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HYUNDAI

CARS THAT MAKE SENSE

56 engineers of 3 gas cos to be trained in Canada

Fifty-six engineers of three major gas companies of Bangladesh will be trained in Canada in natural gas industry, reports UNB.

The training will be provided at the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, one of the Canada's premier polytechnic institutes, under contracts signed here Friday.

The contracts were signed between SAIT and Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Limited, Bakhirabad Gas Systems Limited and Jalalabad Gas Transmission and Distribution Systems Company Limited.

A press release said yesterday SAIT Director Ed Evancio and Manager Chris Foote, senior executives of the three companies signed the contracts under the third Gas Development Project.

The engineers will be trained in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, Calgary Stampede during 1997 and 1998 to receive extensive technical training in natural gas industry and related subjects.

Vietnam may face power shortage

HANOI, June 7: Near drought conditions in northern Vietnam may force the temporary shutdown of the country's largest power plant, state-run media reported Saturday, says AP.

Water reservoirs feeding the Hoa Binh hydroelectric plant, turbines have dropped below normal levels, official media reported Saturday.

No rain has been reported in most of northern Vietnam since the middle of May and none is expected for at least the next few days, the National Weather Forecasting Service said.

Unusually high temperatures this summer and a shortage of rainfall has set off the power problem, the English-language Vietnam News reported. Through most of May, temperatures have been as high as 35 C (97 F).

During a similar situation last year, plant engineers at the Hoa Binh facility were forced to limit power generation to about three hours a day, the Vietnam News said.

Electricity consumption is climbing dramatically in Vietnam, where industrialisation and market-oriented reforms are boosting the demand for power.

Hoa Binh hydro plant is located on a tributary of the Red River.

Vietnam's rainy season usually starts in late July, often causing flooding in both the northern and southern deltas.

Bank fraud case Four arrested in China

BEIJING, June 7: Police have arrested two bank staffers and two officials of a Shanghai construction company accused of defrauding a bank of 28 million yuan (3.4 million dollars), a Shanghai newspaper reported Friday, according to AP.

The four were accused of using the promise of high interest rates to persuade a Shanghai district industrial bureau, a building company and an international trade company to invest in a bank in greater Shanghai, the Liberation Daily reported.

The scam involved using false seals and signatures to handle the transactions and then taking the money to spend it on luxuries, the report said.

The two construction company officials accused in the case fled in March and were arrested in Urumqi, capital of Xinjiang in far northwest China. It did not give details on the arrest of the two others, including which bank they worked for.

LONDON, June 7: Two precious metals, platinum and palladium, usually the obscure preserve of experts in the car and electronics industries, rocketed into the unfamiliar glare of the limelight this week, reports AFP.

A freeze of exports from Russia, one of the world's biggest producers, has caused a crunch in supplies of these two metals.

Industry, which uses the elements in electronic parts and catalytic converters for cars, has been forced to pay between 35 per cent and 75 per cent more than four months ago.

Moscow has vowed to resume supplies in the weeks ahead, but dealers feared that an overhaul of the Russian export system, which has paralysed sales since early 1997, may continue to wreak havoc with exports.

The suspension of exports is a reflection of the disarray at the heart of the Russian administration rather than an attempt by the powerful producer to inflate prices, according to a precious metals analyst at Union Bank of Switzerland (UBS), Andy Smith.

Coffee prices cooled from recent highs, as frosts failed to materials in Brazil and as dealers predicted that exports from

1783 products of 38 LDCs come under GSP programme

Bangladeshi goods to get duty-free access to US

WASHINGTON, June 7: The Office of the US Trade Representative (USTR) says it will grant for the first time duty-free treatment to imports of 1,783 products from 38 of the world's poorest developing countries, reports USIS.

In addition to 30 least developed countries in sub-Saharan Africa, the other countries newly eligible for the additional trade benefits under the US Generalised Systems of Preferences (GSP) programme are Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Yemen, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Kiribati and Cambodia.

The GSP programme provides duty-free treatment of specified products from more than 140 designated beneficiary countries and territories. In a statement issued June 5, US Trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky said that the administration's decision to grant GSP benefits to Cambodia was

based on the progress being made in that country on promoting internationally recognised worker rights and in enforcing modern intellectual property rights laws. Benefits to the poorest countries will be available immediately.

