



MOSCOW: Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko (R) gestures while speaking with Russian President Boris Yeltsin during a session of the Inter-State Council of the Economic Integration Treaty member states (Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kirgizstan) in Moscow Friday. During the session Tajikistan became the fifth full member of the Treaty. The day before Lukashenko had offered to host Russian nuclear weapons as a counter-threat to NATO once Moscow and Minsk strike their illusive union.

— AFP photo

EU leaders move closer to reprieve of duty-free sector

BONN, Feb 27: The 15 EU leaders moved closer Friday to a reprieve of the European Union's duty-free sector, with only Denmark opposing an extension of tax-free sales over 2 1/2 years, reports AP.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair hailed the leaders' decision to ask EU finance ministers to reconsider extending duty-free sales that were to end July 1 for travel within the Union.

"It is sensible to have some form of extension so we can put in place a proper and sensible successor regime," he told reporters.

The EU governments agreed in 1991 to end duty-free sales this summer, arguing they were incompatible with a borderless Europe. They were initially due

to disappear in 1992, but the deadline was extended to 1999.

Germany, Britain and France have lobbied hard for a second reprieve, citing job losses even though an EU study this month showed those fears to be unfounded.

At the summit, Danish Prime Minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen was the only one to argue that duty-free sales must end July 1, Dutch Prime Minister Wim Kok — who has long favoured ending duty-free sales — said he will accept an extension "provided it is kept as brief as possible."

German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, the summit chairman, proposed the extension, which requires unanimous approval of all 15 EU governments. Officials said Denmark may well have to yield its opposition.

Under Schroeder's proposal, value-added taxes would be imposed as of July 1 and excise taxes on alcohol and tobacco only 2 1/2 years later.

Leaders also split on the future of duty-free sales at a summit in Vienna last December, asking the European Commission to study the impact on employment. The study found the effect on employment was "likely to be of a more limited magnitude and a more local nature than commonly believed."

But the International Duty Free Confederation has mounted a forceful lobby. The industry estimates ending duty-free sales for travel within the EU will affect up to 140,000 jobs and wipe out an industry with annual sales of some \$7 billion.

Exploration for rich mineral reserves off west Lanka

By Sugeeswara Senadhiraj

COLOMBO, Feb 27: Sri Lanka is to contract a foreign firm to explore and mine rich mineral deposits in the seabed off its west coast.

The National Aquatic Resources Research and Development Agency (NARA) has estimated that mineral deposits worth more than \$330 million can be mined in just three places on the seabed off Panadura to Bentota, 60 kilometres south of Colombo.

The deposits of ilmenite, rutile, monazite and zircon were discovered by scientists of NARA's Oceanographic Division working under an exploration programme funded by the United Nations.

Two companies from Australia and Canada submitted bids for an environmental impact assessment as well as a follow-up programme of site drilling to get core samples needed to determine the grain, size and mineral content of the sediments.

Tilak Dharmawardane, head of NARA's Oceanographic Department, said from the initial exploration work it was concluded there are 11 recognised heavy mineral deposits in separate patches on the seabed.

The research was funded by

the United Nations Revolving Fund for Mineral Resource Exploration with which the government signed an agreement to evaluate mineral deposits.

Under the agreement, if the government makes a profit from the minerals found, it has to repay one per cent of the value of the deposit which the UN fund in turn will give other developing countries for exploration.

About 1,100 line kilometre high resolution data was collected from over more than 450 square kilometres by the research vessel. "We used towed sidescan sonar to scan the seabed and build up a three-dimensional picture of the bottom," Dharmawardane said.

He said as a result of the research, the geomorphologic structure of the seabed was revealed. "With the aid of the sonar we built up a topographic map of the seabed, including reefs and rocks," he said.

Under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, Sri Lanka can claim a sea area of up to 23 times its land mass, which is 64,000 square kilometres.

— India Abroad News Service

152,829 tons of WFP foodgrains arrive

A total of 152,829 tons of foodgrains arrived in Bangladesh during January and February, says a WFP press release issued in Dhaka yesterday.

Of it, 120,605 tons are wheat and 32,224 tons rice.

This food assistance is part of WFP's assistance of 352,000 tons of cereals to flood affected people through the government's VGF programme.

The ships that arrived carry 32,000 tons of rice donated by Japan and are currently awaiting at the outer anchorage of the Chittagong port for delivery.

