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The Daily Star BUSINESS

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DHAKA, SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 1999

Two-day Governing Council meet ends

Kibria for including poverty, food issues in IFAD agenda

ROME, Feb 9: Finance Minister Shah A M S Kibria today emphasised that the agenda of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) must include the basic issues of food availability, entitlement, nutrition, poverty alleviation and raising farm income on a long-term basis in its vision for the twenty-first century, says BSS.

Kibria was making concluding speech as the Chairman of the twenty-second session of the Governing Council of IFAD here.

The two-day session was participated by 130 countries at ministerial level.

He said about 21 years ago a sense of crisis about the adequacy of global food supply led to the establishment of IFAD. Mankind felt threatened and IFAD was a response to threat of widespread hunger.

Kibria wondered if member states, especially the developed ones, viewed the situation with an equal sense of urgency and seriousness.

He further observed that the Asian and African countries

struggling to ensure a good harvest to avert food shortage do not feel any complicity about the situation.

The finance minister mentioned that food availability, entitlement and nutrition are still issues of the higher priority in Bangladesh. He further observed that poverty alleviation and raising farm income on a long-term basis are goals which will remain unattainable for many countries if there is a slackening of effort on the part of the global community.

Kibria said Bangladesh had made much headway in last few years but a lot more remains to be done.

The two-day session was addressed, among others, by Sergio Mattarella, Vice-President of the Italian Council of Ministers, Catherine Bertini, Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP), Fawzi H Al-Sultan, President of IFAD, David Harcharik, Deputy Director-General of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and Staffan De Mistura, the representative of the United Nations Secretary-General.

Meanwhile, Kibria had an exclusive meeting with Fawzi H Al-Sultan, President of IFAD. They reviewed the IFAD-assisted projects in Bangladesh and discussed the prospects of taking up more IFAD-funded projects in different sectors of the economy.

Kibria indicated that Bangladesh needed additional amount of concessional loans from IFAD, particularly in the rehabilitation activities that are being implemented in Bangladesh after the recent floods.

Bangladesh Ambassador to Italy, Mohammad Zamir, joined the meeting.

The president of IFAD assured the minister that he would take all possible measures to assist the government in poverty alleviation and in its current rehabilitation work in particular.

Another report says: The finance minister also met Catherine Bertini, Executive Director of WFP.

They reviewed WFP operations in Bangladesh, particularly in the context of the recent devastating floods.

They also discussed future plans of WFP in providing further food assistance and rebuilding the flood-affected economy.

Bertini lauded the Bangladesh government for efficient management of the flood crisis, particularly the transparent and proper distribution of food relief.

Kibria thanked WFP and Bertini for their timely response to the needs of Bangladesh in overcoming the flood situation.

Bertini informed that a high-powered WFP team comprising executive board members will visit Bangladesh soon.

SAARC summit on new millennium in Nepal today

A day-long socioeconomic summit "Strategy for the New Millennium" begins in Kathmandu today (Saturday) with participants from SAARC countries, reports UNB.

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala of Nepal is expected to inaugurate the meeting aimed at exploring strategies to be followed for the socioeconomic advancement of the South Asian nations.

Ministers, business leaders and other dignitaries from the SAARC countries are attending the summit.

A three-member business delegation led by FBCCI president Abdul Awal Mintoo left Dhaka for the Nepalese capital yesterday.

During his stay in Nepal, the FBCCI president will meet the president of the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry to discuss matters of mutual interest.

He will also meet high officials of the Nepalese government and talk ways of enhancing cooperation between the two countries, said a new release.

Baghabari power plant nears completion

SIRAJGANJ, Feb 19: Work on the 130-megawatt barge-mounted power plant, Bijoyer Alo (floating), is nearing completion, reports APB.

Officials said, nearly 75 per cent of the work of the plant at Baghabari in the district has been completed.

Some Tk 600 crore are being spent on construction of the barge-mounted power plant on 30 acres of acquired land. A Malaysian company is engaged in the implementation work.

The power plant is scheduled to be commissioned in the next month. It would primarily generate 90 MW of electricity which would help reduce power shortfall in the national grid.

Meanwhile, the Bijoyer Alo-1 reached Baghabari ghat at the end of January and work on its implementation got underway almost immediately.

Indian economic adviser worried about reforms

NEW DELHI, Feb 9: A top Indian financial adviser expressed concern Friday about the pace of the country's economic reforms, reports AP.

