

Strike at Mongla Port
4299 working hours wasted in four years

KHULNA, Jan 23: About 4299 working hours were wasted at Mongla Port due to strikes enforced by different labour and stevedore organisations in last four years, says UNB.

Port sources said Dock labourers observed strikes for 991 hours, casual labourers 909 hours and Stevedores Association observed 554 hours during the period.

They said Launch Workers' Association observed strike for 264 hours, Bangladesh River Labourers' Federation 552 hours, catering contractors 12 hours, Food Catering Contractors 36 hours, Jahaj Sramik Sangha 552 hours, Dock Sramik Karmachari parichalan Board Union 12 hours and Launch Owners Association 144 hours, causing a huge loss to the port.

Consumer price index rises in Singapore

SINGAPORE, Jan 23: Inflation is speeding up in Singapore, with a two per cent rise in consumer prices last year, up from a 1.4 per cent increase during 1996, the government said Friday, reports AP.

Every consumer cost category increased in 1997, compared to the year before, the Department of Statistics reported.

Transportation and communication costs went up the most, 3.9 per cent, followed by a 3.7 per cent rise in health care. Housing was up 2.3 per cent, and food by two per cent, mostly because of higher prices for cooked food, seafood and rice, the department report said.

Singaporean news media and government analysts have been tracking an increase in the number of citizens expressing a desire to emigrate during the past year. The high cost of living and a stressful lifestyle were the most common reasons given.

WHO finds no evidence of bird flu in China

BEIJING, Jan 23: A World Health Organization team found no evidence in southern China of the deadly bird flu, but said Friday it was too early to declare the outbreak over, reports AP.

The team of virus experts said given that six months passed between the first case in Hong Kong and the second, more surveillance was needed.

China's southern province of Guangdong, which borders Hong Kong, usually supplies about 80 per cent of Hong Kong's live chickens. Its legions of chicken farms have been considered a likely source of the avian flu virus H5N1, which has killed six people in Hong Kong and infected 12 others.

The WHO team recommended that for the next six months, China step up its surveillance of the population by five to 10 fold — drawing about 5,000 blood samples that could be tested for the virus.

"Although there have been no new cases in Hong Kong and no cases in Guangdong, we cannot... feel secure yet," said Dr. Daniel Lavanchy, a team member.

The WHO also suggested that China improve staffing and equipment for the surveillance programme.

Visits to chicken farms as well as hospitals and labs in Guangdong.

Yielded no indications that the source of the virus was in China, Lavanchy said. But he conceded that Guangdong, with tens of thousands of chicken farms, was too large for the team to be sure.

The WHO team's findings confirmed those of government officials, who have insisted all along that the disease has not been detected in China.

Hong Kong last week declared the worst of the outbreak over after barring chicken imports from China and slaughtering all chickens in the territory.

German trade surplus surges

BONN, Jan 23: Germany's trade surplus surged to 11.6 billion marks (64.5 billion US dollars) in the first eleven months of 1997, which was already a new record since the 1990 German reunification, the German Federal Statistics Office in Wiesbaden announced on Tuesday, reports Xinhua.

According to the latest figures released by the statistics office, Germany's exports in the first eleven months of 1997 totalled 80.9 billion marks (439.8 billion dollars), up 12.7 per cent from the same period of 1996.

Meanwhile, the country's imports also increased by 10.1 per cent to total 690.7 billion marks (375.4 billion dollars) during the same period.

Tokyo scraps fishing pact with Seoul

TOKYO, Jan 23: Japan scrapped a fishing pact with South Korea on Friday after talks to renew it deadlocked, threatening to send the often rocky relations between the neighbours to a new low, says AP.

South Korea attacked the decision as "an unfriendly act," and said it would allow its boats to fish freely in Japan's coastal waters.

The exchange added to lingering anti-Japanese sentiments in South Korea, which endured a harsh 35-year colonial rule up to Japan's defeat in World War II.

The two nations have been trying to delineate fishing areas that comply with the 1994 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, which allows a nation exclusive fishing rights within 200 nautical miles (230 miles, 370 kilometres) of its shores.

The countries are less than 400 nautical miles (460 miles, 740 kilometres) apart, so there are overlapping areas.

The treaty Japan shelved on Friday sets exclusive fishing rights within only 12 nautical miles (14 miles, 22 kilometres). That limit stays in effect, however, because the treaty is valid for a year after either side decides to abolish it.

Japan's decision has an-

gered Seoul particularly because of the perception that Tokyo is trying to exploit South Korea's financial crisis to get its way in the fisheries pact.

South Korea needs help from Japan — its largest single lender — to ease its financial turmoil.

Late last year, South Korea turned to the International Monetary Fund for help with its financial troubles and agreed to a record 57 billion dollar rescue fund.

