

IMF Asia chief admits flaws but defends bailouts

BANGKOK, Jan 24: The IMF's top representative in Asia Friday defended the bailouts offered to stricken regional economies, but conceded that initial conditions attached to the plans had been too stringent.

Hubert Neiss, International Monetary Fund (IMF) director for Asia and the Pacific, said there was "no serious criticism" of the Fund in the wake of its efforts to rescue crisis-hit Asian economies.

He mounted his defense just days after the Fund admitted in a report it had made errors in its initial forecasts and assessments of the chaos which began with the float of the Thai baht in July 1997.

Neiss said the multi-billion-dollar bailout programmes for Indonesia, South Korea and Thailand had proven successful despite the depth of the crisis, which had taken all concerned by surprise.

"Had we known the depth of the recession we would not have

recommended such a tightening of fiscal policy," Neiss told reporters at a news conference.

"Some programme projections were over optimistic initially and some policies were not calculated exactly."

"This does not invalidate the overall strategy. We should not confuse detail and the strategy."

The IMF programmes approved in the second half of 1997 were accompanied by strict conditions designed to stem the flow of foreign capital and stabilise spiralling Asian currencies.

Neiss said high interest rates and tight fiscal policies were vital if the economies were to be pulled back from the brink of bankruptcy.

But critics have argued the IMF's austerity measures drove the stricken economies deeper into recession, with grave consequences for ordinary workers and traditional social structures.

"I do not see it (the IMF re-

port released earlier this week) either as a defence or as a confession. Such internal reviews of IMF policy are nothing new," Neiss said.

"Errors and misjudgements were made in forecasting the depth of the recession."

Governments as well as the IMF are, after all, human institutions.

"Our projections were not at that time much different from many of our critics, although some now claim that they had known better all along."

He said the IMF's bailouts were successful and the affected economies were expected to return to growth this year given no dramatic changes in the world economy, he said.

The programmes' macroeconomic targets had been modified as the crisis unfolded and most had been achieved, with currencies stabilising and investor confidence returning. The final phase of "structural adjustment" was underway.

Despite the teething prob-

lems, the affected governments had been able to meet the IMF's targets, none had defaulted on their foreign debts and most were expecting to come out of recession in 1999.

The policy course that is followed presently by Asian governments supported by the IMF is not challenged by any serious critics," Neiss said.

"Despite several imperfections, the basic strategy of IMF-supported programmes is sound."

Neiss dismissed calls for an "Asian fund" to deal with future regional crises as political and not "immediately relevant."

"We have to distinguish between calls for closer cooperation ... and whether there should be a separate institution," he said.

"That (the so-called Asian fund) is a political issue and the countries involved have to decide for themselves. It's not an issue of immediate relevance."

— AFP Internet

Malaysia may ease capital controls

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 24:

The Malaysian government may announce an easing of some of the strict controls it imposed on foreign investors last year in response to the Asian economic crisis, a news report said Sunday, reports AP.

The announcement is expected to come soon after Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and other government officials meet Monday with 40 top international fund managers and potential investors, The Sun newspaper reported.

The report said Malaysia may relax curbs that had halted the flow of capital overseas by barring foreigners from repatriating money earned in Malaysian stock and bond markets for one year from the purchase date.

"The imminent relaxation of controls over the management of these funds is expected to take the form of an exit tax," which would require foreigners to pay a small penalty on sums taken overseas after less than 12 months, the article said.

Analysts have said such a tax would be less onerous for investors than an outright ban. Some analysts have also warned of a mass exodus of foreign capital around Sept. 1, the first anniversary of the controls, unless the restriction is eased before then.

A government spokesman wasn't immediately available for comment.

The Southeast Asian nation is trying to attract foreign investors back because it needs money to pull out of its worst recession in a decade.

Last month, Malaysia's new finance minister Daim Zainuddin said the government was examining ways to scale back controls in order to draw more foreign investment.

Mahathir will present the government's view on the controls to fund managers such as JP Morgan and Co, Prudential Investment and Jardine Fleming at the meeting arranged by the government's financial adviser, Salomon Smith Barney, according to the article.

Exchange Rates

American Express Bank Ltd foreign exchange rates (indicative) against the taka to clients					
Currency	Selling TT & OD	Selling EC	Buying TT Clean	Buying OD Sight Export Bill	Buying OD Transfer
US Dollar	48.7050	48.7450	48.3100	48.1570	48.0850
Pound Stg	81.1912	81.2579	79.5183	79.2664	79.1479
Deutsche Mark	29.2230	29.2470	28.2327	28.1433	28.1012
Swiss Franc	35.5303	35.5595	34.7104	34.6005	34.5488
Japanese Yen	0.4295	0.4299	0.4183	0.4169	0.4183
Dutch Guilder	25.9360	25.9573	25.0570	24.9776	24.9403
Danish Krone	7.6460	7.6523	7.4645	7.4408	7.4297
Australian \$	31.3173	31.3430	30.0730	29.9777	29.9329
Belgian Franc	1.4168	1.4180	1.3688	1.3645	1.3625
Canadian \$	32.4117	32.4383	31.4990	31.3992	31.3623
French Franc	8.7133	8.7204	8.4180	8.3913	8.3788
Hong Kong \$	6.2982	6.3033	6.2225	6.2028	6.1936
Italian Lira	0.0295	0.0295	0.0285	0.0284	0.0284
Norway Krone	6.5644	6.5698	6.4572	6.4367	6.4271
Singapore \$	29.3315	29.3556	28.3759	28.2860	28.2438
Saudi Rial	13.0140	13.0247	12.7622	12.7218	12.7028
UAE Dirham	13.2972	13.3081	13.1167	13.0751	13.0556
Swedish Krona	6.3197	6.3249	6.2361	6.2164	6.2071
Qatari Rial	13.4174	13.4284	13.3220	13.1901	13.1704
Kuwaiti Dinar	166.6208	166.7636	154.5425	154.0531	153.8228
Thai Baht	1.3393	1.3404	1.3248	1.3200	1.3187
Euro	57.1553	57.2023	55.2183	55.0435	54.9612

