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DHAKA TUESDAY, JULY 21, 1998

**PM for increased use of computer technology**

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday underscored the need for spreading computer technology in the country to survive in the present day world of tough competition, reports BSS.

Termining computer a modern technology, the Prime Minister said in view of the country's present socio-economic conditions, the sector has a vital role to play in economic progress of the nation.

She was talking to the members of the Bangladesh Computer Society, who called on her led by its President Aftabul Islam at her office here.

The Prime Minister said, "While the world is progressing fast we cannot lag behind. We must catch up with the modern technology to survive."

She said English, mathematics and computer are complementary and as such computer technology is a combination of both artistic and scientific pursuit.

She laid emphasis on the need for training to make the computer technology more widespread. She also said the country needs more computers and trainers to train up the young generation.

Earlier, Aftabul Islam greeted the Prime Minister on behalf of the Society for withdrawal of import tax on computers. He also thanked the Prime Minister for declaring it a thrust-sector.

The Society lauded the Prime Minister for taking steps to popularise this sector and making efforts for identifying it as an export-oriented one.

**Egg-size blue sapphire to be auctioned**

COLOMBO, July 20: A precious egg-size blue sapphire found in central Sri Lanka will be auctioned later this week, an official said Monday, reports AP.

Buyers from Thailand, Japan, South Korea, India, United States and some European countries are expected to bid for the 880-carat gem on Saturday at Ratnapura, 70 kilometers (45 miles) southeast of Colombo, said AET Ellawala, chairman of Sri Lanka's Gem and Jewelry Authority.

Ratnapura is the centre of Sri Lanka's gems industry. The sapphire was found by Leela Dharmadasa, owner of a gem mine, earlier this month.

Ellawala refused to disclose the gem's reserved price.

**S'pore posts good trade figures**

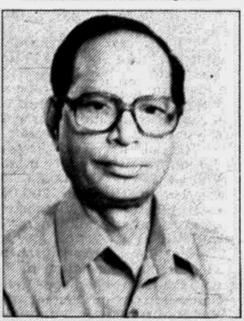
SINGAPORE, July 20: Hounded by increasing fears of recession and months of repeatedly poor trade performance, Singapore received some unexpectedly good news on Monday as mid-year trade rebounded, says AP.

Non-oil domestic exports, a key indication of overall economic performance, rose 6.1 per cent in June compared to last year, according to the Trade Development Board.

The growth ran counter to most economists' expectations of a decline for the month, raising hopes that the vulnerable Southeast Asian city-state may be able to resist an overall contraction this year.

The government board — a division of the Ministry of Trade and Industry — added that non-oil domestic exports for the first half of 1998 were up 5.1 per cent from the same period last year, when the economy hosted a 0.2 per cent increase.

**New Addl MD of Delta Life Star Business Report**



Delta Life Insurance Company Ltd has a new Additional Managing Director.  
He is Moazzam Haq. He will hold the current charge of the post of Managing Director. Prior to this present assignment, Haq worked as an advisor for Meghna Life Insurance Co.  
He joined Delta Life Insurance Co in 1988 as its Executive Director and held the post of DMD from 1996 to 1997.  
He is also a sponsor Director of Green Delta Insurance Co Ltd and Delta Medical Centre also.  
A sponsor Director of Delta Life, Haq has a diversified professional experience.

**Business leaders say**

**Small & medium enterprises face dozens of problems**

Business leaders representing various chambers and trade associations have pinpointed dozens of problems facing the small and medium enterprises (SME) and suggested measures to resolve them in the greater interest of the national economy, reports BSS.

Taking part in a policy related discussion in the FBCCI auditorium here yesterday, they said the larger portion of the industry sector's GDP contribution was being made by small and medium enterprises, thus playing a major role in the economic uplift so far.

But, they said the entrepreneurs of SME were not getting due cooperation from BSCIC or other similar bodies as well as banks for the further development of this potential enterprises throughout the country.

With FBCCI President Yussuf Abdullah Haron in the chair, as many as 20 participants gave their suggestions for the development of SME after pinpointing the existing problems.

