

Dhaka to get 183,000 tons of food aid from WFP

The World Food Programme (WFP) will provide 183,000 tons of food grains at a cost of Taka 170 crore to Bangladesh for sustainable food security and poverty alleviation programmes, WFP sources said here yesterday, reports BSS.

The said, about 85 per cent of the resources for rural development have been allocated to the areas with high and moderate food insecurity and will be channelled to the activities that support women.

The rural development project is expected to generate employment to some half a million people including 175,000 women, during January to May 1998, providing benefit to above three million rural poor.

The support programmes in the water development sector have been allocated 100,000 tonnes of wheat and Taka 20 crore for implementation of projects under Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB). The BWDB projects will employ some 200,000 rural people and in addition, some eight million people will be benefit-

ting from the rehabilitation and maintenance of 239 flood control embankments, drainage canals and irrigation schemes.

The WFP sources said, 27,000 tonnes of wheat and Taka eight crore have been allocated for the improvement, construction and maintenance of over 2,700 kilometres long growth centre connecting roads in collaboration with Local Government Engineering Department (LGED). An additional Taka three crore has been provided for construction of 120 bridges and culverts.

The forestry sector has been allocated 32,500 tonnes of wheat and Taka four crore. At least ten million trees covering 1000 acres of blocks and 8,000 kilometres along the roadsides will be planted under 493 schemes.

The sources said, 13,000 tonnes of wheat and Taka 4.5 crore have also been allocated for the fisheries sector for developing some 700 hectares of water bodies and increasing fish production by 1,500 tons.

AmCham chief tells BOI Identify specific areas to promote US investment

President of American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham) in Bangladesh Forest E Cookson has underscored the need for identifying the specific areas to promote US investment, says UNB.

Identify some specific sectors first and try to manage two or three big investors. Then many others will follow with their money, Cookson told the Board of Investment yesterday.

Board of Investment (BOI) arranged a meeting with AmCham at its conference room to discuss prospects and problems of US investment in Bangladesh.

BOI Executive Chairman Farooq Sobhan presided over the meeting. American Ambassador in Dhaka John C Holz-

man and NBR acting Chairman Saiful Islam Khan were, among other, present.

AmCham president said Bangladesh is now recognised in USA as an interesting place for investment.

But, he said, project oriented approach is necessary. We like to see growth in certain areas. We also want to see clear cut rules for investing in services sector like computer software.

Cookson stressed the need for expansion of American International School, ensuring security of American people and easy access to duty free shops as part of improving the living facilities.

Some 500 to 800 American families are expected to come here by next three years, he

said. Appreciating the BOI's steps, American Ambassador John C Holzmann said Bangladesh is advancing towards positive dimension for investment.

He suggested that the government's commitment to private investors is the best way to attract foreign investment.

Clear and transparent regulatory framework is also essential for the investors to take quick decision, he added.

Foreign Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) president AKM Shamsuddin suggested that regulatory rules in English be made available to them. He also pleaded for establishment of low cost high speed data transmission facilities within this

year. Other AmCham members who spoke at the function suggested creation of a network among the Bangladeshis dealing with US business houses for better interaction. They can provide improved technology, they said.

The members expressed concern over the widespread corruption. The problem of corruption must be addressed to attract investment.

Farooq Sobhan explained various steps taken by the government to promote foreign investment. He assured the AmCham members that their concern and suggestion would be communicated to the appropriate authorities.

Exploitation of Bangladeshi workers Malaysia urged to crack down on syndicates

KUALA LUMPUR, Mar 2: Bangladesh has appealed to Malaysia to crack down on syndicates believed to be raking in millions of dollars by exploiting Bangladeshi workers here, AFP quoting a report said.

"These syndicates are just coming for outright exploitation. Our request is that the government come down hard on them," Wajid Ali Khan Panni, Bangladesh High Commissioner was quoted as saying by Bernama news agency.

The majority of Bangladeshi workers in Malaysia, totalling about 300,000 are employed in the services sector such as petrol stations, supermarkets and restaurants.

Panni said that despite continuous efforts by authorities to crack down these syndicates, much tougher measures were needed to curb the problem.

