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Pakistan decides to transfer energy sector to foreign cos

ISLAMABAD, Aug 31: Pakistan has decided to transfer its entire electricity distribution network to foreign companies in a phased plan aimed at curtailing heavy losses, a senior government official was quoted yesterday as saying, reports AFP.

Lahore and Faisalabad cities in Punjab province would be the first to have their electricity distribution taken over by two foreign firms, said Shahid Hasnain Khan, special Assistant on Energy to Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto.

Khan, quoted by the English-language newspaper Dawn, said unions were resisting the privatisation plan but the government was standing "firm" on its decision.

Pakistan began privatising thermal power generation in June with the sale of a 26-per cent stake in a 1,600-megawatt plant in Kot Addu in Punjab to Britain's National Power Plc.

The state-run water and power development authority retained 74 per cent ownership while transferring the plant's management to the British company.

Three other thermal plants will be partially privatised this year.

India's trade deficit decreases

NEW DELHI, Aug 31: India's trade deficit narrowed down in the first four months of the current fiscal year touching 1.08 billion US dollars sliding from 1.5 billion US dollars in April-July 1995, according to the latest trade data released by the commerce minister here, reports PTI.

India's exports during April-July 1996 was estimated at 10.83 billion US dollars, signifying a growth of 11.45 per cent over the exports during the same period last year valued at 9.7 billion US dollars.

Exports during July 1996 was estimated at 2.60 billion US dollars, signifying a growth of 6.02 per cent over the monthly exports achieved in July last year valued at 2.4 billion US dollars.

Imports during April-July 1996 are estimated at 11.92 billion US dollars which is 5.95 per cent higher than import during the same period last year, valued at 11.25 billion US dollars.

Oil imports during April-July 1996 are valued at 3.0 billion US dollars which is 41.96 per cent higher than oil imports of Rs 2.11 billion US dollars in the corresponding period last year.

Israel plans to reduce foreign workers

JERUSALEM, Aug 31: The Israeli government plans to reduce the number of foreign workers in the country by 20,000 by the middle of next year, Labour and Social Affairs Minister Ely Yishai said Friday, reports AFP.

Yishai told reporters the government was studying ways to expel workers who are in the country illegally and planned to set up a committee to look into how to accelerate the procedure.

According to Labour Minister figures, some 100,000 Thais, Romanians, Poles, and Filipinos have work permits while 100,000 to 150,000 other foreign workers are in Israel illegally.

Foreign workers have replaced Palestinians on construction sites around the country and in the agricultural sector.

China records computer sales boom

BEIJING, Aug 31: China's electronics industry registered sales of 99.93 billion yuan (12 billion dollars) in the first seven months of this year, mostly due to increased computer orders, the official China Daily reported yesterday, says AFP.

The total was a 16.3 per cent rise on the same period last year, the industry showed a year-on-year growth of 17.32 per cent to reach 151.4 billion yuan and the ministry of electronics industry "after months of cut-rate prices failed to end sagging sales is now grinning from ear to ear," the English-language newspaper said.

The growth was attributed to "the government's flexible financial policies" which were "stimulating institutional purchases of capital goods."

The total value of production in 1995 was 230 billion yuan (27.7 billion dollars) which was up 23.5 per cent on 1994.

Fisheries laws will be made timely, minister says

State Minister for Fisheries and Livestock Satish Chandra Roy yesterday said the government will extend all-out cooperation to the private sector for development of fisheries in the country, reports BSS.

"Laws relating to fisheries will also be made timely so as to protect this sector," he told a press conference marking the fisheries week beginning today.

The minister said that about fifty per cent of the fish come from free marsh and water areas but this production is being hampered due to various factors including natural and man-made.

As such, he said, the production of fish from this source has come down to 5.70 lakh tonnes at present from seven lakh tonnes in 1974-75.

Roy said it is essential to increase the production from such sources and the government is working on plans in this regard.

Turning to shrimp cultivation, the minister said this sector plays an important role in the national economy and 25225 tonnes of shrimp have been exported in 1995-96.