Haron, in his introductory speech, said that the number of SME had been much larger than the big industries in the country. "We must give due attention as well as importance on this sector keeping in view the national economy," he said adding, small and medium enterprises are being regarded as backbone of industry in Japan.

Stressing the need for a thorough knowledge about the state of being of the SME in the country, the FBCCI president said that a policy decision would be undertaken on this sector and that would be placed before the government for future course of action.

In this respect, referred to several studies carried out by various research organisations and said the suggestions of the participants of this discussion would help a lot in formulating a policy decision for the government.

Chairman of BSCIC AHM Rezaul Karim said that BSCIC was providing promotional help towards the growth of SME in the country but this sector was facing various problems including lack of appropriate technology and working capital.

He said the SME could not give quality product due to such problem and emphasized the need for enhancing efficiency level to compete with the present open market economy. "We can not run our industries by harbouring inefficiency," he said.

In this respect, Karim suggested a total study on home demand of the products of SME and develop this sector in accordance with the needs of the people.

President of MCCI Laila Rahman Kabir pointed out lack of information, marketing and power for the present situation facing the small and medium enterprises throughout the country.

She suggested a provision for supplying power generator to these small enterprises for keeping them in operation regularly so that production was not hampered at any cost.

She also suggested the district level chambers and trade association to develop marketing networks for SME products throughout the country. "Such networks can also provide adequate information to the entrepreneurs for the sake of production as well as marketing," Mrs Kabir said.

Dr. Quazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmed, Chairman of Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad and an internationally reputed economist, suggested formation of a central level body which would provide basic information and develop marketing of the products of SME at home and abroad.

Before launching a central level body, Dr. Ahmed called for organising the entrepreneurs of SME at thana and union levels so that they could coordinate with others in an even manner for smooth supply of their products to various parts of the country and foreign markets.

Dr. Ahmed also said that the SME could generate maximum employment in the country to help import substitution as well as export expansion for the national economy.

In this respect, he suggested a deeper thought on the SME, particularly the agro-related and agro-processing industries, in the greater interest of the national economy.

Shafiqul Alam from Midas said small and medium industries were largely concentrated around Dhaka and Chittagong compared to other districts of the country.

He said lack of proper knowledge, collateral security, technical know-how, initiative from lending institutions, need-based idea and coordination would be responsible for the present situation in the SME sector.

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Yussuf Abdullah Haron (2nd-R), President of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, addressing a meeting on enhancing the growth of small and medium scale industries in Bangladesh organised by FBCCI at Federation Auditorium yesterday. FBCCI Vice-President Kazi Md Shafiqul Islam, Executive Committee Member Abu Alam Chowdhury, MCCI President Laila Rahman Kabir and FBCCI Executive Committee Member Maleka Khan are also seen. — FBCCI photo

**Malawi willing to follow Bangladesh's rural model**

Visiting Malawi Minister for Transport Kamangadzi Chambalo has expressed his keenness to follow the Bangladesh model for his country's rural development and transport management, reports BSS.

He said that he was amazed to see the beautiful roads, markets, schools and transport maintenance facilities being developed in Bangladesh. "This is a lesson for Malawi."

Hambaio was speaking at a seminar on "rural transport" at LGED Bhaban here yesterday.

The visiting minister said "we have a lot of scope to enrich the quality of our rural life taking lessons from Bangladesh's experiences and LGED models and implement those in our country."

Presided over by WASA Chairman Prof ATM Zahurul Huq, the seminar was also addressed by Chief Engineer of the LGED Quamrul Islam Siddique and Additional Chief Engineer Monowar Hossain Chowdhury.

Lauding Bangladesh's rural development especially the women's access to markets.

Chambalo said sustainable transport management along with a modern transport network can radically change the scenario of a country.

"Bangladesh can be a model for other African countries in this regard," he said the rural women of

Malawi produce huge quantity of coffee, cotton and groundnuts, but cannot market those due to poor transport system in Malawi which is frustrating the poor women, and the country loses a huge amount of money everyday as well.

Quamrul Islam Siddique said LGED model for rural infrastructure development in Bangladesh has been able to attract some least developed countries including Nepal, Laos and Malawi.

