

# BJP govt running out of time on economic front

By Paranjay Guha Thakurta

NEW DELHI, Dec 27: The stormy winter session of the Indian Parliament concluded with the government making very little headway on its legislative business. At least three crucial economic bills had to be deferred and could not be enacted into law.

These bills are aimed at doing away with the government's monopoly on the insurance business and allowing foreign investors to enter the arena; providing exclusive marketing rights to holders of international patents on food and agro-chemical products; and enabling companies to buy back their own shares.

Meanwhile, Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha, who appears to be a beleaguered man these days, acknowledged that the fiscal deficit as a proportion of gross domestic product (GDP) would exceed the 5.6 per cent target set in his June 1 budget.

Speaking at a function organised by the Punjab, Haryana, Delhi Chamber of Commerce, Sinha took umbrage at the chamber chief claiming that the fiscal deficit would touch seven per cent of GDP during the current financial year. Sinha said such statements undermined the government's efforts to boost business confidence. At the same time, he conceded that the deficit was "under pressure" on account of low collections of indirect taxes. In particular, collections of excise duty on manufactured products have fallen way below expectations as industrial production in the first half of the fiscal year (April-October) grew by a niggardly 3.6 per cent against 6.2 per cent in the corresponding period of the previous year.

In the manufacturing sector, only two segments — computers and pharmaceuticals — have performed well. The worst per-

formers are steel and cement, demand recession having hit both industries pretty badly. In addition, steel manufacturers are reeling under high inventories apparently on account of cheap imports. Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's grandiose plan to construct six-lane highways to criss-cross the country — which could boost steel and cement demand — is still in limbo with the detailed financing modalities yet to be worked out.

The government's supporters are arguing that the country's economic problems are a consequence of a "cyclical slowdown" in the world economy. They add that even if the real rate of growth of GDP in the year ending March 1999 is somewhere between 4.5 per cent and 5 per cent — the official projection is still 6 per cent — India would not have performed all that badly since the world economy is expected to grow by only 2 per cent during calendar year 1998. That is, however, small consolation for a country whose GDP went up in real terms by 7.5 per cent in 1996-97 and by nearly 5 per cent during the following 12 months.

More than the financial meltdown in Southeast Asia and the fall in the unit value of commodity exports from India, what has upset the government's calculations is the fall in the projections of agricultural output on account of floods and adverse weather conditions. Be-

tween 1996-97 and 1997-98, total agricultural production came down by as much as 2 per cent and foodgrain output fell by 2.5 per cent. There were expectations that agricultural output would bounce back by 4 per cent this fiscal year, but the latest data point towards a rise in crop output by 3 to 3.5 per cent. In other words, the actual rise would be only 1 to 1.5 per cent which would hardly raise agricultural incomes which, in turn, creates new demand for industrial products.

On the corporate front, there is a lot of activity in the automobile industry. With a host of new manufacturers entering the fray, market leader Maruti Udyog Limited (a joint venture between the Indian government and Japan's Suzuki Motor Company) is getting reconciled to a drop in its currently formidable share of over 80 per cent of the country's market for passenger cars.

The Tata group has announced the launch of its new indigenous small car model, the Indica. The Tata group is also in the process of consolidating its holding in various associate and group companies. For historical reasons, government-controlled financial institutions in India are the major shareholders in large privately-managed corporate enterprises. Hence, the quip that there was little private about the country's private sector.

— India Abroad News Service

## S'pore to lower port handling charges

SINGAPORE, Dec 27: Freight handling and storage charges in Singapore, one of the world's busiest ports, are likely to fall in line with government initiatives to lower port costs, a newspaper reported Sunday.

The Singapore Freight Forwarding Association, which represents more than 210 members, will review its price guidelines shortly, said the report.

Private freight forwarders will probably lower labour, transport and warehousing fees as soon as the government-linked port operator, PSA Corp., unveils further details of the latest round of rebates, said The Sunday Times.

Last month, the government announced a 20 per cent cut in port dues for 1999 as part of wide-ranging measures to lower business costs to boost competitiveness.

Together with a similar move in July, the government

rebates total 46 million Singapore dollars (\$28 million).

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The imminent reduction of port-related costs by government and private handlers comes after shipping charges for smaller quantities of goods have dropped below the cost of local handling and storage charges, the report said.

While many port charges in Singapore have been traditionally higher than its regional competitors, the small city-state has continued to attract customers to its efficient, perennially busy port.

## Exchange Rates

StanChart foreign exchange rates (indicative) against the Taka clients. Effective on Sunday, December 27, 1998				
Central Bank USD/BDT Rate: Buying - BDT 48.35/Selling - BDT 48.65				
Selling	Currency	TT Clean	OD Sight Doc	OD Transfer
TT/OD	BC	TT Clean	OD SIGHT	OD
TT/OD	BC	TT Clean	DOC	TRANSFER
48.7100	48.7500	USD	48.3150	48.1549
81.6526	81.7196	GBP	80.0000	79.7349
29.1067	29.1306	DEM	28.6057	28.5109
0.4215	0.4219	JPY	0.4108	0.4095
35.6536	35.6829	CHF	34.9551	34.8393
25.8148	25.8360	NLG	25.3969	25.3127
29.5840	29.6086	SGD	28.9919	28.9355
8.6696	8.6867	FRF	8.5340	8.5057
31.6093	31.6353	CAD	30.9315	30.8290
6.0780	6.0800	SEK	5.9765	5.9567
30.1758	30.2006	AUD	29.0132	28.9170
57.8188	57.8663	ECU	55.4415	55.2577
6.2978	6.3029	HKD	6.2228	6.2091
13.0223	13.0330	SAR	12.8446	12.8020

StanChart foreign exchange rates (indicative) against the Taka clients.