The new benefits will be available to Cambodia in July, one US official said. Though GSP technically expired May 31, 1997, the administration is seeking a multi-year renewal of the programme, which would provide benefits retroactively to the countries.

Barshefsky said that the additional products eligible for GSP treatment will help promote sustainable economic development in the least developed countries.

"The administration is committed to building strong trade partnerships with sub-Saharan Africa's rapidly grow-

ing and reforming economies; relationships which will benefit both Africans and Americans," Barshefsky said. "In an increasingly competitive global economy, the United States cannot afford to neglect a largely untapped market of some 600-million-plus people and the world cannot afford to see a vast region marginalised."

While 64 per cent of total GSP imports come from Asian beneficiaries, only 0.3 per cent, or 588 million dollars, came from sub-Saharan countries in 1996, USTR said. The total imports of the new GSP-eligible products from the eligible African countries was 2,500 million dollars in 1996.

As part of its annual review of its GSP programme, also announced on June 5, 89 products from 19 countries valued at 5,700 million dollars were removed from the programme be-

cause each country had exported over a certain dollar value of the product to the United States, thus exceeding the "competitive need limits" designated in the programme.

Under the competitive need limits provision, an individual beneficiary country can lose duty-free access for a GSP product if the country accounts for more 50 per cent of total US imports of that product or if the country exported more than 75 million dollars worth of the product to the United States in 1996.

Eleven products with 1996 imports valued at 126 million dollars but whose benefits had been previously excluded were redesignated as GSP eligible. Another three products with 1996 imports valued at nearly 10 million dollars were being added to the list of GSP eligible products for the first time.

It venture trailer truck assembling plant awaits BOI approval

By Staff Correspondent

A private company is going to set up a trailer truck assembling plant in the country with the technical help of a leading Indian company.

Speaking at a press briefing in a local hotel yesterday, the chairman of Sattar Corporation, Montaqim Sattar, said the proposed plant will be set up at Kashimpur in Gazipur.

He said his company applied to the Board of Investment (BOI) to set up a plant for assembling trailer trucks. Most of this type of vehicles now plying in the country are either imported or poorly assembled in road-side workshops.

Some way-side garages with very poor technology and without any legal permission have been found building trailers and vehicles by using ship-scrap and used axles, he al-

leged.

He further said these shops do not follow any automobile technology and design in fabricating the vehicles which are prone to break down and accidents.

"If we get permission from the BOI we would be able to produce these modern transport vehicles at the end of this year," Sattar said.

He said the Punjab Engineering of India has agreed to provide all kinds of technical help to build each 40 tonnes capacity truck priced at Tk five lakh only.

He demanded reduction of duty structure for import of articulated trailers from the existing 45 per cent to the minimum 2.5 per cent to meet the country's growing demand for export and import.

Grains Council chief for maintaining assistance

Volume of pledged food aid to LDCs may shrink: Diplomats

PARIS, June 7: The head of a group of grain trading nations urged food exporters on Friday to pay attention to Third World hunger, but diplomats said the amount of grain pledged as food aid could be under threat, reports Reuters.

German Denis, who leads the London-based International Grains Council of 44 exporting and importing nations, told an audience of grain dealers that maintaining assistance was vital.

"We must of course see about maintaining the capacity to help the least developed countries," Canadian-born Denis said at an informal grain industry gathering in Paris.

"(We must) compensate for important food deficiencies and keep up the safety net for these countries," he said.

Diplomats, however, said an international pact to supply surplus grain as food aid to developing countries could be trimmed when it came up for renegotiation later this year.

The pact, known as the Food

Aid Convention, is monitored by the Grains Council and its pledges had already been cut in 1995 when the United States halved its commitment for cost reasons.

"I think the volume (pledged) will be lower," one food diplomat said, adding talks would not however start in earnest until later this year.

The existing pact, which runs until June 1998, guarantees developing countries food aid equivalent to 5.32 million tonnes of wheat a year — about one per cent of global production and worth some 750 million US dollars at today's prices.

A previous three-year agreement had guaranteed 7.32 million tonnes, though the Grain's Council says that in both cases these minimum pledges have usually been exceeded.

A United Nations World Food Summit in Rome last year sought to put famine relief at the top of the international agenda, with a commitment to halve world hunger within a generation.

Many debt-saddled importing countries appealed for cheaper grain when prices hit records last year due to a plunge in global grain reserves, evoking memories of a 1970s food scare.