"Despite years of economic reforms, nine-tenths of the economy still remains under state control and liberalisation seems to have come to a grinding halt," Finance Commission Chairman A M Khusro was quoted as saying by Press Trust of India. Khusro was addressing a meeting on privatisation.

Khusro cited land markets and education as areas "crying for liberalisation."

Reform of India's socialist economy was launched in the mid-1990s, with pledges to encourage private enterprise and sell off huge state-owned companies that market everything from condoms to oil. After the initial heady years when growth exploded to 6-7 per cent, progress slowed amid political wrangles over the pace and direction of reform.

Growth for the fiscal year ending next month is expected to hover around 5 per cent, measured as the percentage increase in gross domestic product.

Khusro's commission advises the government on how to divide tax proceeds between the federal and state governments.

G-7 to consider Third World debt relief proposals today

LONDON, Feb 19: The world's top industrialised nations will consider three proposals to step up Third World debt relief at a Group of Seven finance ministers' meeting this weekend, a British newspaper reported today, says AFP.

The United States, Germany and Britain will each table proposals in Bonn to speed up assistance offered by the West and to make it easier for poor countries to qualify, the Guardian said, citing G-7 sources.

Saturday's meeting between Japan, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and the United States, will be a vital stepping-stone in securing

agreement on debt relief measures when the G-7 meets in Cologne in June, it added.

The left-leaning daily said that aid agencies believed that a high-profile campaign by stars from the world's of pop and sport to cancel third world debt was forcing rich nations to take the issue more seriously.

Led by Bono, Singer of Irish Rockers U2, and Boxing Legend Muhammad Ali, jubilee 2000 aims to cancel the estimated 371-billion-dollar debt of the world's 52 poorest countries by the millennium.

A US-backed proposal will be for the G-7 to support sales of the International Monetary

Fund's 100-billion-dollar stockpile of gold to provide extra money for the World Bank's heavily indebted poor country initiative (HIPC), said the Guardian.

Germany's Finance Minister Oskar Lafontaine, meanwhile, will be pressing for the qualification period for HIPC to be cut to three years — from six — so that countries can receive help more rapidly.

Britain, for its part, will strongly back the German proposal but will push the G-7 to go even further and ease the tough conditions necessary for countries to qualify for HIPC debt relief, the newspaper said.

Chairman of Micro Electronics Limited Engineer Mofi-ud-Dowla speaks at the company's dealers' conference '99 held in the city yesterday. Seen on his right are Directors Hasina Dowla, Dr Borhan Uddin and Nilufar Haque and on his left Chief Adviser Engineer Nefaur Rahman, Advisers Engineer Satyesh Majumdar and Arif-ud-Dowla.

— Micro Electronic photo

Sharp rise in shipments to US

Japanese steel exports jump 17pc

TOKYO, Feb 19: Led by a sharp rise in shipments to the United States, Japan's overall steel exports jumped 17.6 per cent last year to 27.65 million tonnes, according to an industry report published Friday, reports AP.

It was the second straight year of growth in steel export volume. The amount of steel sold abroad jumped 14.2 per cent in 1997, said Yoshihisa Hino, spokesman for the Japan Iron and Steel Federation.

In terms of value, however, steel exports fell 8.6 per cent on a dollar basis to \$15.76 billion and 0.3 per cent on a yen basis to 2.073 trillion yen, the federation said.

The federation's annual report came as Japanese exports of steel to the United States have become a major trade issue between the two nations.

Exports to the US market more than doubled in terms of volume, increasing 160 per cent to 7.02 million tonnes from 1997 levels. Wide strip hot-rolled coil exports to the United States rose 288 per cent to 2.25 million tonnes, the federation said.

Total ordinary steel exports to the United States surged 188 per cent to 5.39 million tons, while specialty steel exports rose 48.4 per cent to 814,587 metric tons.

Last week, the US government said it had evidence that Japan and Brazil had illegally dumped hot-rolled steel.

Japanese steelmakers have said Japan's sharp rise in exports last year came largely at the request of the US steelmakers themselves and steel users to meet a domestic supply shortage.

On Tuesday, major US steelmakers and the United Steelworkers Union filed import complaints, accusing Japan and seven other nations of selling cut-to-length steel in the US market at less than production costs and home market prices.