Termining LGED activities as successful initiative of the government with financial assistance from donors he said it will change the scenario of rural Bangladesh.

Monowar Hossain said road transport is the most dynamic area of transport development in Bangladesh he said LGED has taken up a pilot programme to improve non-motorized transport (NMT) especially with regard to design, safety and efficiency.

In his presidential speech, Prof Zahurul Huq underlined the need for a modern rural transport system.

He reorganized the company and restored it to profitability, and was named president of the re-named Bangchak Petroleum in 1985.

Sophon pursued a marketing plan which concentrated on rural areas and encouraged the formation of community organizations and cooperatives to distribute and sell Bangchak products.

As the government considers selling its remaining 80 per cent stake in the company, Sophon is in the forefront of a campaign to give Thai citizens priority over foreign investors in the ownership of Bangchak stocks.

MANILA, July 20: A Thai oil company president who helped rural community groups and cooperatives become gasoline dealers was named winner Monday of the 1998 Ramon Magsaysay Award for public service, reports AP.

The awards board cited Sophon Suphapong, president of Bangchak Petroleum Ltd., for encouraging these small groups to "own and operate businesses as affiliates of one of Thailand's major oil companies."

This helped rural areas benefit more from the country's rapid economic growth, it said.

After joining the Petroleum Authority of Thailand, Sophon, 52, was assigned to rehabilitate a debt-ridden state-owned oil refinery.

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China's exports, battered by the Asian financial crisis, grew by only 7.6 per cent in the first half of the year, compared with 26.2 per cent during the same period in 1997.

**Weak yen may hit China's growth**

BEIJING, July 20: The weakening of the Japanese yen could threaten China's economic growth on track in the second half of the year, but state media yesterday reaffirmed a pledge not to devalue its currency, reports AFP.

"The deterioration will make it very difficult for China to reach its goal of 10 per cent growth in export volume for 1998. The China Daily business weekly quoted a Chinese gov-

ernment economist as saying. This would make the government's task of stimulating domestic demand harder. Zhao Jinping, researcher at the State Council Development Research Centre told the paper, which blazoned the story across its front page.

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**Taliban shuts down int'l aid organisations**

KABUL, July 20: Taliban soldiers with automatic rifles shut down international aid organisations on Monday and ordered foreign workers to relocate to abandon dormitories or leave the war-shattered capital, reports AP.

The deadline for them has passed. We told them to move to polytechnic (institute dormitories) by Sunday," said Mullah Mohammed Nabi Majrooh, deputy head of the Taliban security department.

Majrooh led five Taliban soldiers to the offices of international humanitarian aid groups in Kabul, ordered everyone inside to leave and then sealed the offices.

"They are ordered to leave," he said.

empty since 1992 when Islamic insurgents swept the communists from power and opened fire on each other.

While the United Nations and the International Red Cross has been exempted from the relocation order, the UN loudly opposed the move. It sent a letter to Taliban leaders asking them to reconsider their ultimatum.

Aid workers also say they can't afford to rebuild the dormitories. They also fear for their security saying that it would leave them vulnerable to attacks and kidnappings.

But Majrooh said international aid workers have two choices: either relocate to the dormitories or leave Kabul.

"If they don't move and we see them on the streets in Kabul tomorrow (Tuesday) we will take action under our laws," he told The Associated Press. The deadline passed on Sunday but we gave them another 24

**Thai wins Magsaysay prize for public service**

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**World Energy Council study says S Asia needs \$ 125m per yr investment in power**

NEW DELHI, July 20: For the bulk of people in the three largest countries of South Asia — India, Pakistan and Bangladesh — life after sundown is spent in complete darkness.

The three are among the most "ill-lit" countries in the world, according to an expert.

"Two-third of the population of these countries are without electricity and in Asia almost a billion people were not being supplied electricity in any form," according to a paper by Hisham Khatib, vice-chairman of the World Energy Council. The paper says 72 per cent of India's rural population has no access to electricity.

"Asia has to invest slightly more than half the global investment in electric power system extension," Khatib says in the paper tabled during a seminar on Financing of Energy Sector in Developing Countries here. The Statesman newspaper reported.