But critics of food aid, pioneered after World War Two, say it often fails to get to the people who need it and usually ignores the root causes of poverty — political instability.

Grants and targeted relief were likely to take an increasing share of international aid efforts, the diplomat said. This was not inconsistent with maintaining over all levels of assistance.

The Grains Council pact combines the United States, still the largest donor despite the cuts, and the European Union, Canada, Australia, Japan, Switzerland, Norway and Argentina.

Most of the food aid guaranteed by the convention goes in the form of wheat, flour or rice and nearly half of all food surplus shipped as aid goes to Sub-Saharan Africa.



AS Ashrafuddin Ahmed, General Manager, Agrani Bank and Project Director of MEDU, distributed certificates among the participants of the training course titled "Employment Generation Project for the Rural Poor" jointly organised by Agrani Bank Training Institute and Micro Enterprise Development Unit (MEDU). Badruddin Ahmed, Deputy General Manager and Director of ABTI, Akhter Aysha Khanom, Deputy General Manager, and Nazmul Islam, Asstt General Manager, are also seen.

Indian investment in Nepal to increase

KATHMANDU, June 7: India yesterday pledged to contribute towards Nepal's industrial development and said about 30 joint ventures have already been set up in the Himalayan kingdom, reports PTI.

The promise was made by Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral to business representatives at a function organised by the Federation of the Nepal Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI).

Gujral said India had decided to raise the existing ceiling for Indian investments in Nepal to 25 crore rupees for fast track cases and to 50 crore rupees for those involving regular approval.

"We have done this in response to a demand from the business sector of both India and Nepal and hope to see more economic interaction between the two countries," he said.

Assuring Nepal of finding a market in India, he said it was all the move certain of this coming through, particularly since, "we all agreed on setting up a free trade area in South Asia by 2001."

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and the FNCCI in a joint memorandum of recommendations to Prime Minis-

ters of both the countries demanded full invertibility, including on capital account, between Indian and Nepalese rupee and setting up of an institution for carrying out investment promotional activities in India.

The memorandum was submitted to them by the CII president, N Kumar, and the FNCCI President, Padma Juoti, at a luncheon meeting.

Referring to the recently renewed trade treaty between the two countries, Gujral said it would give a boost to commercial relations and increase Nepalese exports to India.

He said the three main features of the treaty — removal of material content requirement, rationalisation of countervailing duty structure, and automatic renewal of the treaty — would open new vistas for the trading community of both countries.

Gujral, while replying to a business representatives query, said: "You cannot think of SAPTA or SAFTA without opening the skies, otherwise globalisation and liberalisation will remain a distant dream."

US dollar rises against mark

NEW YORK, June 7: The US dollar's rate against mark climbed higher first Friday on strong US jobs data but turned lower long with yen which was affected by different news, reports Xinhua.

There was a newspaper report in Japan asserting that the Group of Seven would ask Japan to suppress its trade surplus at their summit in Denver this month. The news furthered the yen's weakness against the dollar.

The dollar settled in New York at 1.7258 marks, down from 1.7288 Thursday. The dollar cost 114.60 yen, down from 115.72.

The pound fell to 1.6316 US dollars, down from 1.6351 US dollars, despite news that the Bank of England raised interest rates a quarter percentage point to 6.50 per cent to suppress inflationary pressure.

Later the dollar was boosted by the US Labour Department's report that the US unemployment rate fell in May to 4.8 per cent, down from 4.9 per cent in April, the fourth straight decline and the lowest level in a generation.

Other late-dollar rates in New York compared with late Thursday: 1.4517 Swiss francs, up from 1.4465, 5.8280 French francs, down from 5.8300, 1699.25 Italian lire, down from 1,700.70, 1.3831 Canadian dollars, up from 1.3766.



A training on 'Listening skill' was conducted by Alec Ang, DHL Area Director, recently at DHL country office. Anselm A. Quiah, Managing Director, Homebound Group, Alec Ang, Dalip Handa, DHL Technical Advisor, Showket Hossain, Country Sales and Marketing Manager, Md Ashrafuzzaman, HR Manager, are seen along with the participants in a concluding ceremony.

NBL Kishoreganj branch opens

KISHOREGANJ, June 7: The 65th branch of National Bank Limited was inaugurated by Deputy Speaker Advocate Mohammad Abdul Hamid in Haji Akkas Ali market here yesterday, reports UNB.