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passengers only for a short stint. Hours after the passenger bus begins a journey of some 400 kilometers (250 miles) and 10 hours from the Indian capital of New Delhi to the Pakistani border city of Lahore, Vajpayee flies to the Indian border city of Amritsar.

From there, he will join a convoy of buses for the 37-kilometer (23-mile) trip to the border for a welcome ceremony. The two men will talk Saturday and Sunday in Lahore before Vajpayee flies back to New Delhi.

It will be only the second time an Indian prime minister has gone to Pakistan specifically to talk peace. The last such visit was in 1989, when Gandhi flew to the Pakistani capital to discuss disputes that

have festered since the two countries were formed out of British India in 1947.

The last all-out Indo-Pakistan war was in 1971. A low-level war continues with almost daily skirmishes over Kashmir, the Himalayan border region split between them and claimed by both.

Last May, India set off underground nuclear tests, saying it needed a nuclear defense against Pakistan and China. Pakistan responded with its own tests and both the nations declared themselves nuclear powers.

"Both countries are under international pressure to prove they are not a bunch of irresponsible people, especially after the nuclear tests," said Prful Bidwai, a New Delhi-based

searcher at the Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses, an independent think-tank in New Delhi, said Vajpayee and Sharif may work out cuts in conventional forces, or establish a communications hotline.

With little people-to-people contact, it has been easy for extremists in both nations to whip up hate campaigns. Muslim groups in Pakistan have threatened to wreck Vajpayee's trip, while Hindu groups in India have said he should be invading, not visiting.

The consequences of poor relations can be seen in the faces of the thousands of Indians like Hayat, who uses one name only, who line up everyday at the Pakistani embassy in New Delhi. Many want visas so that they can visit family members

from whom they were separated by partition; both countries are stingy about granting such permission.

"We're all brothers and sisters. How can we hate each other?" asked Hayat, an 80-year-old farmer from a village near New Delhi, whose relatives like in Kota Radhakishan village near Lahore.

Urvasi Butalia, a book publisher in New Delhi whose uncle stayed in the Pakistani city of Lahore at partition and converted to Islam, is pessimistic about the bus diplomacy.

"Whenever leaders of both countries have problems at home, they make positive noises about friendship," she said. "It's easier than hard-core gritty questions. The real question lies beyond the bus."

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NARITA (Japan): World's largest freight aircraft Airbus A300-600ST carrying French painter Eugene Delacroix's "La Liberté guidant le peuple (Liberty guiding the people)" arrives at the New Tokyo International Airport in Narita, Friday. The painting will be displayed at the Tokyo National Museum from 26 February as part of the French Year in Japan. —AFP photo

WB okays \$210m loan to India

NEW DELHI, Feb 19: A \$210 million World Bank loan was welcomed in India Friday as a sign international relations are at last improving after it shocked the world by conducting nuclear tests last year, reports AP.

The loan approved in Washington Thursday was for a power project in India's southern Andhra Pradesh state. It is the first loan for anything other than humanitarian needs since the United States led the world in imposing anti-nuclear economic sanctions on India just after its May, 1998 underground nuclear explosions.

Obviously it reflects a general thawing of the relations between India and the United States," said Subhash Agrawal, an analyst who ad-

vises potential foreign investors on politics and the economy in India.

A US administration official had said earlier this week Washington would drop objections that had blocked the World Bank loan. The official said on condition of anonymity that India was being rewarded for ensuring other countries were denied its nuclear know-how and moving to decrease production of weapons-grade material.

Indian government officials were not immediately available for comment.

Washington also has been gradually easing sanctions on Pakistan, the uneasy neighbour that responded to India's tests with tests of its own. After three India-Pakistan wars in the last

five decades, the international community is fearful a fourth conflagration could escalate to a nuclear exchange and has pressed the two to make peace. An India-Pakistan summit will take place this weekend.

Agrawal said that with the economy generally weak, foreign businesses were unlikely to respond immediately with new investment, but will be encouraged to see Indian political leaders ending their isolation.

Prful Bidwai said the World Bank loan was another indication of progress in negotiations with the United States aimed at persuading India to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. Bidwai said India was likely to sign the treaty well before the September deadline.

Successive India governments have argued the CTBT would only freeze the nuclear advantage years of testing has given the United States, Britain, China, France and Russia. Current Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee now may sign to escape sanctions.

The sanctions had presented an unexpected hurdle for Andhra Pradesh officials, who had been negotiating the World Bank loan for three years.