He also said the current economic downturn has spawned a new form of exploitation. "Workers who are retrenched

or on the verge of retrenchment are promised new jobs elsewhere, and money is solicited for this purpose."

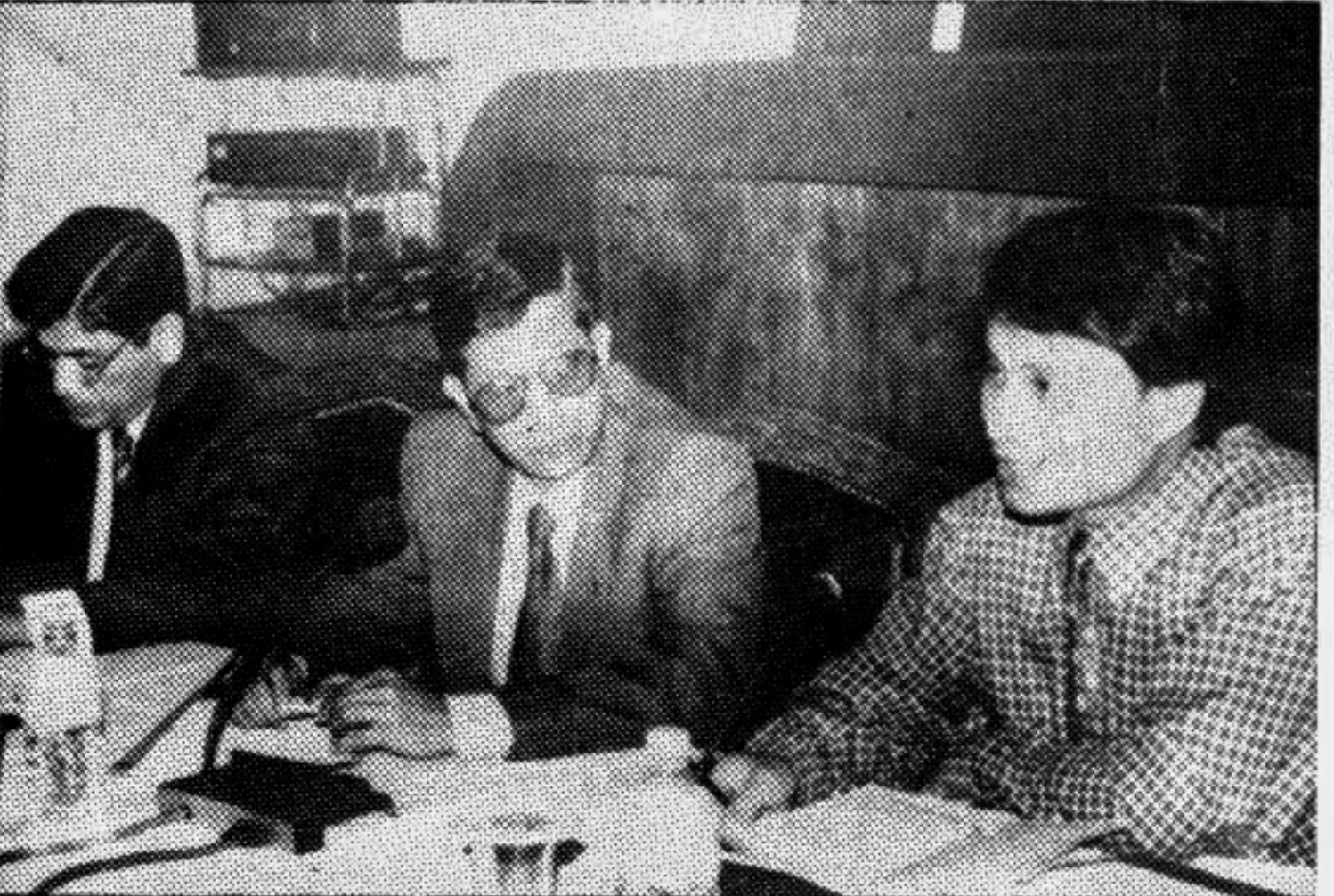
Panni said these syndicates, often led by Bangladeshis with permanent resident status in Malaysia, approach the workers with the pretext of finding them a job.

