SANYO
Air Conditioners
Sole Distributor in Bangladesh
Transfin Trading Limited
100, Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, Dhaka-1215
Telephone 815306-09, 819625-29, Fax: 813062

The Daily Star
BUSINESS
DHAKA SATURDAY NOVEMBER 22, 1997

HYUNDAI
CARS THAT MAKE SENSE

Imports of raw materials and machinery up

Imports marked a steady rise during the first quarter of 1997-98 fiscal with a significant growth in opening letters of credit for import of basic raw materials and machinery, reports UNB.

According to figures released by Bangladesh Bank Thursday, import LCs worth Tk 7,013.47 crore were opened during July-September period, reflecting a growth of 6.73 per cent over the level of same quarter in last year.

The central bank said the increase was mainly due to higher volume of LCs for import of industrial raw materials and capital machinery.

Imports of raw materials and machinery grew by a substantial 15.24 per cent during the quarter, it said.

Opening of LCs for import of textile fabrics and accessories for the readymade garment industry as usually topped the table: LCs worth Tk 1881.42 crore were opened during the quarter.

They were followed by chemicals and chemical products (Tk 637.74 crore), machinery (Tk 467.88 crore), petroleum, oil and lubricants (Tk 452.27 crore), raw cotton and synthetic fibre (Tk 268.12 crore), edible oil (Tk 245.19 crore), CI sheets, BP sheets and tin plate (Tk 236.75 crore), yarn (Tk 218.49 crore), scrap vessels (Tk 166.79 crore), cement (Tk 119.03 crore), oil seeds and rape seeds (Tk 116.48 crore) and motor vehicle (Tk 106.14 crore).

ROK decides to seek IMF bailout

SEOUL, Nov 21: Bowing to what it had called the "unthinkable," South Korea said Friday it will ask the International Monetary Fund to bailout its once-mighty economy, reports AP.

"We have decided to request IMF assistance," Yoon Jeung-hyun, assistant minister for financial policy, told reporters. "We are discussing the size and conditions of such loans."

It was a tough pill to swallow for South Korea, proud of its meteoric rise from a war-torn nation to the world's 11th-largest economic powerhouse, and one it had delayed taking for weeks.

Although its problems were spinning out of control, the country insisted it would never seek an IMF bailout — which requires stringent economic reforms and policy controls.

On Friday, it conceded that the IMF bailout was unavoidable.

Earlier Friday, Finance and Economy Minister Lim Chang-yuel said the IMF had offered to provide South Korea with short-term funds to help improve the severe cash strains that are pushing the country to the brink of financial chaos.

He declined to comment on the size of the proposed aid.

South Korea is a member to the Washington-based IMF and is entitled a direct six billion dollar loan. But South Korean news reports said the IMF was likely to put together a bailout package of up to 60 billion dollars with contributions from the United States, Japan and other member countries.

President Kim Young-sam planned to deliver a nationally televised speech Saturday to seek public support for that decision. South Korea's dramatic downfall from an Asian Tiger to an Asian beggar overlaps with Kim's tumultuous five years in office. His term ends in February and by law, he can not seek re-election.

Turkey to buy electricity from Azerbaijan

ANKARA, Nov 21: Turkey, suffering from a serious energy shortage, has struck a deal with Azerbaijan to buy electricity from the former Soviet Republic in Trans-Caucasia, Energy Minister Cumhur Ersumer said yesterday, reports AFP.

"We will buy 300 mw of electricity from Azerbaijan through links across Georgia" which borders both countries. He told reporters here after talks with his visiting Azeri counterpart Muslum Imanoav.

This is the first time Turkey has announced it will import electricity for more than a decade.

He said the deal with Azerbaijan would take effect next year. He did not say how much Turkey would pay.

Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz has already warned that the government may have to order electricity cuts of several hours a day in industrially-developed western regions.

Officials said Turkey was also continuing talks to buy electricity from Bulgaria.

The government has announced plans to build a nuclear power plant in the country's south and construct more than ten natural gas-operated plants mainly in the western areas in the next few years.

Turkey is expected to pay more than 10 billion dollars for energy over the next seven years under the plan.