Stressing the need for maintaining this sector in the out-of-the-world he said processing plants have to be improved and product diversification has to be kept in mind in this regard.

The minister said government is concerned about the diseases that have been afflicting the shrimp for two or three years and will take all necessary measures to overcome this

problem.

Roy detailed the programmes being taken for the development of the fisheries and said 26 schemes have been incorporated in the annual development programmes for 1996-97 for an amount of Taka 96.68 crore with a foreign exchange component of more than Taka 49 crore.

Replying to a question, the minister said the requirement of fish in the country is 16 lakh tonnes while the production is 12 lakh tonnes with a shortfall of four lakh tonnes.

Secretary of the ministry Ershadul Huq, who was present at the press conference, said fisheries sector provides both financial returns and helps poverty alleviation and it requires no imported technology.

Motia tells JS 9.33 lakh tonnes of reserve foodgrains in govt sector till July 1

Food Minister Motia Chowdhury yesterday told the Jatiya Sangsad that till July 1 of the current year, the reserve of foodgrains in government sector was 9.33 lakh tonnes, reports BSS.

Of the reserve, 6.11 lakh tonne is rice and 3.22 lakh tonne wheat, she said in reply to a question from BNP member Mashur Rahman (Jhenidah).

The minister said the possible production of foodgrains this year had been estimated at 200 lakh tonnes against the demand for 223.64 tonnes.

He said the government had taken up plans to provide grants and allow import both in government and private sectors to meet the deficit.

Bank holiday

The Bangladesh Bank and all its scheduled banks will remain closed on Wednesday on account of holiday for observing "Janmasthami", said a Bangladesh Bank press release yesterday, reports UNB.

World Economic Forum backs Mideast econ summit

GENEVA, Aug 31: The World Economic Forum said on Friday that a Middle East economic summit should go ahead in Cairo in November as it was vital to maintain foreign investor's confidence in the region, reports Reuter.

The Geneva-based group, which organises the annual gathering of world political and business leaders in the Swiss resort of Davos, said that cancellation of the Cairo summit would be a catastrophe for all countries of the region.

Egypt has shown signs of cold feet about the summit, saying it would be pointless unless Israel made a serious effort to carry out peace accords. The talks would aim to promote economic integration between Israel and its neighbours.

In a statement, the forum said summits held in Casablanca in 1994 and in Amman last year had been instrumental in bringing a "business dimension to the peace and reconciliation process."

"The effect of the current political environment is to slow down this momentum and enthusiasm. Should this trend continue it will be very difficult, if not impossible to reconstitute economic optimism on the part of the international business community," it said.

The building of trust generated to date will be jeopardised, it added.

Klaus Schwab, Founder and President of the Forum, was quoted as saying: "The cancellation of the summit in Cairo would certainly be a catastrophe for all countries of the region."

UN experts due in Iraq next week to monitor oil flows

BAGHDAD, Aug 31: Experts hired by the United Nations to monitor Iraq's oil exports under the oil-for-food deal are due to arrive in Baghdad next week, an Iraqi official said yesterday, reports AFP.

Saddam Hassan, the head of the State Oil Marketing Organisation (SOMO), said the two sides still had to determine how the observers from the Dutch firm Saybolt would do their job. "We will discuss that with them," he added.

The team is to supervise the quantity and quality of oil exports.

But Hassan said Baghdad has until now not concluded any export contract because his organisation has not met UN experts tasked with monitoring and approving oil sales.

"We are ready to sell to any company provided there is an agreement on the price. The price is the essential question," Hassan said. "Iraq is ready to export its oil."

IMF raises budget deficit target in \$10b loan with Russia

MOSCOW, Aug 31: The International Monetary Fund is raising the budget deficit target in its 10-billion-dollar loan deal with Russia because of Boris Yeltsin's costly campaign promises, a senior official said Friday, reports AP.

The IMF originally set the target at 4 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP), but its board agreed to up it to 5.25 per cent, giving the Yeltsin government some badly needed breathing space.