"And they take some money and cheat them. Sometimes they put them in some jobs which were not very good and again they take some money to find a better job," he said.

He also alleged that some employers abuse workers by denying them basic rights such as insurance coverage and health facilities.

He said there were cases of employers deducting money from the workers salary for levy to be paid to the government.

"Levy and permits are employers' responsibility," Panni said.



Vietnamese economist Nguyen Huy Hoang giving a talk on "Prospects of Bangladesh-Vietnam economic cooperation" at BISS yesterday. —Star photo

'Prospect of Dhaka-Hanoi cooperation bright'

Speakers at a discussion yesterday observed that the prospect of economic cooperation between Bangladesh and Vietnam is very bright because of their similar economic conditions and problems in the process of industrialisation.

These two developing countries can share their developing experiences as both are agro-based and trying to proceed towards rapid industrialisation, they said.

Vietnam emerged from a devastating war and made remarkable growth over the years through various reforms to towards rapid industrialisation, they said.

Hoang said the FDI is contributing a lot to create a strong base of economic development in the country. He suggested Bangladesh build more airports and develop transport facilities to attract FDI.

He, however, noted that there was no Bangladeshi investor in Vietnam as well as no Vietnamese investor in Bangladesh mainly due to lack of communication and exchange of funds.

To increase trade relations between the two countries, he said, Bangladesh can export more goods to Vietnam as there is a demand for Bangladeshi jute goods, ready-made garments and chemical fertilizer.

On the other hand Bangladesh can import rice from Vietnam as it has emerged as the second largest rice exporter of the world after Thailand," Hoang said.

Giving an overview of economic development in Vietnam, he said — a good number

of world famous companies rushed to Vietnam for exploring economic potentials following the liberalisation of its economy. "And now the flow of Foreign Direct Investment into the country reached 25 billion US dollars," he noted.

"The main attractions of foreign companies are cheap and skilled labour force," Hoang said adding that the country had a target for attracting another 25 billion dollars in foreign investment in the next decade.

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Duty-free import of generator for one year

The government has decided to extend the time limit for duty free import of generators by one year.

The decision was conveyed to the President of the Foreign Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industry, A K M Shamsuddin by the Executive Chairman of the Board of Investment, Farooq Sobhan during a meeting at BOI yesterday, the chamber said in a press release.

Meanwhile, the FICCI has hailed the decision saying it made a proposal in this regard to the Finance Minister last January.

The FICCI committee, in course of its meeting with the Prime Minister last month reiterated the chamber's proposal for extending the time limit for duty free import of generators at least by another year in view of the prevailing power crisis.

Iran ready to boost trade ties with Bangladesh

Iranian Construction Minister Mohammad Reza Saidi Kia, who arrived in the capital yesterday to lead the ministerial level JEC meeting, said Iran is eager to expand cooperation with Bangladesh in economic, technical and cultural sectors, rep. UNB.

"I am here to have a clear understanding of how to develop trade and economic cooperation between the two brotherly countries," he told newsmen on arrival at the Zia International Airport in the morning.

The Iranian minister is heading a 20-member delegation at the Bangladesh-Iran Joint Economic Commission (JEC) meeting.

The delegation includes Deputy Construction Minister Rasoul Lahjani and business leaders from the Iranian Private sector.

Replying to a question about the proposed oil refinery in Chittagong, Saidi Kia said a private Iranian company is working on the project. Since it is a big project, it may take some time for implementation, he added.

He said that the ministerial level JEC meeting will review the decisions adopted at the two previous JEC meetings and take follow-up actions to further expand the trade and economic cooperation.

The Iranian minister said one of the major developments of the JEC decisions was to establish the Dhaka-Tehran direct air-link introduced last November.

Finance Minister Shah AMS Kibria, who received the minister at the airport, said Dhaka is

BTC to change its name

Bangladesh Tobacco Company, a subsidiary of British-American Tobacco (BAT), has decided to change its name, subject to regulator's clearance.