Stock market witnesses better week

Star Business Report

Share prices witnessed a moderate rise last week pushing the market indicators slightly up after going through a depression over the weeks.

Price Indices of Dhaka Stock Exchange and Chittagong Stock Exchange increased by 7.27 points and 6.88 points during the week respectively. The DSE index closed at 800.18 points on Thursday from 792.91 points the previous week.

The market capitalisation of DSE surged by Tk 98.32 crore and closed at Tk 7103.78 crore from Tk 7005.46 crore.

Although the market had started with a bullish mood, it became dull again at the later part of the week. The rising trend continued only for four days and the DSE index went to 820.71 points on Monday. But it suffered by about 19 points in the remaining two days.

Market analysts and observers termed the situation a reaction to a long falling trend. "It is not unlikely that prices would rebound slightly after going down for long", said an observer. He, however, said that normally prices go down during the November-December period. But this year's sufferings went beyond expectation.

Investors are fearing that the opposition political parties led by BNP would start strong agitation programe soon which is taking toll on the share market, a DSE member said.

According to another market observer, the situation could not improve much because of money crisis. Although the government had promised to disburse money for share business immediately after the sudden price fall last year, the investors and brokers did not get any help from the government.

With moderate improvement in the price index the volume of trading on the floor also increased slightly as more than 4.36 lakh shares and debentures changed hands as against the transaction of 4.18 lakh stocks the previous week. The average value of issues traded rose to Tk 6.09 crore from Tk 5.27 crore.

The average number of gainers remained lower than the average number of losers as prices of 75 issues declined while 58 gained during the week.

All Securities Price Index of CSE stood at 346.13 points from previous week's 339.25 points. Its market capitalisation surged by 108.80 crore closing at Tk 5632.77 crore from Tk 5523.97 crore.

India decides to free petroleum sector

NEW DELHI, Nov 21: India yesterday decided to free its petroleum sector from state-run controls by the turn of the century, officials said, reports AFP.

An officials spokesman said the cabinet, which met here late Thursday, announced the phasing out of "administered price mechanism" or state subsidies over the next four years.

"The government subsidy for domestic oil companies will be withdrawn and the prices will be in tune with the global market by the year 2002," he said.

"Imports and exports of all petroleum products except crude, aviation turbine fuel and high speed diesel will be decontrolled."

The spokesman said a regulatory body to "oversee the functioning of and to enforce the competitive framework will be established."

But he said liquefied petroleum gas and kerosene, known as the poor man's fuel, would, however, continue to be subsidies.

The Indian government subsidises petroleum products to the tune of 4.4 billion dollars a year. It imports about six billion dollars of petrol annually.

New Delhi was forced to postpone planned oil price increases for more than two months earlier this year due to communist opposition.

If finally increased prices of diesel by 22 per cent, petrol by five per cent and liquid petroleum gas by 15 per cent on September 1. The price of kerosene, used for cooking, were left untouched.

Oil consumption in India is expected to grow from the present 79 million tonnes a year to 155 million tonnes by 2006-07. India's domestic oil production is about 35 million tonnes a year while the rest is imported.

Analysts have said India's dependence on imported oil was likely to be more than 70 per cent by the turn of the century.

Exchange Rates

The following are the **Sonali Bank**'s dealing rates (BD Tk for one unit of Foreign Currency) to public as on 20th Nov. '97.

Buying

Name of Currency	TT Clean	OD Sight Export Bills	OD Transfer
US Dlr	44.8400	44.6605	44.5660
GB Pound	75.3338	75.0322	74.8734
D Mark	25.7048	25.6019	25.5477
F Franc	7.6795	7.6488	7.6326
C.Dlr	31.5061	31.3800	31.3136
S Franc	31.7415	31.6144	31.5475
JP Yen	0.3508	0.3494	0.3486

Selling

Name of Currency	T.T & O.D.	B.C.
US Dollar	45.2090	45.2485
GB Pound	76.5489	76.6158
D.Mark	26.1919	26.2148
F. Franc	7.8246	7.8314
C.Dollar	32.0960	32.1240
S Franc	32.3934	32.4217
JP. Yen	0.3609	0.3613

A) TT (DOC) US Dollar Spot Buying Tk. 44.7502

B) Usance Rate

30 Days	60 Days	90 Days	120 Days	180 Days
44.3791	44.0055	43.6318	43.2581	42.5108

C) US Dollar sight export bill 3 months forward purchase: Same as OD sight export Bill buying rate.