The decision also comes at a difficult, transitional time for Seoul because it will be inaugurating a new government late next month.

"It's a very unfriendly act that Japan, as a neighboring country, has unilaterally abolished the accord because its excessive demand was not accepted," Foreign Ministry spokesman Lee Kyu-hyong said in Seoul.

Referring to South Korea as "a country with which Japan has one of the closest and most friendly relations," Japanese Foreign Minister Keizo Obuchi said Friday that Tokyo will continue "to work earnestly on the negotiations."

But South Korean Foreign Minister Yoo Chong-ha said "a cooling-off" period would have to come first before any talks can be resumed.

Yoo warned that Japan was responsible for the consequences of its decision. But he said his government has no plan to recall its ambassador to Japan in protest.

The issue has grown complex since Japan expanded its territorial waters last January and began seizing South Korean fishing boats that allegedly violated the new zone.

Japan says South Korean fishing boats are depicting fish in waters near its shores.

An eighth South Korean fishing boat was seized Tuesday by Japanese maritime police. South Korea has demanded its release.

"The Japanese action is not desirable for the future of both countries," said Chung Dong-yong, a spokesman for President-elect Kim Dae-jung.

"We believe that the fisheries accord is an issue that should be resolved through dialogue and negotiations, not an issue that can be resolved through forceful measures."

Another sore point in South Korean-Japanese relations is a territorial dispute over a set of islets in the Sea of Japan, called Takeshima in Japan and Dokdo in South Korea. The islets are surrounded by rich fishing grounds.

China sets new anti-corruption guidelines

BEIJING, Jan 23: Chinese leaders have set new anti-graft guidelines in what they describe as a crucial year in the fight against corruption, the official Xinhua news agency reported yesterday, says AFP.

The agency said the moves included curbs on lavish spending by officials for personal ends, efforts to alleviate the burden on farmers and severe punishment for offenders.

The guidelines were set at the second full session of the communist party's central commission for discipline inspection held in Beijing from January 20-22.

Xinhua said the session urged the whole party "to deeply understand the great significance of combating corruption in the process of reform, opening up and modernisation drive."

A communiqué called for leading officials to exercise self-discipline and for strict controls on the building and furnishing of office buildings and on meetings and celebrations.

Leading officials are forbidden to use public funds to hold banquets, install household phones or purchase mobile phones, and must use or change cars strictly according to regulations, Xinhua said.

The meeting, attended by top leaders including President Jiang Zemin and Prime Minister Li Peng, said the anti-corruption drive should focus on "increasing education of party members in the party spirit and improving the legal system to ensure the fight against corruption and for a clean government is carried out in an orderly way."

Cathay Pacific announces 760 layoffs

HONG KONG, Jan 23: Struggling Hong Kong airline Cathay Pacific announced Monday that it was laying off 760 people because of the financial crisis buffeting Asia, reports AP.

In a statement, Cathay said 1997 was a very bad year and 1998 shows little hope of improvement.

It said 460 of the staff to be laid off were in Hong Kong and the rest were based in other countries around the world.

"Just six months ago I would never have thought we would be forced to resort to such painful measures as this," said Cathay's managing director, David Turnbull.

But he also defended the action, saying: "We cannot just sit here and wait for the market to turn around and save us."

US universities offer help to Asian students

EUGENE, Oregon, Jan 23: The University of Oregon has agreed to defer tuition and offer emergency loans for students from Asian nations facing an economic crisis, reports AP.

SEoul: Share prices closed mixed, though declines in major blue chips set the index tumbling 2.8 per cent. The Kuala Lumpur's Composite Index rose 23.9 points, or 0.9 per cent, to 2,623.3.

SINGAPORE: Share prices closed slightly lower. The main Straits Times Industrials Index fell 9.6 points, or 0.8 per cent, to 1,259.83.

BANGKOK: Thai share prices closed slightly higher. The Stock Exchange of Thailand (SET) Index rose 2.07 points, or 0.5 per cent, to 422.87.

WELLINGTON: New Zealand share prices closed slightly higher, regaining all of the ground it lost early in the session on the back of a price rebound by Telecom Corp. of New Zealand. The NZSE-40 Capital

Index edged up 1.00 point to 2,245.92.

MANILA: Share prices closed lower for the third straight session. The Philippine Stock Exchange Index of 30 selected issues fell 3.54 points, or 0.2 per cent to 1,704.07.

SYDNEY: Australian share prices closed higher as investors snapped up resource stocks and selected industrial stocks.

The All Ordinaries Index rose 23.9 points, or 0.9 per cent, to 2,623.3.

SEoul: Share prices closed mixed, with the key index rising slightly on a rise in heavyweight blue chips. The Korea Composite Stock Price Index rose 2.87 points, or 0.5 per cent, to 486.86.