Bill Buying Rates:

TT Doc	30 Days	60 Days	90 Days	120 Days	180 Days
48.2112	47.9074	47.5048	47.1023	46.6667	45.8945

US dollar London Interbank Offered Rate (Libor) as of January 22, 1999

Buying	Selling	Currency	1 Month	3 Months	6 Months	9 Months	12 Months
48.050	48.7050	USD	4.96	4.97	4.97	4.98	5.03
48.050	48.7050	GBP	5.00	5.78	5.50	5.60	5.43

Exchange rates of some Asian currencies against US dollars

Indian Rupee	Pak Rupee	Thai Bath	Malaysian Ringgit	Indonesian Rupiah	Korean Won
42.450/42.550	50.450/50.550	36.850/36.950	3.7998/3.8002	8825/8925	1178.5/1181.0

Axes on Sunday's market

The USD/BDT market remained high with demand for the greenback from local private bank. The range for Sunday was between 48.6700 and 48.6825 with most deals done at 48.6750.

The local money market calmed down from pre-Eid sessions with most deal done between 9.50 and 10.50 per cent.

The dollar rose against the yen of Friday as investors wagered Brazil's currency slump would trigger losses in currencies of developing Asian nations, which could weaken Japan's economy. But the greenback was mixed against other major currencies as investors picked through a full plate of news, including Argentina's surprise Thursday announcement that it plans to abandon its peso and issue dollars instead.

Many investors believe the worst is now over for Brazil and Latin America while China and other Asian nations could still see weaker currencies and economies, which would hurt Japan. The market recently tested the dollar's resistance at 15 yen twice, but failed to push it decisively above that level. But attempts to push the dollar down also failed due to rumours of a devaluation of the Chinese yuan. As a result, the market had lost a sense of clear direction.

Dollar/yen was boosted by a rising euro/yen, which rose more than a yen to nearly 133. The euro edged higher against the dollar, ending at \$1.1585/95 in New York session close on Friday 22 January 1999.

New York closing 22 January 1999. USD was at 1.6882/1.6890 DEM, 114.40/114.50 JPY, 1.3808/1.3818 CHF, 5.6572/5.6621 FRF, EUR at \$1.1580/1.1585 and GBP was at \$1.6560/1.6570.

Making Pak-IMF deal public to boost investor confidence'

KARACHI (Pakistan), Jan 24: Publication of the full terms of Pakistan's loan accord with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) will help boost investor confidence but achieving the target will be extremely challenging, analysts said, reports Reuters.

They said much would depend on the political will of the government and how pro-active the private sector becomes in helping it meet targets laid out in the agreement.

To tell everyone yes this is what we have agreed helps recover and boost investor confidence, said Qaiser Hasan, head of research at Jardine Fleming Pakistan.

Pakistan's Finance Minister Ishaq Dar unveiled the agreement before the National Assembly on Friday detailing the conditions it had agreed for the resumption of the IMF's 1.56 billion loan programme suspended after sanctions were imposed after Pakistan conducted nuclear tests last May. He said the unprecedented disclosure was proof of the government's commitment to transparency after wild speculation about what the terms might be but diplomats said making the pact public was one of the terms of the agreement.

Analysts said while the government has lifted some concerns investors were still worried it might fail to meet them since as successive Pakistani governments have for years.

For its political survival the government is left with little option but to pursue these targets, he said.

The central bank has forecast a current account deficit equal to three per cent of GDP for the current fiscal year down from 3.2 per cent in 1997/98.

Hasan said he expected it to remain at that level in 1999/2000. I see a current account deficit of between 1.5 to 2 billion or 3 per cent of GDP, he said.

Hasan said the inflation target of six per cent was also not realistic, but added it could be held to single digit growth.

He added plans to remove food subsidies like power tariffs and unify the exchange rate were all inflationary.

The most critical area for the government would be to bring the large informal sector into the tax base the analysts said.

Just seven million rupees were collected in retail sales taxes last year and only 600 outlets were registered said Subhani.

computers priced \$1,500 and less, will run at speeds of 266 MHz and 300 MHz, Intel said.

Price cuts in the current line of mobile Pentium II chips are also expected. Pricing details were not yet available.

All the new mobile processors will also include Level 2 cache memory on the processor, instead of separately, further condensing the packaging of chips for the mobile market and resulting in higher performance.

— CNN Internet



Kensaku Aomoto, Deputy Governor of the Export-Import Bank of Japan, and Lee Kyung-jae, President of Industrial Bank of Korea (right), sign a loan agreement totalling up to \$1.3 billion in yen equivalent, at the latter's office in Seoul on Friday. The loan is part of the \$3 billion financial assistance package JEXIM signed with the government of South Korea following the Japan-Korea October summit.

— UNB/AP photo

Intel to unveil new chips today

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