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SANYO

The Daily Star

BUSINESS

DHAKA WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 28, 1998

HYUNDAI

CARS THAT MAKE SENSE

Import growth increases

The country's import growth reflected a 7.87 per cent increase in July-November period of the current fiscal compared to the same period of the last fiscal, Bangladesh Bank said yesterday, says BSS.

The bank said the growth took place mainly because of the opening of high volume of letters of credit (LCs) for import of industrial raw materials, petroleum and petroleum products during the period.

It said during the first five months there were 15.71 per cent increase in the import of industrial raw materials, petroleum and petroleum products compared to the corresponding period of the last fiscal.

The bank said letters of credit for the import worth Taka 11764.29 crore were opened by authorised dealer banks during July-November of the current fiscal.

'Economic situation in Pakistan improving'

ISLAMABAD, Jan 27: Pakistan's Finance Minister Sartaj Aziz said yesterday that the country would fully come out of the present economic crunch in the next financial year starting from July 1, 1998, says Xinhua.

"The economic situation has been improving and it will continue so provided the economic atmosphere in this region continues to be favourable," said Aziz while talking to the local media in Multan, a major city of Punjab province, according to the Associated Press of Pakistan.

Terming 1998 as a better year for the country's economy, Aziz said, "the government is trying to improve revenue recovery instead of relying upon new taxes."

He said that Pakistan will have to pay 150 billion rupees (about 3.4 billion US dollars) in the foreign debt servicing sector this year, and the amount of payment will increase every year with passage of time.

So it is vital for the country to enhance its domestic growth rate, he stressed.

Referring to various steps adopted by the government, Aziz said that the growth rate of the gross domestic product (GDP) in current fiscal year would be 5 per cent.

And the agriculture sector, which accounts for about 25 per cent of the GDP, is also expected to achieve a growth rate of 5 per cent, said Aziz. It is enough to avert the economic collapse, he added.

On the revival of the industrial sector, Aziz hoped that similar achievements would also be registered as a number of packages had already been introduced.

He also said that the deficit in the balance of payments had been reduced from 1.6 billion dollars to one billion dollars.

He expressed the hope that the situation would be further improved in the days to come.

UK urges Euro partners to keep door open to Asian imports

LONDON, Jan 27: Britain urged its European partners Monday to keep their doors open to cheaper Asian imports in order to support Asian countries as they accelerate the liberalisation of their troubled economies, says AP.

"Asia and Europe need to trade with each other more, not less," Foreign Office Minister Derek Fatchett said in a speech to the Economic and Social Research Council's Pacific Asia Programme.

Asian economies have been wrecked by a disastrous plunge in regional currencies and securities markets since last summer. Three of the worst-hit countries—Thailand, South Korea and Indonesia—have had to accept bailouts from the International Monetary Fund.

Europe has huge financial interests in Asia. In 1996 the 15-nation European Union exported 123 billion US dollars worth of goods and services to emerging east Asia, more than even the United States. European banks had more than 350 billion US dollars invested in Asia last year.

"The way European governments and banks have worked with Asia to assist its recovery I take as evidence of a new understanding that Asia's problems are our problems and Asia's opportunities are our opportunities," Fatchett said.

As the Chinese Year of the Tiger begins this week, he said, "we must look beyond the attention-grabbing headlines to recognise that these difficulties are not a sign of terminal collapse."

Europe's investments in Asia provide 'powerful reasons for Europe's close cooperation with Asia; and they are unaffected by recent events.

Europe must support the liberalisation of Asian markets, he said, "not by closing our own markets to their exports as they become cheaper, but by keeping our doors open."

Credit Guarantee Scheme shelved

The "Credit Guarantee Scheme" introduced with much enthusiasm in 1993 to encourage small investors, after four years of lackluster performance, has now been temporarily shelved for paucity of funds, says UNB.

According to sources, the Bangladesh Bank is not in a position to issue guarantee to any more new project under the scheme since no further funds are available against "guaranteed" loan.

During last four years,

Bangladesh Bank issued guarantee certificates to commercial banks against loans amounting to Tk 30.73 crore in favour of 201 projects since introduction of the scheme in December, 1993.