The following are the **Janata Bank**'s dealing rates (BD Tk for one unit of Foreign Currency) to public as on 20/11/97.

Buying

Name of Currency	TT Clean	OD Sight Export Bills	OD Transfer
US Dlr	44.8350	44.6506	44.5410
GB Pound	75.3240	75.0054	74.8213
D Mark	25.7014	25.5927	25.5299
FR Franc	7.6785	7.6461	7.6273
JP Yen	0.3525	0.3510	0.3502
C.Dlr	31.5020	31.3688	31.2918
S Franc	31.7373	31.6031	31.5255

Selling

Name of Currency	T.T.& O.D.	B.C.
US Dollar	45.2115	45.2510
GB Pound	76.5286	76.5962
D.Mark	26.1774	26.2005
Fr. France	7.8203	7.8272
JP Yen	0.3612	0.3615
C.Dollar	32.0783	32.1065
S. Franc	32.3756	32.4041

Janata Bank's selling and buying rates in cash currency for public:

	SELLING	Buying
US DLR	45.7000	45.1000
GBP	75.5300	73.5300
S Riyal	12.2000	11.9000
UAE DH	12.1500	11.7000
KW Dinar	147.5000	142.5000

Political crisis threatens Pak economic reforms

KARACHI, Pakistan, Nov 21: Pakistan's political crisis is likely to slow the pace of major economic reforms started by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, even if he survives and retains his position, analysts said today, reports Reuter.

"Even if he does survive, his weakened position raises serious question about his ability to carry on the ambitious reforms initiated by his government," said Jahanzeb Nasser, head of research at Jardine Fleming Securities Ltd Pakistan.

Analysts said a change in government might not result in a radical change of policies as most reforms are linked to loans from multilateral donors which are badly needed by the cash-strapped country.

But their implementation would certainly be delayed if Sharif's government collapsed because any new government will take time to settle in, they said.

They said a slowdown of the process was inevitable even if Sharif survived, as it would take months to recapture the momentum set in place when he came to office nine months ago.

Nasser said a resolution two weeks ago by the National Assembly (lower house) against Sharif's policy of cutting jobs in over-staffed state organisations showed that politically sensitive reforms would be difficult to implement.

"Most of the economic policies were the result of Nawaz Sharif's own thinking and are not necessarily supported by all the legislators of his own party. A new government may have its own ideas about how and when these policies should be implemented," he said.

Since assuming power in February, Sharif has cut taxes and tariffs and unveiled incentive packages for agriculture, capital markets and the banking sector.

Aliya Ehmar, research head at Ing Baring Securities, said restructuring of the state's tax collection body, the central board of revenue and the corporate law authority that monitors the capital markets and privatisation of financial institutions, banks and utilities would be hit by the political crisis.

Loans from multilateral donors such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank would also be delayed as the reform process slowed, she said.

"Even if all the policies are kept intact, we should expect an additional delay of at least a year before they start showing results, which means that an economic turnaround may not be possible in the current fiscal year," Ehmar said.

Nasser said a near stand still of economic activity during the political turmoil would make Pakistan miss almost all the targets it agreed with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for the October-December quarter.

"The IMF is more likely to hold disbursement of the December tranche while other donors may delay disbursement by at least six months," he said.

Ehmar said withdrawal of IMF support at this point could result in Pakistan defaulting within a couple of months on repayments on its 30 billion foreign debt.

"I do not think it will be suitable for IMF to back out on Pakistan, they might ask for readjustment of the targets instead," she said.

A new investment policy was due to be announced today. But it was unclear whether Sharif would unveil the package due to fresh challenges to his authority in the Supreme Court where he is facing contempt of court charges.

All the measures were seen by economists as efforts to help Pakistan out of its economic problems through supply side initiatives and to boost the private sector, where Sharif has his roots as a major industrialist.