The study says the worldwide investment in power would have to be in the region of \$2,800 billion between 1995-2010 or about \$125 million on an average per year for equitable power distribution. East and South Asia alone, according to the paper, would have to invest \$600 billion over the 15-year period.

Khatib's paper says that in 1998 India would produce 480 trillion watt hour (TWh) of electricity, much lower than the 1,200 TWh and 1,070 TWh that China and Japan were respectively expected to add to their existing production in the course of the year.

Demand per capita in Asia, according to Khatib's paper, is 1,250 kilowatt hour (KWH) — half that of the world average of 2,500 KWH. Asian nations, according to him, need a consumption of about 2,500 KWH to rise above the subsistence level and make some economic progress.

Khatib says in the paper: "Electricity demand growth would continue to be high and unequal to economic growth in

purchasing power parity. The growth could be as high as four to six per cent annually in most Asian countries (with the exception of Japan) and will continue with this average in spite of the recent economic slowdown in East Asia in order to feed the presently unsatisfied demand."

To quell opposition from the environmental lobby to big power projects, Khatib suggests that electricity generating units invest in emission control technology, emphasis be given on efficient production as well as usage and cleaner fuels be used wherever possible.

— India Abroad News Service

**Islami Bank micro investment up by 22.39 pc**

Islami Bank Bangladesh Limited disbursed Tk 152.70 crore under its micro-investment schemes during 1997-98 up from 124.93 crore in 1996-97, says a press release of the bank issued in Dhaka yesterday.

The growth rate is 22.39 per cent. The bank also investment of 78.28 crore during 1995-96.

It may be mentioned that during 97-98, the micro-investment of the total investment of the bank in 1996-97 the rate was 8 per cent accounted for 10 per cent while in 1991-1992 it was only 0.51 per cent.

The maximum amount of investment is Tk 75,000 per client and it aims at improving in the quality of life making the unemployed youths self-reliant, income-generation and poverty alleviation leading to economic development of the common people.

Islami Bank introduced the micro-investment through a few welfare-oriented investment schemes, they are household durables schemes, small business investment scheme, rural development scheme, agricultural investment scheme and small transport investment scheme.

**Japan mulls over waiving ban on loans to Myanmar**

TOKYO, July 20: Japan is considering lifting a 10-year ban on loans to Myanmar for humanitarian projects because the sanction has not helped improve human rights in the country, a newspaper reported Monday, says AP.

The change could come as early as this fall, said the Yomiuri, Japan's largest newspaper, quoting unidentified government sources. The move would leave intact, however, a ban on non-humanitarian loans, the report said.

Officials at Japan's Foreign Ministry were unavailable for comment.

Japan suspended the loans following the 1988 military crackdown by the government of Myanmar, also known as Burma on a pro-democracy movement.

The report said the government was reconsidering the freeze because it was seen as having been ineffective in ending human rights abuses in Myanmar or helping bring about free elections.

Japan was now considering a two track approach of pressing the Myanmar government to improve human rights and also helping improve living standards by resuming loans, the Yomiuri quoted the sources as saying.

Resuming such assistance could stir opposition from pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi and Western nations, which

want tougher economic sanctions because of the poor human rights record of Myanmar's military government.

Japan expressed concern last week over increased tension between the Myanmar government and the opposition National League for Democracy headed by Suu Kyi, winner of the 1991 Nobel Peace prize.

The league overwhelmingly won 1990 general elections but its legislators were never allowed to take their seats. They have been put under tight restriction in recent weeks by the military government.

**Vietnam's exports to ASEAN members drop 31 pc**

HANOI, July 20: Vietnam's exports to other members of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) from January through June dropped 31 per cent from the same period last year, reports Xinhua.

The Vietnamese trade ministry said in its latest report that the financial crisis sweeping through the region since last July had curbed its exports to ASEAN countries. As currencies of countries in the region were devalued.

Vietnamese commodities have hardly been able to compete in the ASEAN markets, the ministry said.

**Mannan calls for ending industrial disputes**

Labour and Manpower Minister, M A Mannan, has called upon all to help the government create a congenial atmosphere for capital investment by reducing industrial disputes, reports BSS.