An extra-ordinary general meeting of the company yesterday approved the change to British American Tobacco Bangladesh Company Ltd.

The change in nomenclature requires the approval of Registrar of Joint Stock Companies, following which a formal announcement would be made, a company source said.

Now acronymised as BTC, the company is now looking for a one that should be as communicative as the present one. The company management is not willing to call it BATBC as the new name suggests.

BAT holds roughly 66 per cent in the Bangladesh subsidiary, while Investment Corporation of Bangladesh has about 28 per cent stake. The rest is held by the government of Bangladesh, Shadharan Bima Corporation (2.9 per cent), Bangladesh Shilpa Rin Sangstha, Sena Kalyan Sangstha, and individual shareholders (0.8 per cent).

Saudi Prince due tomorrow to open Faysal Bank

Saudi Prince Mohammed Al Faisal Al Saud, Chairman of Al Faysal Islamic Bank of Bahrain EC arrives in the city tomorrow.

He will be accompanied by the senior management of the bank and its parent company, says a press release.

The Prince will inaugurate the bank's first branch in Bangladesh.

The formal inauguration of Faysal Islamic Bank of Bahrain EC will take place on Thursday.

Prince Mohammed is the son of the late King Faisal, and grandson of King Abdul Aziz Al Saud, the founder of modern Saudi Arabia. With a distinguished career as a pioneer in the development of Saudi Arabia's water desalination industry, the Prince has worked in the fields of economics, banking, education and culture. Prince Mohammed's efforts to implement Islamic doctrines and principles in these fields has led him to the establishment of Faysal Islamic Bank of Bahrain EC.

He is the founder and chairman of the Dal Al-Maal Al-Islami, a Geneva-based Trust with an authorized share capital of one billion US dollars and a paid up capital of 315 million US dollars.

Prince Mohammed has established the "Iman Foundation" or the Foundation of Faith, which operates some 60 schools in Saudi Arabia, and sponsored the translation and worldwide publication of Islamic literature.

Prince Mohammed is accompanied by the Vice Chairman of Faysal Islamic Bank of Bahrain, Sheikh Ahmed Salah Jamjoom, as well as two members of the Board of Directors of the Bank, Prince Amir Mohammed Al Faisal Al Saud and Sheikh Mohammed El-Khereiji.

Also in the delegation are Nabil Nassief, President and CEO of Faysal Islamic Bank of Bahrain and Muazzam Ali, Vice Chairman Dar Al-Maal Al-Islami.

Workshop on security at working place begins

A four-day workshop on health and security aspect at working place began at a local hotel yesterday, reports UNB.

The workshop was jointly organised by Japan International Labour Foundation (JILAF), and front organisations of international Confederation of Free Trade Union (ICFTU), Bangladesh Jatiya Sramik League, Bangladesh Jatiyaatabadi Labour Party, Bangladesh Free Trade Union Congress and Jatiya Sramik Party.

Presided over by General Secretary of Bangladesh Jatiya Sramik League leader Mojibur Rahman Bhuiyan the opening session of the workshop was attended by Director of International Labour Organisation Anisa Hassanein as the chief guest.

JILAF representative Dr Kawkami and SKOP leader Shah Md Abu Jafar also spoke on the occasion.

Some 32 labour leaders throughout the country are taking part in the workshop.

'Coming Indian govt should open up insurance sector'

NEW DELHI, Mar 2: India's Planning Commission yesterday said the country's incoming government should open up the insurance sector as "competition was a must for efficiency," reports AFP.

The Planning Commission, a panel of top bureaucrats responsible for preparing economic blueprint every five years, said domestic private sector companies should be allowed into the state-run sector.

India's insurance business is estimated to be worth six billion dollars a year. It is currently run by two state companies, one specialising in life insurance and the other in health and general insurance.

Many foreign insurance companies. Indians are estimated to spend on average around 1.7 dollars a year on insurance that compares with a almost 30 dollars in Thailand.

\$14m tax on Princess Diana's estate

LONDON, Mar 2: Princess Diana left an estate worth more than 21 million pounds (\$34 million dollars) in her will, lawyers said Monday, reports AP.