Jochen Wermuth, a German economist who heads the Expert Group in the Russian Finance Ministry, said the decision was made when the IMF agreed to release the latest installment of the loan earlier this month.



French Prime Minister, Alain Juppe (1st row C) poses for photographers with French ambassadors after a conference at the Ouai d'Orsay, in Paris Thursday. Juppe reaffirmed that France will meet the Maastricht Treaty criteria for economic and monetary union (EMU) and will participate in it in 1999. — AFP/UNB photo

Bigger harvests ease pressure on world grain market

LONDON, Aug 31: Bigger harvests and a drop in demand, particularly from China, point to lower grain imports after a period when prices have been at historic highs, the International Grains Council (IGC) said yesterday, reports Reuter.

The London-based council is an authoritative monitor of world grains supply and demand. It said buyers may soon have a stronger hand partly because of bigger harvests in all major exporting countries except the United States.

It raised its forecast for the 1996 world wheat harvest by 3.0 million tonnes from its previous estimate to 563 million. This is up from 539 million last year.

The leading buyer, China, may also cut imports after a likely increase in its own production. Traditional suppliers like Australia will need to explore other outlets.

"The forecast decrease in world import demand and improved availabilities in all major exporters... has strengthened the commercial advantage of importing countries," said Bill de Maria, Assistant Executive Director of the IGC.

Farmers expanded sowings in response to soaring prices earlier this year when Chicago wheat futures touched dollars 7.50 per bushel — compared with less than five dollar now.

The tight market, with world stocks at 20-year lows followed drought in Australia, North Africa and Russia.

But in Australia, for in-

stance, the planted area has now risen to its highest level in 10 years.

Exporters may end up with surplus grain as prices decline and analysts said that, if competition heats up, they could be tempted to reintroduce subsidies to snap up a higher share of the market.

The European Union (EU) reacted to the easing market on Thursday when it subsidised

20,000 tonnes of wheat for the first time in 15 months. It had been taxing grain exports to keep scarce supplies at home.

It said stocks should begin to recover from their lows, while wheat trade would be the lowest for 11 years.

The estimate for Chinese imports was slashed to 9.0 million tonnes for 1996/97 from an estimated 12.7 million last year.

Air India's losses may double to \$114m: Report

NEW DELHI, Aug 31: India's flagship carrier Air India could see its losses double to 114 million dollars in the fiscal year to March 31, 1997, a government report said yesterday, according to AFP.

The controller and auditor general, a government body probing the finances of state-owned firms, said the international airline's decision to hire aircraft from other companies two years ago was the main reason.

"During the fiscal (year) to March the loss on the five aircraft taken by Air India on wet lease may be to the order of 66 million dollars," the report said.

Under a wet lease, the aviation company leases the aircraft, cockpit crew, maintenance and insurance services.

Yogesh Chandra, Secretary of the Civil Aviation Ministry, said it was too early to com-

ment.

"Wet lease of aircraft was a temporary stop-gap measure," Chandra said.

The leased aircraft are flying on the London, Frankfurt, Singapore, Perth, Nairobi and Dubai routes.

The controller and auditor general said Air India should withdraw from sectors where it was making continuous losses, such as Canada.

Chandra, however, argued Air India was not a regional airline and had to operate globally. "Therefore we cannot withdraw from these routes," he said.

Candra said Air India was forced to take up aircraft on wet lease as the government had not yet approved its fleet expansion programme.

IMF, WB to ask Paris Club to ease debt held by world's poorest

WASHINGTON, Aug 31: The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank will ask western creditor nations to reach a decision in the next two months on a plan to ease the debt held by the world's poorest nations, reports AFP.

A joint document prepared by the Fund and the Bank added that executive boards from the two bodies will also examine the debt scheme at meetings here in the second week of September.

Carrying an overall minimum cost of 5.6 billion dollars, the proposal would commit all the bilateral creditors in the Paris Club to taking part in a debt relief initiative targeting eight to 20 countries principally in Africa.