Effective on Sunday, December 27, 1998

Usance Export Bills

TT DOC 30 days 60 days 90 days 120 days 100 days

48.2154 47.9179 47.5208 47.0641 46.5677 45.4558

Exchange rates of some Asian currencies against US dollar.

Indian Rupee Pak Rupee THAI BAHT Mag. Rngt Indo. Rupiah Sing. Dollar

42.528/ 51.45/ 36.29/ 3.79/ 7750/ 1.6540/

42.535/ 51.55/ 36.29/ 3.80/ 7650/ 1.6550/

US dollar

Buying Selling 1 Month 3 Months 6 Months 2 Months

Cash notes 48.15 48.75 USD 5.6175 525 5.11031 5.06031

T C 48.1 48.7 GBP 6.50825 6.35641 6.04594 5.745

## Market commentary

On Sunday, demand for US dollar was steady although sluggishness prevailed in the local forex market. Activities in the interbank market have slowed down mainly due to Ramadan. The international market still remains thin after Christmas. In the interbank market, US dollar traded between BDT 48.6500 and BDT 48.6510. In the last auction of the year, Bangladesh Bank accepted Treasury Bills worth of BDT 4340 million for 28-day at an average rate of 8.11 per cent and BDT 310 million for 91-day at an average rate of 8.95 per cent. The call money market was in a lackluster and the call rate ranged between 7.00 and 7.50 per cent. The banks offered one unit of US dollar to the importers at BDT 48.7500 and purchased a unit of the same from the exporters at BDT 48.1500. The international markets are yet to resume after the weekend and Christmas holidays. At New York closing on Thursday, dollar traded at 1.6810/15 against DEM, 11.655/6.60 against Yen and GBP traded at 1.6718/28 against US dollar.

## Shipping Intelligence

### Chittagong Port

Berth Position and Performance of Vessels As On 27.12.98.

Berth No	Name of Vessels	Cargo	L Port Call	Local Agent	Date of Arrival	Leaving
J/2	Orange Moon	Vehi	P Kel	BBA	23/12	27/12
J/3	Lynx	Wheat (P)	Mars	Rainbow	15/12	27/12
J/5	Sea Phontic	Wheat (P)/Gl	Vans	AASS	14/12	31/12
J/6	Hal Nan No 1	C.Clink	Sing	MBL	9/12	
J/7	Xia Men	Gl	Sang	BDShip	11/12	29/12
J/8	Ken Pan	Wheat (G)	Norl	OWSL	9/12	29/12
J/9	Banglar Shobha	Wheat (G)	K Dia	BSC	R/A	30/12
J/11	Golden D	Wheat (G)	K Dia	Frank	R/A	28/12
J/12	Meghna	Cont	Sing	BDShip	17/12	27/12
J/13	Jurong Balsam	Cont	Sing	NOL	20/12	28/12
CCT/1	Manash	Cont	Sing	RSL	21/12	29/12
CCT/2	Richmond	Cont	P Kel	QCSL	20/12	29/12
RM/14	Al Swamruz	C.Clink	Cica	ASLL	30/11	27/12
CCJ/1	Al Quamar	C.Clink	Taje	PSAL	12/12	31/12
GSJ	Yick Hua	Wheat (G)	Rouen	Ancient	19/12	28/12
TSP	Suthathip Narce	Repair	Ham	Move	10/12	30/12
RM/6	Mingzhou-3	Urea	Sing	Seacom	13/12	30/12
DDJ/1	Tanary Star	Idle	P Kel	PSAL	10/12	31/12
DDJ/2	Seabulk Command	-	K Dia	IBS	R/A	24/12
RM/8	Al Muztoba	Repair	-	CLA	R/A	31/12
RM/9	Banglar Mamata	Repair	-	BSC	R/A	24/12
Kafco(U) Ap Anand	-	Urea	-	MHL	R/A	25/12

### Vessels Due at Outer Anchorage

Name of Vessels	Date of Arrival	L Port Call	Local Agent	Cargo Loading Port
Xing Ye	30/12	-	-	Rice (G)
Banglar Shukha (Cont)	13/12	Sing	BSC	Gl Cal
Pulau Mawar	29/12	Sing	QCSL	Cont Sing
Devlan	27/12	Mong	LAMS	-
Great Fortress	28/12	Turk	OWSL	Vehi
Bunga Mas Enam (Cont)	20/12	Sing	EOSL	Cont Sing
Sunsin	29/12	Col	Litmond	Mop
A A Venture	2/1	-	-	CLARiceP/Gl
Coral Trader	28/12	Sing	AASSriceP/Gl	-
Q Pinail (Cont)	17/12	Sing	QCSL	Cont Sing
Banga Biraj (Cont)	17/12	Sing	Bdship	Cont
Sin Hai (Cont)	8/12	Sing	RSL	-
Prima Cynthia	29/12	-	RML	Gl
Ever Chear 24/12	31/12	-	SSL	Gl
Jaami	29/12	Cal	Royal Rice (G)	-
Min Jiang	31/12	-	BDShip	Gl
Kim Dong	31/12	-	MSL	Rice
Song Ling	30/12	-	BDShip	Gl
Banga Birol (Cont)	10/12	Sing	SSL	Gl
Shinhan 24/12	31/12	-	BDShip	Cont Sing
Budi Aman (Cont)	21/12	1/1	Sing	RSL
Makassar Express (Cont)	21/12	1/1	Sing	Baridhi
Kota Cahaya (Cont)	22/12	1/1	Sing	Pil (BD)