paper mills along the Huai River in China's northeast have shut down under a ban intended to curb severe water pollution, the official Xinhua news agency said Monday.

It said all of the targeted mills in Henan, Shandong and Anhui provinces stopped production of paper pulp by Sunday afternoon, but several still were producing in Jiangsu province northwest of Shanghai.

The ban applied to mills whose output is less than 5,000 tons of paper a year.

Many of the smaller mills lack environmental controls and are blamed for high levels of industrial pollution in the Huai, which supplies drinking water for one of China's most densely populated areas.

Xie Zhenhua, director of the State Bureau of Environmental Protection, said mills that ignore the ban will be severely punished.

Authorities also have banned mill owners from moving

their equipment to other provinces to skirt the ban along the Huai.

**MANILA:** The technical committee of the National Power Corp. has recommended to the board that a contract for the rehabilitation of the 500-kilovolt Nagatayabas power line be awarded to China's Xian Electric Machinery Import and Export.

Documents released by Napocor over the weekend

suspension insulators and line hardware and the installation of the towers and power conductors, fibre optic groundwires and line hardware.

Provision for office spaces and two vehicles for the project is also included.

The report will be funded by the World Bank under a loan package for the Leyte-Luzon interconnection project.

The power conductors, fibre optic groundwires and

other materials will be supplied by a separate contract, which is being lined up under the 250 million World Bank Transmission Grid Reinforcement Loan, Napocor said.

The other bidders were KEC International Ltd. of India, ABB Sadeomi Ltd. of Britain, Hyundai Engineering and Construction Co. of South Korea, and Jyoti Structures Ltd. of India in a joint venture with Kipatric of Australia.

The project involves building a backbone trunk line for the Luzon grid. The scope of work covers the supply and delivery of steel towers.

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## 240,000 child labourers engage in Rajasthan carpet industry

RAMGARH, India, July 1: Ten-year-old Chandni labours for 10 hours a day at a primitive loom, weaving intricate carpet designs to earn a measly two rupees (five cents) a day, reports AFP.

The bright-eyed gamine is one of several thousand children illegally employed in carpet factories dotting the villages of the Indian desert state of Rajasthan, producing quality goods mainly for export to the West.

Child labour is illegal in India, but the country has the world's largest workforce of pre-teens because the laws are mainly based on paper, particularly in a sing-song voice to the children as they weave.

Activists say some 500,000 people are employed in Rajasthan's carpet industry, which is growing by about 30 per cent every year due to the closure of many units in nearby Kashmir, a traditional carpet producer.

"I want to study but I cannot because my father has no work," she said, adding that her greatest wish was to be able to spend a few rupees at the local village fair.

Ganthia, who works for a non-governmental group battling child slavery. Nearly 90 per cent of the workforce comprises young girls, who are forced by their families to earn money for their marriage dowry, Ganthia said.

Chandni's co-workers, a 13-year-old girl who shyly confessed to being married at 10, said her earnings over the years had gone towards the dowry for her groom's family, though she had them up to 35 rupees (one dollar) a day.

Meena earns 2,000 to 3,500 rupees (57 to 100 dollars) per carpet depending on the intricacy of their designs, which are dictated by a supervisor in a sing-song voice to the children as they weave.

But Chandni's employer, Deen Dayal Meena, who oversees eight other girls at his two looms in a village near this small town, said he paid them up to 35 rupees (one dollar) a day.

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Despite the penury, Chandni says she is contented because her father does not beat her and she can play with friends after work.

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Ninety per cent of India's carpets are exported, mainly to the West and the Middle East.

## Dollar, stocks lower in Tokyo

TOKYO, July 1: The US dollar slipped slightly against the Japanese yen Monday morning in Tokyo, while prices on the Tokyo Stock Exchange were lower, reports AP.

The dollar weakened as it faced selling pressure around 110 yen, traders said.

At late morning, the dollar was changing hands at 109.68 yen, down 0.20 yen from Friday in Tokyo, and slightly below its New York level late

Friday of 109.72 yen.

Traders grew cautious ahead of central bank meetings in Japan and the United States this week, traders said.

Branch managers from the bank of Japan are scheduled to meet in Tokyo Monday and Tuesday to discuss the nation's economy, while a meeting of the US Federal Open Market Committee is scheduled for Tuesday.

On the stock market, the 225-issue Nikkei Stock Average slipped 41.90 points, or 0.19 per cent, to finish at 22,488.85. On Friday, the index gained 29.14 points, or 0.13 per cent.

## Most Asia-Pacific units ease against dollar

HONG KONG, July 1: Major currencies in the Asia-Pacific region eased against the dollar as the Group of Seven (G7) summit raised expectations of support for the greenback, reports AFP.

**JAPANESE YEN:** The yen eased during the week as Japan and the United States agreed to support a stronger dollar.

The Japanese unit stood at 109.59 yen to the dollar in late afternoon Friday, down from 108.69 a week earlier.

Japan's Finance Minister Wataru Kubo and US Treasury Secretary Robert