Inheritance tax amounted to 8,502,330 pounds (13.9 million dollars), leaving about 13 million pounds (21 million dollars), the law firm Lawrence Graham said.

Under the terms of her will, published Monday, the bulk of what remains of her estate will be held in trust for Prince William and Prince Harry.

Other beneficiaries are Diana's 17 godchildren and her former butler, Paul Burrell, who receives 50,000 pounds (\$82,000 dollars).

The Princess's wedding dress, her wardrobe and so-called intellectual property rights were left for charitable purposes or for the benefit of her sons. The intellectual property included copyright, trademarks and resulting royalties from the authorized commercial use of her picture or name, on mementoes, for example.

The gross value of her belongings was 21,711,485 pounds (35.6 million dollars). After payment of unspecified personal taxes, an estate of 21,468,352 pounds (\$32.1 million dollars) remained.



Bangladesh Express Co Ltd, a licensee of Federal Express Corporation, launched FedEx 10 kg and FedEx 25 kg Box at a function held at Sonargaon Hotel in the city yesterday. —Star photo

Fraud in Japan Stock investor sentenced to 12 yrs in prison

TOKYO, Mar 2: An Osaka court Monday sentenced a former high-rolling stock investor to 12 years in prison for fraud in a case that illustrated the speculative excesses of Japan's once flourishing "bubble" economy, reports AP.

The prison term for former restaurateur Nui Onoue, 68, was announced at the Osaka District Court, a court official said, on condition of anonymity.

Onoue, once reputed to be the largest individual stock investor in Japan, had been indicted on fraud and breach of trust charges involving 270 billion yen (2.14 billion dollars).

She was arrested in September 1991 on charges of colluding with a former manager of a local credit union to use more than a dozen fake deposit certificates as collateral for stock deals.

In an effort to cover major stock losses, Onoue used the certificates to obtain 2.8 billion dollars in loans, of which 1.8 billion dollars came from the Industrial Bank of Japan, a pillar of the country's financial establishment.

New executive director of BB

The General Manager of Credit Information Bureau of Bangladesh Bank (BB), Mohammad Nur Karim, has been promoted as executive director of the bank, says a press release.

Karim obtained his post graduate degree in Statistics from Dhaka University in 1966.

He joined the Statistics Department of the then State Bank of Pakistan in 1967.

He headed the Credit Information Bureau since its inception in 1992.

Sharp price rise exists in Thailand

Most Asian currencies strengthen

HONG KONG, Mar 2: The Japanese yen continued to strengthen throughout the week, buoyed by renewed hopes the government may deliver a stimulus package strong enough to lift the country's stagnant economy, reports AFP.

Elsewhere, the Indonesian rupiah strengthened but concerns surrounding plans to introduce a currency board persisted. Most other Asian currencies also gained, largely due to domestic factors.

JAPANESE YEN: The Japanese yen edged up against the dollar during the week, backed by growing hopes for Tokyo's next economic stimulus package. The yen stood at 126.7-73 to the dollar late Friday against 126.79-82 a week earlier.

The Japanese unit plunged into the 128-range to the dollar Monday amid growing concerns over the government's handling of its stagnant economy after the Group of Seven (G-7) financial meeting in London.

Finance Minister Hikaru Matsunaga rejected G-7 calls for Japan to do more to help kick-start its economy and help Asia recover from its economic crisis. The yen rallied to the 126-level later in the week with senior ruling party officials hint-

ing the next economic package would include more fiscal spending.

INDONESIAN RUPIAH: The Indonesian rupiah closed Friday at 8,706-8,794 to the dollar compared to 8,950-9,050 a week earlier.

SOUTH KOREAN WON: The won strengthened to 1,637 to the dollar Saturday from 1,655 a week ago as foreigners increased their portfolio investments, providing some breathing space amid the ongoing financial crisis.

THAI BAHT: The Thai baht appreciated slightly against the dollar closing at 43.05-20 compared to 44.70-90 a week earlier.

Analysts said strength in the baht was due to positive sentiment following cabinet approval for new strategies to deal with the economic crisis, in cooperation with the International Monetary Fund.

positive impact on the ringgit. Further gains were expected but market players would remain cautious amid continuing economic uncertainty in the region.