The measures were successful to the extent that after three weeks of negotiations last July the government reached an understanding with the IMF on a loan programme to help institute structural reforms.

The IMF Executive Board, after a meeting in October, approved a 1.6 billion dollar three-year loan and praised Sharif's economic policies.

Pakistan's trade gap has narrowed while inflation climbed down to a single digit in the first four months of fiscal 1997/98 (July-June).

The State (Central) Bank of Pakistan persuaded mostly state-run and some private banks that were charging up to 22 per cent interest rates on loans to slash lending rates while improving the rate of return on deposits.

The move was backed by cuts in some of the key interest rates by the central bank.

The annual yield on government six-month bonds slipped to around 12 per cent, the lowest in the past several years.

Sharif unveils new investment policy

ISLAMABAD, Nov 21: Trying to put a week of political turmoil behind him, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on Friday promised to make Pakistan an investment-friendly country, reports AP.

Addressing a convention of foreign and Pakistani investors, Sharif unveiled a new investment policy that offers tax holidays to new industries, concessions on customs duties and tariffs and puts fresh emphasis on export industries.

The convention came at the end of a week of political feuding that has sent the stock market into convulsions and threatened a massive exodus of foreign capital.

On Friday it appeared that the crisis had been forestalled following last minute mediation by the powerful army chief of staff and a one-week adjournment of a contempt of court hearing against Sharif.

By midday the Karachi Stock Exchange had recorded a 60 point jump in trading, its first move upward in one week.

"The market is up. It is jubilant," said Iqbal Ibrahim, a stock broker in Karachi. "Everyone is on a buying spree. The news has been taken positively."

Sharif told dozens of businessmen that his government's new investment policy gives priority to the export industry, high technology industries and the agro-based industries.

He said export and high technology industries will be given a 90 per cent first year allowance on capital expenditure and investment.

As well Sharif said his government will abolish all custom duties on the import of machinery and equipment for new manufacturing and agricultural-related plants, providing the equipment cannot be bought locally.

Agro-based industries will be given a 75 per cent first year allowance, he said.

"The essence of the policy measures have been to keep Pakistan attractive in the international investment market by improving the policy regime, offering fiscal and tariff relief," the state-run news agency, The Associated Press of Pakistan, quoted Sharif as saying.

The new investment policy calls for foreign equity investment to be at least one million dollars, with a minimum of 40 per cent of the equity to be held by a Pakistani company or individuals.

Long-term leases will be offered to investors and industrial zones will be established with separate areas for small and medium industries, the new policy states.

Meanwhile, Finance Minister Sartaj Aziz said Pakistan expects a six per cent growth in gross domestic product.

Despite the political turmoil, Aziz said Sharif's 10-month old government has restored business confidence, something that had been at a low ebb during Benazir Bhutto's term in office.

However in Karachi, businessmen were saying that the weeklong political tussle between Sharif and both the president and prime minister has weakened investor confidence.

"The crisis is breeding a lot of uncertainty ... reforms in Pakistan are linked to Nawaz Sharif and not to Pakistan," said Aliya Ehmar, research chief at the British-based securities firm, ING-Bearings.

Shipping Intelligence

Chittagong Port

Berth Position and Performance of Vessels as on 20.11.97.