This is the first private bank in the district town. One of the Directors of the bank Habibullah presided over the discussion meeting of clients held on the occasion.

Managing Director Sarwaruz-Zaman dwelt at length on the details of the policy of the bank. Among others, it was addressed by Kishoreganj Pourasava Chairman Alhaj Mohammad Abu Taher Mia, Deputy Commissioner AMM Farhad, Director of the bank and former MP M A Reza and branch manager Shamsul Alam.

The branch will start its transaction and total operation from tomorrow, bank sources said.

Thai co, Myanmar sign joint venture agreement

YANGON, June 7: Sutech Engineering of Thailand and Myanmar's Ministry of Agriculture have signed a joint-venture agreement to open a sugar mill capable of refining 2,000 cubic tons a day, the state-run New Light of Myanmar reported Friday, says AP.

The new company will be called Myanmar-Sutech Co. Ltd., and the mill will be located in Prom, 260 kilometers (160 miles) northwest of Yangon.

The newspaper did not divulge the financial details of the agreement.

Thailand, one of the largest foreign investors in Myanmar, is the world's leading sugar exporter, and Myanmar's economy is still heavily based in agriculture and agro-industries.

Myanmar's Ministry of Agriculture has already signed two other joint venture agreements with Guang Don Zhuhai Corp. of China to build two sugar mills with a 1,500 ton a day capacity.

Unemployment rate in US falls to 5 pc

WASHINGTON, June 7: The US unemployment rate fell to 4.8 per cent in May, its lowest since October 1973, the government reported yesterday, reports AFP.

But job creation was a modest 138,000 — interpreted on financial markets as a sign of easing pressure on tight labour markets. The Dow Jones Industrial rose 15.87 points in early trading to 7,321.16.

May hourly earnings, closely watched as an indicator of wage-driven inflation, rose 0.3 per cent — roughly in line with expectations — and was up 3.8 per cent year-on-year, the Labour Department reported.

Market analysts did express concern, however, with a dramatic upward revision in April non-farm payroll gains to 323,000 from an initially estimated 142,000. The jobless rate in April was 4.9 per cent.

Wall Street economists had expected May non-farm payrolls to rise by 239,000 jobs and for the unemployment rate to move up to five per cent.

BASC training workshop opens today

A five-day training workshop on 'Beef cattle fattening' will begin at the BASC training hall in the city today, says a press release.

Organised by Business Advisory Services Center (BASC), the workshop will continue till June 12.

27 participants will attend it.

The certificate awarding ceremony will be held on the concluding day of the workshop.

Prices of gold, oil, tea, coffee decline over the week

Colombia would rise.

GOLD: Placid. The yellow metal was pushed into the shadows by the dazzling surge in platinum and palladium prices and fell by two dollars to 343 dollars per ounce.

As expected, the German government's climbdown in its dispute with the Bundesbank over the revaluation of central bank gold reserves had no impact on the market.

The compromise struck between German Finance Minister Theo Waigel and Bundesbank President Hans Tietmeyer means the government will not be able to revalue the reserves until 1998, rather than in 1997, as Waigel had wanted.

SILVER: Brighter. Silver prices gained 16 cents to 4.94 dollars per ounce, on technical buying.

PLATINUM AND PALLADIUM: Surge. Platinum and palladium prices surged because of the continuing freeze in exports by Russia, one of the world's major producers.

The price of palladium, a metal used to make catalytic converters and electronic com-

ponents surged 30 per cent in the space of one week, to reach 235 dollars per ounce (31.103 grammes), a level not seen since the late 1980s.

The price of platinum, which is also used to make jewellery, shot up by 16 per cent, to 475 dollars per ounce, a high since the early 1980s.

COPPER: Tarnished. Copper prices lost 60 dollars to 2,480 dollars per tonne on the London Metal Exchange (LME), after a slowdown in the decline in stocks, which had been falling rapidly thanks to robust demand.

Angus MacMillan, an analyst with billion metals, a subsidiary of South African mining group Gencor, said that prices had moved too far upwards in past weeks and were ripe for a downward correction.

LEAD: Stable. Lead prices remained stable at around 635 dollars per tonne, tugged in opposing directions by copper's decline and the rise in zinc prices.

The drop of almost 1,000 tonnes in LME reserves, how-

ever, supported prices.