The document obtained Friday spells out in detail the process by which beneficiaries would be selected the means that would be mobilised to help them and an official timetable to be followed.

But the study sheds no light on whether or not the IMF will finance its participation through the sale of some of its gold not on the eventual in-

volvement on the Paris Club. It said the plan "assumed that Paris Club creditors would indicate a willingness to provide a reduction of up to 90 per cent on eligible debt on a case by case basis."

French economy set to grow around 2.5 pc per year

PARIS, Aug 31: The French economy is now set to grow "on the order of 2.5 per cent a year" in real terms, French Budget Minister and government spokesman Alain Lamassoure said yesterday, reports AFP.

He said "all conditions" were present for the country to get back to growth rate on that order.

France has an unemployment rate of 12.5 per cent, and Lamassoure said that until the French economy gets back to a "cruising speed" of around 2.5 per cent growth per year, "it is clear that the results in the jobs field will not be very favourable."

At present club members traditionally forgive up to 67 per cent of debts owed by the poorest countries.

If the new scheme wins the backing of the IMF and the Bank in early September, according to the document members of the Paris Club would be asked "to convene a meeting within two months" to make their own decision, according to the document.

Non-governmental organisations eager to see the debt question resolved once and for all have expressed anxiety over the indecisiveness on the part of the IMF and Paris Club.

"The whole debt initiative is in danger of ending up as an empty charade if the Paris Club and the IMF don't make immediate progress" warned just in Forsyth of Oxfam international.

A proposal for the IMF to sell off part of its gold in order to re-invest the profits and finance the debt scheme, has made little headway in the face of opposition from Germany, Italy, Switzerland and several northern European countries.

Liaison body meet on shipping held

"A meeting of the Liaison Committee on Shipping of Shippers' Council of Bangladesh was held on Thursday in the Conference Room of Chittagong Port Authority, says a SCB press release.

Presided over by Capt. Zaheruddin Mahmood, Chairman of Chittagong Port Authority the meeting was attended, among others, by M R Ali, Chairman, Md Rezaul Karim, Senior Vice-Chairman, Md Amirul Islam, Executive Committee Member, S M Mattur Rahman, Secretary General of Shippers' Council of Bangladesh, M Mohsin Sarkar, Director (Traffic), CPA, Khalilur Rahman, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturer & Exporters Association, representatives of Bangladesh Shipping Corporation, other shipping lines, shipping agents, Bangladesh Railway, B.J.M.C. Master's Stevedores Association, etc.

The Chairman of CPA informed the meeting that the port was working normally and there was no congestion or berthing delay of feeder vessels at the port.

He also informed that the programmes and projects for expansion of container yard space, setting-up of ICD's and construction of container berth at New Mooring would be implemented speedily.

He also assured that he would do his best to implement all the other suggestions made by the representatives of BGMEA, B.J.M.C. Master's Stevedores Association and others at the meeting for improving port facilities and efficiency, to ensure smooth export/import trade through this port.

Board members back home from Pakistan Possibility of opening third IFIC Bank branch discussed

The members of the Board of Directors of IFIC Bank Ltd, after evaluation and inspection of the operations of two branches in Pakistan and holding a board meeting there, returned home on August 22. They went to Pakistan recently in pursuance of the discussion held in the Board earlier. The main objective of the visit was to introduce the IFIC Bank to the government and non-government agencies in Pakistan including building-up of its image and credibility, says a press release.

The necessity of a goodwill tour to Pakistan by the members of the Board of Directors was being felt since long for a number of reasons. In addition to evaluation of the operations of the branches there, it was necessary to examine the problems and prospects of business in Pakistan. Meeting present and future clients, holding discussion on subjects of mutual interest with different banks including Central Bank and Government, meeting leaders of different Chamber of Commerce and Industry and above all, building environment of goodwill in Pakistan to promote business there, were among others, the main objectives of the visit. In the background of such a necessity, a board meeting was held in Pakistan where all the govt directors and sponsor directors were present.