SINGAPORE: Share prices closed slightly lower. The Stock Exchange of Thailand (SET) Index rose 2.07 points, or 0.5 per cent, to 422.87.

WELLINGTON: New Zealand share prices closed slightly higher, regaining all of the ground it lost early in the session on the back of a price rebound by Telecom Corp. of New Zealand. The NZSE-40 Capital

Index edged up 1.00 point to 2,245.92.

MANILA: Share prices closed lower for the third straight session. The Philippine Stock Exchange Index of 30 selected issues fell 3.54 points, or 0.2 per cent to 1,704.07.

SYDNEY: Australian share prices closed higher as investors snapped up resource stocks and selected industrial stocks.

The All Ordinaries Index rose 23.9 points, or 0.9 per cent, to 2,623.3.

SEoul: Share prices closed mixed, with the key index rising slightly on a rise in heavyweight blue chips. The Korea Composite Stock Price Index rose 2.87 points, or 0.5 per cent, to 486.86.

SINGAPORE: Share prices closed slightly lower. The Stock Exchange of Thailand (SET) Index rose 2.07 points, or 0.5 per cent, to 422.87.

WELLINGTON: New Zealand share prices closed slightly higher, regaining all of the ground it lost early in the session on the back of a price rebound by Telecom Corp. of New Zealand. The NZSE-40 Capital

Index edged up 1.00 point to 2,245.92.

MANILA: Share prices closed lower for the third straight session. The Philippine Stock Exchange Index of 30 selected issues fell 3.54 points, or 0.2 per cent to 1,704.07.

SYDNEY: Australian share prices closed higher as investors snapped up resource stocks and selected industrial stocks.

The All Ordinaries Index rose 23.9 points, or 0.9 per cent, to 2,623.3.

SEoul: Share prices closed mixed, with the key index rising slightly on a rise in heavyweight blue chips. The Korea Composite Stock Price Index rose 2.87 points, or 0.5 per cent, to 486.86.

SINGAPORE: Share prices closed slightly lower. The Stock Exchange of Thailand (SET) Index rose 2.07 points, or 0.5 per cent, to 422.87.

WELLINGTON: New Zealand share prices closed slightly higher, regaining all of the ground it lost early in the session on the back of a price rebound by Telecom Corp. of New Zealand. The NZSE-40 Capital

Index edged up 1.00 point to 2,245.92.

MANILA: Share prices closed lower for the third straight session. The Philippine Stock Exchange Index of 30 selected issues fell 3.54 points, or 0.2 per cent to 1,704.07.

SYDNEY: Australian share prices closed higher as investors snapped up resource stocks and selected industrial stocks.

The All Ordinaries Index rose 23.9 points, or 0.9 per cent, to 2,623.3.

SEoul: Share prices closed mixed, with the key index rising slightly on a rise in heavyweight blue chips. The Korea Composite Stock Price Index rose 2.87 points, or 0.5 per cent, to 486.86.

SINGAPORE: Share prices closed slightly lower. The Stock Exchange of Thailand (SET) Index rose 2.07 points, or 0.5 per cent, to 422.87.

WELLINGTON: New Zealand share prices closed slightly higher, regaining all of the ground it lost early in the session on the back of a price rebound by Telecom Corp. of New Zealand. The NZSE-40 Capital

Index edged up 1.00 point to 2,245.92.

MANILA: Share prices closed lower for the third straight session. The Philippine Stock Exchange Index of 30 selected issues fell 3.54 points, or 0.2 per cent to 1,704.07.

SYDNEY: Australian share prices closed higher as investors snapped up resource stocks and selected industrial stocks.

The All Ordinaries Index rose 23.9 points, or 0.9 per cent, to 2,623.3.

SEoul: Share prices closed mixed, with the key index rising slightly on a rise in heavyweight blue chips. The Korea Composite Stock Price Index rose 2.87 points, or 0.5 per cent, to 486.86.

SINGAPORE: Share prices closed slightly lower. The Stock Exchange of Thailand (SET) Index rose 2.07 points, or 0.5 per cent, to 422.87.

WELLINGTON: New Zealand share prices closed slightly higher, regaining all of the ground it lost early in the session on the back of a price rebound by Telecom Corp. of New Zealand. The NZSE-40 Capital

Index edged up 1.00 point to 2,245.92.

MANILA: Share prices closed lower for the third straight session. The Philippine Stock Exchange Index of 30 selected issues fell 3.54 points, or 0.2 per cent to 1,704.07.

SYDNEY: Australian share prices closed higher as investors snapped up resource stocks and selected industrial stocks.

The All Ordinaries Index rose 23.9 points, or 0.9 per cent, to 2,623.3.

SEoul: Share prices closed mixed, with the key index rising slightly on a rise in heavyweight blue chips. The Korea Composite Stock Price Index rose 2.87 points, or 0.5 per cent, to 486.86.