ZINC: Highs and lows. After a weak start, zinc prices gained ground later on industrial and speculative buying, ending the week 10 dollars higher at 1,360 dollars per tonne.

At first, the market was depressed by an acceleration of Chinese exports that came to light the previous week, analyst Martin Squires, from brokers Rudolf Wolff, said.

ALUMINIUM: Rise. A sharp fall in LME reserves, down by 15,000 tonnes this week, lifted aluminium prices to 1,600 dollars per tonne.

Traders said that the fall in reserves was a sign of strong demand for the metal.

NICKEL: Tumble. Nickel prices fell by 100 dollars to 7,200 dollars per tonne in the face of a build up of LME reserves.

The negative market sentiment came despite strike action at a Canadian Nickel Complex, the Sudbury plant at Inco, Ontario, which produces more than 100,000 tonnes of nickel and 100,000 tonnes of copper per year.

The plant produces almost 15 per cent of all nickel sold in the West and dealers feared that if the strike continued, then supplies might be severely impaired.

TIN: High. Tin prices rose by about 50 dollars to 5,620 dollars per tonne, after a slight fall in LME reserves.

OIL: Slip. Crude oil prices fell by one dollar to 18.4 dollars per barrel, after an announcement that the United Nations had agreed to extend by six months its oil-for-food deal with Iraq.

The deal allows Baghdad to sell about 600,000 barrels of crude per day to finance humanitarian aid to the Iraqi people.

Prices also fell in the face of a rise in crude stocks held in the United States, which is the world's leading importer of oil.

RUBBER: Calm. Trading was subdued on the London market, where prices fell by five pounds to 725 pounds per tonne.

A sharp rise in the value of the Thai baht, which hit a 13-year high after intervention by the central bank, had little im-

act on the market.

Thailand is the world's leading rubber producer, but the abundant harvest this year has shielded the market from the effects of monetary fluctuations.

COFFEE: Cooler. Coffee prices suddenly cooled down after the heated buying frenzy of previous week.

On the London futures market, the price of robusta beans, ground into lower quality brews from Africa and Asia, lost 600 dollars to 1,870 dollars per tonne, more than wiping out the previous week's gains.

TEA: Fall. Prices fell in the London auction houses because of weakening demand. The price for medium-quality brews fell five pence to 142 pence per kg.

SUGAR: Sparkling. Sugar prices soared to a six-month high on the London market under the influence of strong demand and predictions of a relatively small harvest in the world's number one producer and consumer country, India.

White sugar prices rose by two per cent in the space of two

sessions to 320 dollars per tonne. Thereafter, prices eased slightly to 317 dollars per tonne, which was three dollars higher than last week.

VEGETABLE OILS: Melt-down. Soya prices on the Chicago market fell sharply after the Cargill cereals giant announced that it would import large quantities of soya from Brazil.

Dealers predicted that North American beans, which currently, command historically high prices, will come under intense pressure in the face of the South American produce.

Rumours that China had purchased large quantities of Brazilian soya added credence to these fears. Prices on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) fell by 33 cents to 8.36 dollars per bushel (of 27.2kg — delivery in July).

In Rotterdam, palm oil prices fell by 7.5 dollars to 540 dollars per tonne. sunflower oil prices fell by 15 dollars to 575 dollars per tonne.

Rapeseed oil prices fell by one guilder to 104.5 guilders per

100 kg. groundnut oil prices held at 1005 dollars per tonne.

GRAINS: Soft. Favourable weather conditions in the United States and across Europe put cereal prices under pressure this week, as both regions looked set to reap large harvests.

Wheat prices on the Chicago market fell by 11 cents to 3.56 dollars per bushel (of 27.2 kg — for delivery in July).

In contrast, maize prices rose by five cents to 2.74 dollars per bushel (of 25.4 kg). This was despite predictions by the international grains council that the US harvest would be bigger than predicted.

COTTON: Floating. Orders of US cotton by China and uncertainty surrounding this year's crop in the Mississippi delta buoyed cotton prices at 80 cents per pound on the cotton outlook index.

Traders feared that cotton bushes in the Mississippi delta might become infected with disease under wetter-than-usual conditions there.

WOOL: Hot. Increased demand from Japan, China and western Europe strengthened cotton prices. The eastern index rose by 14 Australian cents to 714 cents per kg.