In a statement in Washington, the World Bank said the \$210 million was the first in a series that would total \$1 billion over eight years "to help transform Andhra Pradesh's power sector from being a major drain on the state's budget into a contributor of resources...."

UN commission session begins

Dhaka wants use of regional forums as development tools

As a UN commission began deliberations on the issue, Bangladesh sought enhanced international cooperation and use of regional forums like SAARC as a tool in socio-economic advancement of the poorer countries, reports UNB.

In this context, the decision by SAARC to draft a "Social Charter" to promote social development in the region was mentioned.

Permanent Representative to the United Nations Ambassador Anwarul Karim Chowdhury put forward the suggestion Thursday saying that poverty eradication should be the central goal of all our efforts for social development.

He was addressing the debate on social development issues in the 37th session of the Commission for Social Development being held in New York.

This year's session of the commission is looking into the ways and means to implement the recommendations of the Copenhagen Summit. The Summit, held in 1995, recommended a broad set of goals for addressing the challenges of social development through poverty eradication, employment and social cohesion.

The United Nations will review the progress achieved in this regard in the millennium year 2000. To provide a boost to the review progress, the commission initiated the debate on implementation of the Copenhagen Summit.

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Bangladesh Ambassador mentioned that developing

countries, and especially the LDCs, faced a greater challenge for promoting social development.

There is, on the one hand, a lack of consensus to prioritise social development and reallocate resources within society. On the other hand, the international environment is not enabling enough to devote greater resources for social development programmes."

He identified the areas where sustained efforts are needed. He mentioned that through poverty eradication, more and

more people would be independent of social safety net provided by governments. Presently, the social safety net is less effective because resources are scarce and the people depending on it are many.

The success of micro-credit programmes as a tool of poverty alleviation was mentioned. Chowdhury said that its success is the result of enabling the poor to help themselves. He also underscored the need for eliminating disparity between men and women and among social groups.

Improving work conditions in Alang were difficult because workers were unregistered, unorganised and without the benefit of labour laws, said Jayaram. Workers, mostly poor migrants, have no knowledge of, or protection from, the dangerous substances they are forced to handle.

NEW DELHI, Feb 18: Workers at shipbreaking yards in India are constantly exposed to contamination and hazardous waste that make one worker in four susceptible to cancer, a greenpeace report said Thursday, reports AP.

The international environmental group released a report — Ships for Scrap: Steel and Toxic Wastes for Asia — presenting technical data on toxic contamination at shipbreaking yards in Bombay and Alang in western India.

Trade unions have long complained about the occupational hazards faced by more than 40,000 workers in the shipyards. The Alang shipyard

42pc of Aussie businesses set to ignore Y2K glitch

CANBERRA, Feb 19: Nearly half of all Australian businesses plan to ignore the Year 2000 computer bug problem, a survey released Friday said, reports AP.

Of the businesses that do plan to take action against the Year 2000 computer bug problem (Y2K), half had not even begun to do so by October last year, the Australian Bureau of Statistics said.

The bureau said 93 per cent of businesses were aware of Y2K but only 58 per cent had taken action or would act before January 2000 to avoid problems caused by the computer bug.

In total, 42 per cent of all businesses — mainly small businesses or farmers — did not plan to take action against Y2K.

Sixteen per cent of businesses had begun work to combat the problem, 13 per cent were either testing or had completed their Year 2000 preparation and 30 per cent were yet to begin.

The electricity, gas and water supply industry was most likely to have already taken action against Y2K, while the construction industry was least likely, the survey found.

A quarter of businesses said they did not believe they would be affected and 16 per cent were either unsure what action to take or unaware of the problem.

Samsung Motors workers end 75-day strike

SEOUL, Feb 19: Thousands of workers at fledgling Samsung Motors Inc. returned to work Friday, ending a 75-day strike over job security, reports AP.

Samsung's 3,000 workers walked off their jobs in early December to protest a decision by their parent conglomerate to swap the auto firm for the electronics arm of the Daewoo group.

The swap was part of government efforts to cut overlapping investment, thus increasing competitiveness of South Korea's largest businesses, called chaebol.

The auto workers' union reached agreement with management on job security and financial compensation earlier this week.

The agreement calls for a five-year job guarantee and an extra eight months' salary for workers who choose to stay with the car maker after their plant is taken over by Daewoo Motors Co.

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