It may be mentioned here that the Bank's branch in Karachi has been functioning since 87 and Lahore branch has been functioning since 93. Both

Karachi and Lahore branches are profit earning. Quite a good number of Bangladesh executives are working in those branches. Lahore branch is housed in Bank's own property.

In Pakistan, members of the Board of Directors held discussions with the customers of both the branches and gave on-the-spot directions to the branches to solve their problems. The team met Governor and Deputy Governor of the State Bank of Pakistan with a view to having knowledge about

the govt policy. Discussion took place on subjects of mutual interest. During the discussion, IFIC bank's operations and progress were highlighted. Governor gave a patient hearing and assured all help and cooperation.

The Board of Directors also met Presidents and Executive Committee members of Karachi and Lahore Chamber of Commerce & Industries. They also paid a courtesy call to the honourable Governor of the Punjab. During one hour long meet, he expressed satisfaction over the operations of the Bank in Pakistan.

The Board meeting observed that operations in both Karachi and Lahore were profitable and response for business expansion was favourable. The possibility of opening a third branch in Pakistan was discussed and it was felt that Board meetings should be held in Pakistan at regular intervals. Board expressed satisfaction over the operations of the branches in Pakistan.

Bandgladesh Perspective

prevalent throughout the world where shrimp culture is going either extensive, semi-intensive or intensive. In to-days free and mass communicated world we just cannot avoid it-but we have to live with it and device the ways and means to prevent or contain the disease problem within limits through sustainable environment-friendly management programme.

Factors Contributing to outbreak of disease and crop failure:

1. Lack of specific regulations and management for the diverse physio-geographical conditions of coastal land and waters.
2. Indiscriminate and unplanned development in farming areas.
3. Excessive stocking densities which overload the pond carrying capacity.
4. Greedy attitude among profit driven entrepreneurs.
5. Lack of regulation and rampant abuse of fertilizers, chemicals and feed.
6. Lack of research on pond dynamics and ecologically and environment-friendly production system
7. Destruction of mangroves and eutrophication of coastal water.

*Toward a sustainable production:

1. All shrimp farms must register with D.O.F.
2. 30% of land area of a particular shrimp farm should be used and reserved as water storage/reservoir.
3. Biological treatment and management by crop rotation, crop diversification e.g. Shrimp in rotation with T. Aman plantation, 1st crop: shrimp, 2nd crop: saline resistant fin fish culture, one year shrimp-next year fin fish then again shrimp and many other farms of crop diversification or rotation etc.
4. Establishment of a national laboratory for easy and quick diagnosis, and identification of diseases, analysis and

assay of all shrimp feed, chemicals etc. before giving permission for marketing.

5. Discharge of water from disease infested pond is to be prohibited unless and until it is done under direct supervision of a competent person from D.O.F.

6. To enforce quarantine programme for importation of shrimp fry and feed-but quick testing system must be made available.

7. Urgent need to develop domesticated disease free and sustainable broodstock. And also to examine and ensure disease free wild broodstock before breeding in our hatcheries.

8. Sustainable regulation for wild fry harvest and time to time checking for any viral contamination.

9. Deployment of sufficient trained D.O.F. Staff at Thana/Union level in major shrimp culture area with proper equipment.

10. To encourage formation of Association of farmers at local and national level, to train/motivate the farmers through association and to demonstrate, monitor and evaluate all shrimp related activity of D.O.F. in close co-operation and collaboration with farmers.

11. To halt further destruction of mangrove forest and to take crash programme for afforestation in the coastal belt.

12. Strick adherence to pollution control measures in the coastal belt and in all reverine system.

13. Immediate construction of basic infrastructure like embankments, roads, electricity, sluice gate and excavation of canals in and around shrimp culture area and zoning of shrimp culture areas.



DHL Bangladesh Country Sales & Marketing Manager, S A M Showket Hossain, conducted a training course on "Consultative Selling Skill" at DHL Country Office in the city recently. Desmond Quiah, Country Manager, seen with the participants in the picture.