PHILIPPINE PESO: The Philippine currency appreciated by 1.3 per cent to close at 39.85 pesos to the dollar on Friday, from 40.36 on February 20.

AUSTRALIAN DOLLAR: The local unit closed at 67.45 US cents Friday down from 67.58 US cents a week ago. Analysts said a flood of official data due this week could how much damage the Asian economic crisis had done to the currency, and result in volatile trade.

There seems to be resistance at 67.60 US cents, but there appears to be some stop (loss or orders to buy) at 67.65-67.70 US cents, so if we do manage to get up there it may propel to 68.00 US cents," said IBJ Australia Foreign Exchange Manager Darrin Stewart.

Colonial state bank chief economist Craig James said the Australian dollar faced "a major test" on Tuesday when retail trade, building approvals, current account, and foreign debt are due.

gold price and an improving Japanese yen.

NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR: The New Zealand dollar closed Friday at 58.06 US cents, up from the 57.97 of a week earlier. Dealers said there were some bids at around the 58.08 US cent level.

TAIWAN DOLLAR: The Taiwan dollar settled at 32.100 against the dollar Friday, after rising 2.3 per cent over the week following the inauguration of the island's new central bank governor, Peng Hua-Nan, who was expected to take tough action against currency speculation.

The unit stood at 32.852 Monday and Tuesday rose to 33.752. The upward trend continued Wednesday and the unit moved to 32.551 and rose further Thursday to 32.200.

SINGAPORE DOLLAR: Despite sharply lower official growth forecasts for 1998, the Singapore unit closed firmer at 1.6235 to the dollar from 1.6360 the week before as investors acquired the currency ahead of the release of the national budget last Friday.

Exchange Rates

Following is the Monday's forex trading statement by Standard Chartered Bank, Dhaka. Central Bank USD/BDT Rate: Buying-BDT46.15/Selling-BDT 46.45.

Selling		Buying	
TT/OD	BC	TT Clean	OD Sight
46.5100	46.5500	46.1100	45.9350
76.9275	76.9937	75.3437	75.0578
25.7673	25.7895	25.2658	25.1699
0.3718	0.3721	0.3622	0.3614
31.9656	31.9931	31.2610	31.1424
22.8438	22.8635	22.4270	22.3419
28.9062	28.9310	28.2537	28.1464
7.6635	7.6701	7.5565	7.5279
32.9158	32.9441	32.1773	32.0651
5.8283	5.8333	5.7351	5.7133
32.0454	32.0730	30.8476	30.7305
12.9374	12.9485	12.1502	12.1041
6.0137	6.0189	5.9466	5.9240
12.4692	12.4799	12.1984	12.1521

USDollar Libor

TT DOC	30 Days	60 Days	90 Days	120 Days	180 Days
46.0150	45.7310	45.3520	44.9162	44.4425	43.3813

Buying		Selling	
Cash	Notes	1 Month	3 Months
46.05	46.60	5.68750	5.67969
45.90	46.50	7.51172	7.56250

Exchange Rates of Some Asian Currencies Against US Dollars

Indian Rupee	Pak Rupee	Thai Baht	Malaysian Ringgit	Indonesian Rupiah	Korean Won
39.30/39.40	44.006	42.93/43.20	3.6950/3.7050	8850/9050	1631/1635

Market Commentary
Trading in the local foreign exchange market gained momentum on Monday as international foreign exchange market resumed operation after weekend holidays. In the interbank market US dollar ranged between Taka 46.35 and 46.40. The call money rate remained soft and steady at the range of 7 per cent and 7.75 per cent.

The Japanese yen on continuing speculation that Japan will eventually take stimulus measures to boost its economy. These expectations also raised the Tokyo Nikkei Stock average which supported yen's gain against the US dollar. Dollar was weak against the Deutsche mark as a result of its weak rally against the yen. At 05:30 hours local time US dollar traded at 1.8067/72 DEM, 125.30/35 yen and GBP at 1.6513/1.6524 USD.