Sources said commercial banks started disbursement of loan against projects during the concluding part of 1994 and so far disbursed Tk 27.80 crore in dairy, poultry, fisheries and other small scale industries.

According to the original scheme, the government was supposed to make available an

initial fund of Tk 50 crore to the Bangladesh Bank against its guarantee to the projects. But the government made available an initial fund of Tk 25 crore only.

When the fund exhausted, the Bangladesh Bank requested the government to give additional fund to issue guarantee against projects submitted before July 1996, and the government provided another Tk 13 crore to the fund.

The central Bank is now issuing guarantee certificates on

a very selective basis against a huge number of project proposals lying with commercial banks. Most of these projects are unlikely to get Bangladesh Bank guarantee.

The default culture, which has eaten into the vitals of the country's banking sector, has also infected the Credit Guarantee Scheme soon after its inception.

The commercial banks could recover only Tk 1.69 crore against Tk 3.80 crore that had fallen due against project loans

under the scheme till December 1996.

The Credit Guarantee Scheme has been designed to provide collateral free project loan to the small investors. The Bangladesh Bank, after scrutiny of the project appraisal and other documents submitted by the concerned banks, will issue guarantee certificate.

But the Bangladesh Bank guarantee will not be more than three times of the equity of the sponsors of the project or Tk 50 lakh.

Two senior bureaucrats arrested

Japanese finance minister to resign over bribery scandal

TOKYO, Jan 27: Japan's embattled finance minister said Tuesday he will resign over a bribery scandal that has led to the arrest of two senior bureaucrats under his supervision, a news report said, reports AP.

Hiroshi Mitsuoka had been under heavy pressure to quit after the powerful Finance Minister was searched by Tokyo prosecutors on Monday and the two officials were arrested.

The finance minister met with Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto on Tuesday evening, and national broadcaster NHK reported that Mitsuoka agreed at that meeting to step down.

No resignation date was given. NHK said Mitsuoka would make an announcement later Tuesday at a news conference. A Ministry of Finance spokeswoman refused to comment on the reports.

An opposition group had called for Mitsuoka's resignation and boycotted a legislative committee meeting on the government budget and fiscal reform. Their absence Tuesday brought debate on bills there to a halt.

On Monday, ministry officials Koichi Miyagawa, 52, and Toshimi Taniuchi, 48, were arrested for allegedly telling banks in advance when the ministry would conduct surprise inspections in exchange for 10,000 dollar in winning and dining over four years.

The arrests followed a similar move last week when a former Finance Ministry bureau chief working for Japan's national highway corporation was arrested on charges of accepting entertainment in return for favours.

No bank officials have yet been charged in the latest case but prosecutors searched the offices of Dai-ichi Kangyo Bank, Sanwa Bank, Asahi Bank and Hokkaido Tokai Bank on Tuesday afternoon.

The arrests are part of a widening crackdown on collusion between government and business. Dozens of investigations from the Tokyo District Public Prosecutors' Office raided the ministry's bank in-

spection division Monday evening.

The Bribery scandal is another blow to the Finance Ministry, which has been widely blamed for failing to contain a bad-loan crisis that has weighed heavily on the nation's financial system.

Critics have pointed to poor oversight by the ministry in several recent high-profile failures among Japan's troubled financial institutions.

The report of Mitsuoka's resignation came hours after he vowed to weed out corruption in his ministry and work to regain public confidence.

"In order to make sure that this type of thing doesn't happen again, we will push through Finance Ministry reforms," he said. He didn't say what specific steps would be taken.

At a morning cabinet meet-

ing, Hashimoto had said the government would consider new laws to ensure public servants are fair and impartial.

Government spokesman Kaneko Muraoka said all top Finance Ministry officials will be investigated to see if there are others who may have accepted bribes.

Opposition politicians, however, had called for a bigger shakeup of the ministry.

"We will strongly demand Mitsuoka's resignation," said Yukio Hatayama, leader of a coalition of opposition political parties and the head of the Democratic Party of Japan.