Berth No.	Name of Vessels	Cargo	L. Port Call	Local Agent	Date of Arrival	Leaving
J/1	Hill Harmony	C. Clink	Dali	USTC	8/11	28/11
J/2	Selin-S(E/L)	E/L	Mong	OWSL	17/11	23/11
J/4	Olga (Prt)	Dap (G)	Sing	USTC	12/11	28/11
J/5	Pericles	GI	Sing	Prog	7/11	25/11
J/7	Alba Sierra	GI	Busa	Prog	4/11	26/11
J/8	Song Lin	GI	Dali	Prog	1/11	25/11
J/9	Sea Voyager	R. Seed	Fran	AASS	7/11	28/11
J/11	Jordan-II	Urea(G)	Long	RSA	24/10	24/11
J/12	Saigon-4	Fert(G)	Ruwa	CTPL	25/10	24/11
J/13	Kota Berjaya	Cont	Sing	Pil (BD)	10/11	22/11
CCT/1	Vanessa	Cont	Sing	RSL	11/11	20/11
CCT/2	QC Pintail	Cont	Sing	QCSL	17/11	24/11
CCT/3	Da Fu	Cont	Sing	APL (B)	13/11	23/11
RM/14	Ivan Pereverzev	GI (P. Mat)	Hust	Total	13/11	22/11
CCJ	Rattana Naree	C. Clink	Sing	RML	3/11	21/11
RM/4	Sheng Yuan	Cement	Peng	RML	R/A	23/11
RM/6	Nickolas	Cement	Sing	PSAL	6/11	26/11
DOJ	Banglar Jyoti	C. Oil	-	BSC	R/A	20/11
DD	Banglar Kakoli	Repair	-	BSC	R/A	30/11
DDJ/1	Tanary Star	Idle	Para	PSAL	-	30/11
DDJ/2	R. V. Sonne	R. Vessel Survey	Coch	Ancient	16/11	21/11
RM/9	Banglar Asha	Repair	-	BSC	R/A	24/11
SM/10	Tug Et Ocean-8	P. Mat	Sing	Total	6/11	24/11
KAFCO(U)	Tug Ocean Echo	P. Mat	Sing	MBD	30/9	[illegible]

Vessels Due at Outer Anchorage

Name of Vessels	Date of Arrival	L. Port Call	Local Agent	Cargo	Loading Port
Britoil-18	20/11	-	B. Bay	-	-
Kuda Nil	20/11	-	B. Bay	-	-
Banglar Moni 9/11	20/11	Sing	Bsc	Cont	Sing
Kota Bintang 12/11	21/11	Sing	Pil (BD)	Cont	Sing
Smit Lloyd-28	21/11	-	B. Bay	Survey Purpose	-
City Wave	21/11	Hamr	Litmond	R. Phos	-
Kekal Satu	24/11	-	Rainbow	GI (Wt. Cement)	-
Arktis Venture	21/11	Sing	Seacom	GI (Copra)	-
Trans Express	21/11	Ilyc	Litmond	Mop	-
Delta Freedom	22/11	Tuni	SSST	GTSP (Fert) (P)	-
Sincere Star	25/11	-	Prog	GI	-
Vasil Levski	23/11	Col	TSL	GI (St. Coil)	-
Ocean-1(48)22/11	24/11	Vize	Cross	GI (St. Coil)	-
Banglar Robi 9/11	24/11	Sing	BSC	Cont	Sing
Hafez (E/L)28/10	24/10	Mong	SSL	E/L	-
Xpress Resolve 16/11	24/11	Sing	RSL	Cont	Sing
Jiang Cheng	24/11	-	Bdship	GI	Chin
Eastern Hope	25/11	Sing	Everett	GI	/ -
Sin Hai 6/11	24/11	Sing	QCSL	Cont	Sing
Lhotse 17/11	25/11	-	RSL	Cont	Sing
Karin-B	26/11	-	Rainbow	GI (Copra)	-
Banglar Urmi	27/11	Kara	BSC	GI	-

Tanker Due

Dignity	20/11	Mina	MSTPL	HSD	-

Vessels at Kutubdia

Name of Vessels	Cargo	Last Port Call	Local Agent	Date of Arrival
Aspilos	C. Oil	Rast	BSL	15/11
Banglar Shourabh	C. Oil	-	BSC	R/A
Marlin	Cement	Yant	Jaycee	19/11
Ismaya	-	-	B. Bay	9/1
Orizont	-	Sing	B. Bay	25/2
Coral Reef Explorer	-	-	B. Bay	R/A (10/11)
Smit Lloyd-72	-	-	B. Bay	R/A (15/11)
Tug Britoil-08	-	-	B. Bay	16/11

Vessels at Outer Anchorage

Ready On

Great Power	GI	Mumb	JF	8/11
Optima	Cont	Col	Baridhi	13/11
Sea Elegance	Cont	Sing	Pil (BD)	16/11
Banglar Gourab	GI	Fang	BSC	17/11
Padma	Cont	Sing	RSL	17/11
Diligence Cont	Cont	Sing	QCSL	18/11
Marina Cathya	Urea	Sing	ANCL	18/11
M. Regina	Cont	Sing	Pil (BD)	19/11
Ultima	Cont	Mong	Baridhi	19/11
Sea World	Urea	Damm	CCNL	19/11
Xing Yang	Cement	Sing	USTC	19/11
Zarina-1	Mop (P)	Ilyc	Litmond	8/11