In addition, 99,454 tons of wheat supplied by WFP are expected to arrive in Bangladesh ports in March and April this year.

Rahimafrooz offers free services at DITF

For the first time in the country, Rahimafrooz has set a remarkable example by providing free services to its customers at Dhaka International Trade Fair (DITF) '99, says a press release issued yesterday.

The company, which is the leading battery manufacturer and a reputed business house in Bangladesh, has a long history of customer service performances since its inception in 1995.

Rahimafrooz believes customer satisfaction and after sales service has been the key factor behind its success and growth and the free service at DITF is an extension of its increased customer service.

The service is an absolutely free one and available at the car parking spot of the fair. The company has also sponsored the main gate of DITF '99, the press release added.

Rahimafrooz hopes that the extended customer service at DITF will help enhance the life of the serviced batteries and ensure customer satisfaction and loyalty. Rahimafrooz does not only satisfy the local needs but also exports batteries to countries in the Middle East, Far East, France, Pakistan, India, Myanmar, Nepal etc. Moreover, its battery manufacturing process is enjoying the certification ISO 9002, the highest accord by the US quality assurance bodies.

— India Abroad News Service

Commodity: Weekly Roundup

Oil up on US production slashing announcement

LONDON, Feb 27: Oil prices rose this week after US refiners announced production cutbacks, with Brent, the reference North Sea crude, up 60 cents in London at 11.05 dollars a barrel for April delivery, reports AFP.

In New York, light sweet crude for April rose 64 cents to 12.68 dollars a barrel.

Phillips Petroleum was to close in mid-March its Borger Texas refinery, which has a capacity of 55,000 barrels a day, as well as several other sites, for two to three weeks.

Ultramar diamond Shamrock announced that it would close part of its McKee, Texas refinery with a capacity of 155,000 barrels a day, for 10 days at the start of March.

The group also plans to reduce production at its Alma refinery in Michigan, with a capacity of 52,000 barrels a day.

Citgo said it would close its Lemont, Illinois refinery, with 153,000 barrels a day capacity, and groundnut oil lost 25 lost 25 dollars to 795 dollars a tonne.

Arabica prices on the New York market (for May delivery) fell to 103.75 cents a pound from 104.65 cents.

Brazilian exporters revised upwards their estimate of the 1999/2000 harvest to 26.6 million tonnes (of 60 kg).

Dealers were surprised that the figure came in above 26 million tonnes.

Meanwhile, Robusta contracts on the London market rose by 10 dollars to 1,640 dollars a tonne.

Rubber: Flat. Rubber prices fell sharply as demand ran dry in the Mombasa auction houses, the London Tea Brokers Association said.

"Prices went down at the beginning of the week below INRO's intervention level and they immediately bought some rubber which helped a bit," said an analyst at Lewis and Peat brokerage.

However, "basically, the physical demand for rubber has just been dreadful. There was no physical demand," he said.

The rubber organisation did however manage to secure its contribution from one of its members, possibly Indonesia, bringing an extra 40 million dollars into its war chest for future interventions.

The RSSI index in Kuala Lumpur was stable, closing at 2.59 ringgit a kilo, compared to 2.58 ringgit the previous week.

In London, rubber for March delivery closed 15 pounds lower at 455 pounds a tonne and 20 pounds lower for April delivery at 480 pounds.

Cocoa: Calm. Cocoa prices rose slightly amid thin trading volume in the absence of any market-moving news.

Cocoa for August delivery on

the London market rose by two pounds to 907 pounds per tonne.

Rainfall in growing regions of Cote D'Ivoire and Ghana raised the prospect of a healthy mid-season harvest in West Africa.

The US Department of Agriculture predicted that Ghana would harvest 390,000 tonnes of cocoa in 1998/99 and Nigeria would harvest 360,000 tonnes.

Coffee: Blended. Arabica prices fell because of an expected increase in supplies from Brazil, while lower-grade robusta prices rose slightly amid expectations of tightening supply.

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Tea: Weak. Tea prices fell sharply as demand ran dry in the Mombasa auction houses, the London Tea Brokers Association said.

On the Chicago market, wheat prices fell by 20 cents to 2.38 dollars a bushel (of 27.5 kg for March).

Maize prices fell amid low export levels after the cancellation of an important order by Iran.