"Industrial development is the real development of the country," he said adding we would be able to establish ourselves as a worthy nation in the world if disputes in industries were removed.

He was addressing as the chief guest the inaugural ceremony of a three-day national workshop aimed at efficiency development on arbitration for labour jointly organised by ILO and the Ministry of Labour on Sunday.

Held at Purbani Hotel, the function was also addressed by Jute Secretary Mahfuzul Islam as a special guest.

Presided over by Labour and Manpower Secretary Mohammad Ahsan Ali Sarkar, it was also addressed by Director of ILO in Dhaka, M A Hasnain, President of Bangladesh Employers Association Rokeya A Rahman and Chairman of National Coordination Committee for Worker Education Shafiqur Rahman Majumder.

The labour minister said the expansion and progress of any industry depend on good relations between the employer and the employee as they consider to be same members of a family.

**Price of US farm produce falls**

WASHINGTON, July 20: While a heat wave bakes fields in the southern United States, farmers in the northwest are hit by too much rain, low prices for their crops and a disease blighting their wheat, reports AFP.

Urged on by members from the western grain states, the US Senate voted Thursday to provide 500 million dollars in compensation to farmers who have been worst affected by the crisis, particularly in north and south Dakota and Minnesota.

The farmers' biggest problem is the fall in prices for their crops.

In Minnesota, the average price for wheat fell from 5.60 dollars a bushel at the end of June 1996 to 3.25 dollars at the end of June this year.

The price of corn fell from 4.50 dollars a bushel to 1.92 dollars during the same.

During the debate, a number of Democratic Senators also criticised a 1996 law that is progressively eliminating subsidies to farmers while giving them more flexibility in deciding which crops to grow.

**Thai sugar exports drop**

BANGKOK, July 20: Thailand's sugar exports to most of its Asian customers dropped off sharply in this year's first five months because of the region's economic crisis, the government's Office of Cane and Sugar Board said Monday, reports AP.

Thailand is one of the top sugar exporters in the world. Sugar exports to Indonesia, Thailand's largest customer, totaled 808,750 metric tons from January to May, compared to 915,900 tons for the same period last year, a decline of 22.6 per cent.

Exports to South Korea, the second major importer, registered a drop of 77.4 per cent, to 116,255 tons from 515,317. Sugar exports to Malaysia dropped by 72.5 per cent, from 260,050 tons to 71,510.

**Emirates starts flights to Peshawar**

Emirates launched twice weekly non-stop service to Peshawar in Pakistan.

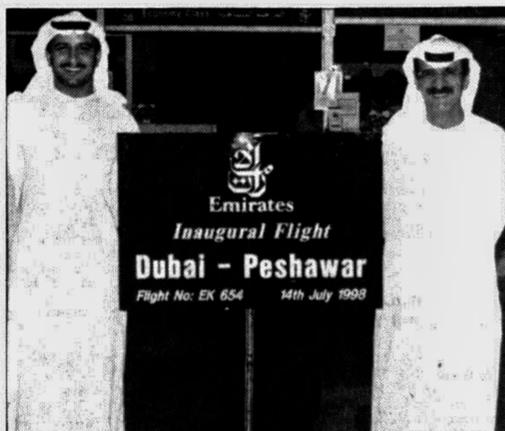
The first flight left Dubai International Airport on Tuesday, says a press release.

Emirates' service follows the recent conclusion of a memorandum of understanding between the civil aviation authorities of Pakistan and Dubai.

It includes an agreement for Emirates to operate a total of nine flights to the northern airports of Peshawar, Islamabad and Lahore.

Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum, Emirates' Chairman and President of Civil Aviation Department of Civil Aviation said: "We are grateful to the government of Pakistan and the civil aviation authorities for their open approach to air services, making this milestone a reality."

With this, Emirates now enjoys access to the north of Pakistan.



Ghaith Al Ghaith, Emirates' Commercial Operations Director and Mohammed Alkhaja, Director of Group Safety, Training and Standards who accompanied the inaugural flight to Peshawar, are seen before departure of the flight. Peshawar is Emirates' 45th destination. — Emirates photo