Vessels Not Ready

Tempest	Cement	Sing	HSL	22/10
Ontario Laker	Cement	Sing	PSAL	6/11
Alam Tanaga	GI (Peas)	Yang	Rainbow	6/11
Paraskevi M.Y.	Wheat (P)	P. Lan	LAMS	8/11
Jollity	Cement	Sing	RML	12/11
High Mountain	Cement	Kind	PSAL	13/11
Ocean Wisdom	Cement	Rizao	USTC	16/11
Great Best-1	Cement	-	USTC	R/A (13/11)
Osprey-1	Cement	Sing	USTC	26/10

Vessels Awaiting Instruction

Banglar Kiron	-	-	BSC	R/A (05/11)

Vessels Not Entering

Kommunist	Scraping	Sing	Simni	20/10
V.T.1	Scraping	Fuja	Simni	22/10
Voyager	Scraping	Col	Simni	15/11

Movement of Vessels for 21, 22 & 23.11.97

Outgoing		Incoming		Shifting
21/11				
CCJ	Ratna Naree	DOJ	B. Jyoti	SM/10 Tug Et Ocean to DDJ/2
DOJ	B. Shourabh	NB	B. Gourabh	
DDJ/2	R. V. Sonne	DDJ/2	Kuda Nil	
		CCJ	Osprey	
		J/10	Arktis	
22/11				
J/13	Kota Berjaya	DOJ	B. Shourabh	
RM/14	Ivan	J/13	Sea Elegance	
DOJ	B. Jyoti	TSP	Citi Wave	
DDJ/2	Kuda Nil			
23/11				
J/2	Selin	CCT/1	Padma	CCT/3 Da Fu To CCT/3
CCT/1	Optima	NB	D. Container	
RM/4	Shing Yun		Great Power	
		J/2	B. Gourabh	

The above were the shipping position and performance of vessels of Chittagong Port as per berthing sheet of CPA supplied by **HRC Group, Dhaka.**

Share prices mixed in Seoul, soar in Tokyo, Hong Kong

HONG KONG, Nov 21: Share prices in South Korea closed mixed on Friday with overseas investors buoyed but local investors gloomy about reports of an impending International Monetary Fund bailout, reports AP.

In Tokyo, shares rose in brisk trading. Hong Kong shares soared five per cent and Malaysia's index rose four per cent, but still ended 16 per cent down from Monday's close.

South Korea's Composite Index closed up 3.6 per cent at 506.07 points, a rise of 17.66 points.

There were conflicting reports about whether South Korea would seek IMF aid, with the deputy minister of financial policy division of the Ministry of Finance and Economy, Yoon Jeung-Hyun, telling reporters that the government would request the aid. He did not disclose the terms, and the size of the package.

But South Korea's finance minister, Lim Chang-Yuel, told reporters after meeting with an IMF official that he would "decide whether to ask for IMF assistance within two or three days."

Overseas buyers were optimistic, believing an IMF package — which news reports said may need to be as big as 60 billion dollars — will boost transparency and competitiveness.

But local investor worried stringent economic restructuring criteria would produce more corporate collapses.

The South Korean currency, the won, closed 7.9 per cent higher at 1,056 won.

In Tokyo, shares rose sharply after a dramatic week which added 11 per cent to their value.

The Nikkei average of 225 selected issues closed at 16,721.58 points, up 413.09 points or 2.53 per cent.

The market flip-flopped most of the week in response to conflicting reports about whether the government would use public funds to help restructure Japan's debt-burdened banking system.

The issue isn't settled yet, and analysts say it wouldn't provide any quick, painless cure for Japan's financial ailments. But investors are encouraged that Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto raised the topic.

"At least we're moving in the right direction in the sense of getting the discussion going," said Stephen Wood, a senior salesman at ING Baring Securities. What the market wanted, he said, was some sort of safety net that ensures Japan's financial problems don't escalate.