Maize prices fell by nine cents to 2.06 dollars a bushel (of 25.4 kg for March).

The European market was buoyed by technical trades, rainfall in France, which delayed planting of spring wheat.

Cotton: Fall. Cotton prices fell under speculative selling ahead of an expected rise in this year's harvest, while demand in the United States this year was expected to fall.

Cash prices covered by the cotton outlook index fell to 55.75 cents a pound from 55.90 cents last week.

Wool: Mixed. Australian wool prices rose amid strong demand, while British prices fell amid low trading volume.

India also predicted a surge in output. Officials said that they expected production in 1998/99 to rise to 15 million tonnes, from 12.8 million tonnes last year.

Prices were also hit by speculative selling from investors.

Vegetable oils: Slip. US soybean prices fell amid low domestic demand and hefty supply from

Brazil, which has now begun harvesting this year's crop.

On the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT), soybean prices fell by 28 cents to 4.54 dollars a bushel (of 27.2 kg for March delivery).

On the Rotterdam market, palm oil for June delivery fell by 50 dollars to 500 dollars a tonne. Sunflower for December fell by 50 dollars to 500 dollars, and groundnut oil lost 25 lost 25 dollars to 795 dollars a tonne.

Rapeseed oil fell by 90 cents to 83.50 guilders per 100 kg.

On Kuala Lumpur's Commodity and Monetary Exchange (COMEX) palm oil fell after India and Pakistan failed to pay for deliveries. The default spread panic among local traders.

May contracts fell to 1,585 ringgit from 1,772 ringgit.

Grains: Ground. US wheat prices fell amid low export levels after the cancellation of an important order by Iran.

Maize prices fell amid intense competition from grains from Argentina and Brazil, which has stepped up exports after the sharp devaluation of its real currency.

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Demand was strong. 87 per cent of lost in the Newcastle, Melbourne and Fremantle markets found buyers.

In Britain, the wool tops index fell by seven pence to 292 pence a kg.

Pacific states for single air traffic control system from 2010

SUVA, Fiji, Feb 27: Pacific states may adopt a single air traffic control system from 2010, the South Pacific Forum Secretariat said Saturday.

A single flexible air traffic control system across the whole Pacific would be the world's largest and most cost effective single system, cutting airline operating costs by millions of dollars annually, the Secretariat said in a statement.

Existing air navigation and communication systems focused on eastern Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and San Francisco would be phased out by 2010 to be replaced by a joint venture organization to run the merger air traffic control areas.

This was one of number of recommendations being considered by a working group from the 16 forum countries and industry representatives.

A study into the planned merger was approved by Pacific Island aviation ministers in May 1998. The minister noted the aim of facilitating economic growth, particularly through tourism, in the region.

In June, the ministers will meet to discuss a detailed operational level study.

The forum said that since the proposed merger would call for the delegation of sovereign and oceanic airspace to an outside service provider, there were "complex legal and institutional issues yet to be resolved."

Forum members are Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

World donors offer \$ 470 m to Cambodia

TOKYO, Feb 27: Major world powers and institutions promised 470 million dollars in new assistance to Cambodia at a key two-day meeting here, the Japanese foreign ministry said.

The sum includes 100 million dollars from Japan in grants and technical assistance, the ministry said in a statement.

Japan also voiced readiness to resume low-interest loans.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Office of the Forest Conservator
Coastal Circle, Ban Bhaban
Mohakhali, Dhaka-1212

Tender Time Limit Extension Notice (Amendment)

Tender Notice No. 01
Dated: 28-1-99
It is hereby notified for general information that, the time limit for collecting schedule of tender for purchase of various kinds of office equipment (viz Computer unit — 6 Nos, Fax Machine — 5 Nos & Photocopy Machine — 2 Nos instead of 4 Nos) is extended up to 10-3-99 in place of 24-2-98 to be purchased from the office of the undersigned as well as Divisional Forest Officer, Coastal Forest Division, Chittagong, Bon Pahar, Nandan Kanon, Chittagong office on each working day and the deadline for submitting tender is extended up to 12:00 Noon of 11-3-99 instead of 25-2-99. The tenders received will be opened on 16-3-99 at 11:00 AM at the office of the undersigned in presence (if any) of the attending tenderers. All other terms & conditions of tender notice & schedule will remain unchanged.