The arrest of two acting ministry officials, there is no way the finance minister himself can avoid responsibility," he said.

Miyagawa, a senior bank inspector, was suspected of receiving dinners and golf outings worth 2.6 million yen (20,800 dollars) from Asahi Bank and Dai-ichi Kangyo Bank between 1993 and 1997.

Taniuchi, an assistant chief in the inspection department, allegedly accepted entertainment worth up to 2.2 million yen (17,600 dollars) from Sanwa Bank and Hokkaido Tokai Bank between 1994 and 1997, media reports said.

The ministry examined the banks to judge their financial health and root out wrongdoing. The inspections are supposed to be a surprise so banks don't have time to conceal evidence or hide losses before examiners arrive.

In addition to allegedly tipping off banks about when and where such inspections would occur, Miyagawa ignored evidence of unreported bad loans at Asahi Bank in August 1996, according to Kyodo News service.

He may have also ignored evidence Dai-ichi Kangyo gave shady loans to Ryukyu Kohke, an admitted corporate racketeer at the centre of a separate scandal that has tainted some of Japan's most prestigious companies, Kyodo said.

Dai-ichi Kangyo executives have been arrested in that case on charges the loans constituted an illegal payoff to Koike.



Anjan Chowdhury Pintu, Managing Director, Square Toiletries Ltd, presented an ambulance to the Pabna Municipality recently on behalf of Square Group Chairman Samson H Chowdhury. He is seen handing over the keys of the ambulance to the Chairman of the municipality Md Mosharraf Hossain. Member of Parliament Jannatul Ferdous and Vice President of Pabna Awami League M Syedul Haq Chunnun were also present on the occasion.

Dollar rises against major currencies

NEW YORK, Jan 27: The dollar, already on the rise Monday against most major currencies, got a lift when President Bill Clinton forcefully denied having an affair with a former White House intern, reports AP.

The dollar rose in early trading because of remarks by a German central banker amid speculation that the United States might become engaged militarily with Iraq over continued squabbling about weapons inspectors.

But Clinton's brief morning denial, broadcast live by major media, gave the dollar a kick that kept it climbing.

"The main factor is that world capital markets regained confidence in US capital markets today. It was a change in sentiment," said Jeremy Fand a foreign exchange specialist at Bank of Boston in Boston. "It's all Clinton. It's Clinton sentiment."

In New York trading late Monday the dollar was quoted at 126.85 yen, up from 125.57 Friday. The US currency also settled at 1.7956 German marks, up from 1.7774.

Last week, the dollar was buffeted when allegations surfaced that Clinton had had an affair with a White House intern, then wanted her to lie about it.

Over the weekend, there were numerous rumors including that the embattled Clinton would cancel the State of the Union message scheduled for Tuesday.

The dollar, having fallen to various lows against major currencies last week, initially was hit again as trading resumed Monday.

But traders said a Japanese finance official made comments interpreted as helpful to the dollar and a German central bank council member, Hans-Juergen Krupp, said the mark was well positioned in terms of purchasing power.

"They took the pressure off the dollar for the time being," said John Hazelton, chief currency trader at Manufacturers and Traders Trust Co.

Other late dollar rates in New York, compared with late Thursday: 1.4575 Swiss francs, up from 1.4413; 6.0143 French francs, up from 5.9755; and 1.771 Italian lire, down from 1.776. The British pound was quoted at 1.6551 dollars down from 1.6735 dollars.

Exchange Rates

The following are the Sonali Bank's dealing rates (BD Tk for one unit of Foreign Currency) to public as on 26th & 27th Jan '98.

Name of Currency	Buying		Selling	
	TT	OD	TT	OD
US Dlr	45.2800	45.1105	45.0110	44.8416
GB Pound	75.7621	75.4785	75.3120	75.0284
D Mark	25.6190	25.5231	25.4668	25.3710
F Franc	7.6512	7.6226	7.6058	7.5772
C Dlr	31.0479	30.9317	30.8634	30.7472
S Franc	31.5833	31.4651	31.3957	31.2775
J Yen	0.3575	0.3561	0.3553	0.3539

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