Hong Kong stocks soared as worries over interest rate rises receded. Strong gains on Wall Street and the solid performance of local banking giant HSBC Holdings PLC also lifted prices.

The blue-chip Hang Seng index closed at a week high of 10,548.20 points, a rise of five per cent, or 497.52 points.

The index opened sharply higher and strengthened its gains in the afternoon, rising as high as 10,602.50 points.

By the end of the day's trading, the index had erased losses incurred earlier in the week when investors sold, worried about a possible spill over from South Korea's financial turmoil into Hong Kong.

BANGKOK: Thai stock prices declined for a fifth consecutive day as foreign investors stayed out of the market pending a government decision on the fate of 58 suspended finance companies. Shares fell 0.59 point from Thursday to 421.59 points.

JAKARTA: Share prices fell 4.87 points, or 1.3 per cent, to 391.26 points, over concern over economic growth rates in the coming year.

KUALA LUMPUR: Shares in Malaysia rebounded on bargain-hunting to close at 23.47 points, or 4.4 per cent, at 560.09, but the index was still down 16 per cent from Monday's close of 667.29 points.

MANILA: Philippine shares closed down amid profit-taking, falling 23.08 points to 1,849.67.

SINGAPORE: Shares in Singapore closed modestly higher, up 1.39 points at 1,642.40.

SYDNEY: Australian shares close up 47 points at 2,482.7 on bargain-hunting.

TAIPEI: Stocks rose as currency instability worries eased and export orders in October posted a record high. The index closed 80.06 points up at 7,773.35.

WELLINGTON: New Zealand shares fell 5.65 points to 2,343.61, boosted by rises in Hong Kong and Japan.

Malaysia to set up economic action council

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 21: Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad said yesterday that the government would set up a "national economic action council" next month to restore confidence in the economy, reports AFP.

Speaking after an emergency meeting of the main party in the ruling coalition, Mahathir said the council would study "ways to reduce waste, increase productivity and exports, reduce imports, improve the quality of Malaysian-made products and control inflation.

"Malaysia is still facing serious pressure on its currency and stock market," he told a late-night news conference.

Earlier Thursday, the Malaysian stock market plunged 11 per cent as the local currency fell to an all-time low of 3.5250 ringgit to the dollar.

A 12-member Thai delegation of architects and engineers led by Kwanchai Phalajiuin, CEO of Bent Severin Group of Companies, which arrived in the city yesterday had a joint meeting with Sheltech (Pvt) Ltd and Appollo Holdings Ltd. The Managing Director of Sheltech Group, Dr Toufiq M Seraj, presided over the meeting.

Yen gains, mark falls against US dollar

NEW YORK, Nov 21: The dollar fell against the Japanese yen but rose against the German mark Thursday as traders sought to lock in profits from the yen's recent weakness and cheered news that Japan may use public funds to help troubled banks, reports AP.

Traders sold marks for yen to pocket gains from the German currency's four per cent rise against its Japanese counterpart in the past two weeks. The dollar also was sold vs. the yen after flirting with a five-year high Wednesday.

"We have traveled quite a long way in the last week or two ... and possibly a little too rich," said Lee Kassler, Vice President of foreign exchange at Israel Discount Bank in New York.

The mark's selloff against the yen helped the dollar gain against the German currency as well. The dollar also rose against the mark on worries about the potential weakness of Europe's planned common currency, which is to begin in 1999, said Pierce Atcheson, chief dealer at NationsBank in Chicago.

In late New York trading, the dollar was quoted at 126.03 yen, down from 127 late Wednesday. The dollar also was changing hands at 1.7413 marks, up from 1.7318.

In addition to profit-taking, the yen rallied after Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto instructed the government to start discussing the use of public funds to stabilise Japan's ailing financial system.

Other late dollar rates in New York, compared with late Wednesday: 1.4125 Swiss francs, up from 1.4034; 5.8285 French francs, up from 5.7955; 1,707 Italian lire, up from 1,696; and 1.4178 Canadian dollars, up from 1.4156.

The British pound was quoted at 1.6880 dollars, down from 1.6912 dollars.