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CAB for movement to realise customer rights

Speakers at a meeting favoured building up of a movement for realising the consumers' rights in the country, reports BSS.

They were speaking at the concluding day of the two-day workshop on the consumers' interests protection law (draft), organised by Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB) at CIRAP auditorium on Saturday.

The formulation of laws would not only suffice, they said adding the government would have to give attention for effective application of laws in protecting the consumers' rights.

Presided over by Executive Editor of Janakanta Borhan Ahmed, the function was addressed, among others, by Chief Editor of Financial Express Rezauddin Ahmed, Professor of the Department of Marketing of Dhaka University Dr Anwarul Islam and Director of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry Manzur Ahmed.

Rezauddin Ahmed underlined the need for the formulation of strong laws and their proper application so that no unscrupulous businessmen could deceive the consumers.

Borhan Ahmed said that the dishonest traders had been amassing huge money, by adopting illegal means and corruption. On the other hand, common consumers are forced bear the consequences of the illegal means of the unscrupulous businessmen, he added.

Ahmed also called for forming consumers interests protection committee in different markets.

Taiwan to allow foreigners to own 50 pc of local banks

TAIPEI, May 23: Taiwan's finance ministry will allow foreigners to own up to 50 per cent of local banks as part of its drive to encourage mergers of financial institutions to bolster competitiveness, local newspapers said today, reports Reuters.

The China Times quoted vice finance minister Sean Chen as saying his ministry would allow foreigners to buy up to 50 per cent stake of each local bank if interested foreigners submitted application.

The Banking Law forbids any single person from owning more than five per cent of an individual local bank, and related persons cannot own more than 15 per cent of an individual local bank, unless they get special government approval, Chen said.

He said the law applies to both local and foreign individual and institutional investors. But foreign ownership of local banks should still follow the 50 per cent ceiling set for foreigner ownership on Taiwan companies, Chen was quoted as saying.

Michael On, President of Beyond Asset Management told Reuters: "Such a more liberal interpretation of the law should encourage more foreign investments in Taiwan banks."

The Commercial Times quoted unnamed finance ministry officials as saying the ministry welcomes foreign investment in Taiwan banks in a bid to accelerate integration of the island's financial institutions.

Officials were not immediately available for comment.

The ministry on April 1 raised the ceiling for ownership by foreign funds to 50 per cent of local stock market capitalisation from 30 per cent.

Indian shares set for tight trading next week

BOMBAY, May 23: Indian share prices are expected to move in a narrow range next week as the market continues to cool off following this week's falls, brokers said yesterday, reports AFP.

The 30-share Bombay Stock Exchange sensitive index was down 59.72 points, or 1.5 per cent, from the previous week to close Friday at 4,015.75 points.

The broad-based 100-share national index was down 20.60 points, or 1.2 per cent, to 1,728.67 over the previous week's close.

The market had risen more than 20 per cent in the two weeks up to May 14 on heavy buying by foreign portfolio investors, but this week the buying eased off and brokers said the trend was expected to continue.

Foreign institutional investor inflows have slowed down as overseas fund managers feel prices are already quite high. This means the market will see some cooling off," said broker Ajit Ambani.

Domestic institutions and traders are likely to be the main players next week.

"There is expected to be some institutional selling pressure to book profits, but domestic traders will be very active and the market will be volatile. The net result will be a marginal rise over this week," said another broker, Gaurav Sanghvi.

Broker Atul Tolia said the focus next week was expected to shift from commodity stocks to computer software issues.

Shrimp sector can fetch Tk 5500cr a year

BFFEA seeks 100 acres of land on long-term lease

Bangladesh has the potential to boost the production of shrimps to 1.5 lakh tonnes from the existing 30,000 tonnes and earn Tk 5500 crore annually, reports BSS.

This could be done through intensive farming of shrimp, said President of Bangladesh Frozen Foods Exporters Association (BFFEA) Kazi Shahnewaz while talking to the agency yesterday.

The country is now earning foreign currency worth Tk 1500 crore exporting 30,000 tons of shrimps.

Emphasising the need for developing fisheries sector on a coordinated and disciplined

structure to boost export, Shahnewaz said that 100 per cent of the foreign exchange the frozen food industries were fetching from their exports were staying in the country, but the major portion of foreign currency earnings by other sectors was going to other countries for import of raw materials.

"It is not like the other export sectors i.e. garments where real value addition is only around 10 per cent," he observed.

Explaining the steps to increase shrimp farming, Shahnewaz demanded of the gov-

ernment to lease out around 100 acres of land on a long-term basis, duty-free import of hatchery equipment, setting up of food industries for shrimp and providing financial support in time.

SM Amjad Hossain, Managing Director of Lockpur Fish Processing Industries, said most of the frozen food industries are now maintaining Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP) to ensure premium quality of shrimp processing.

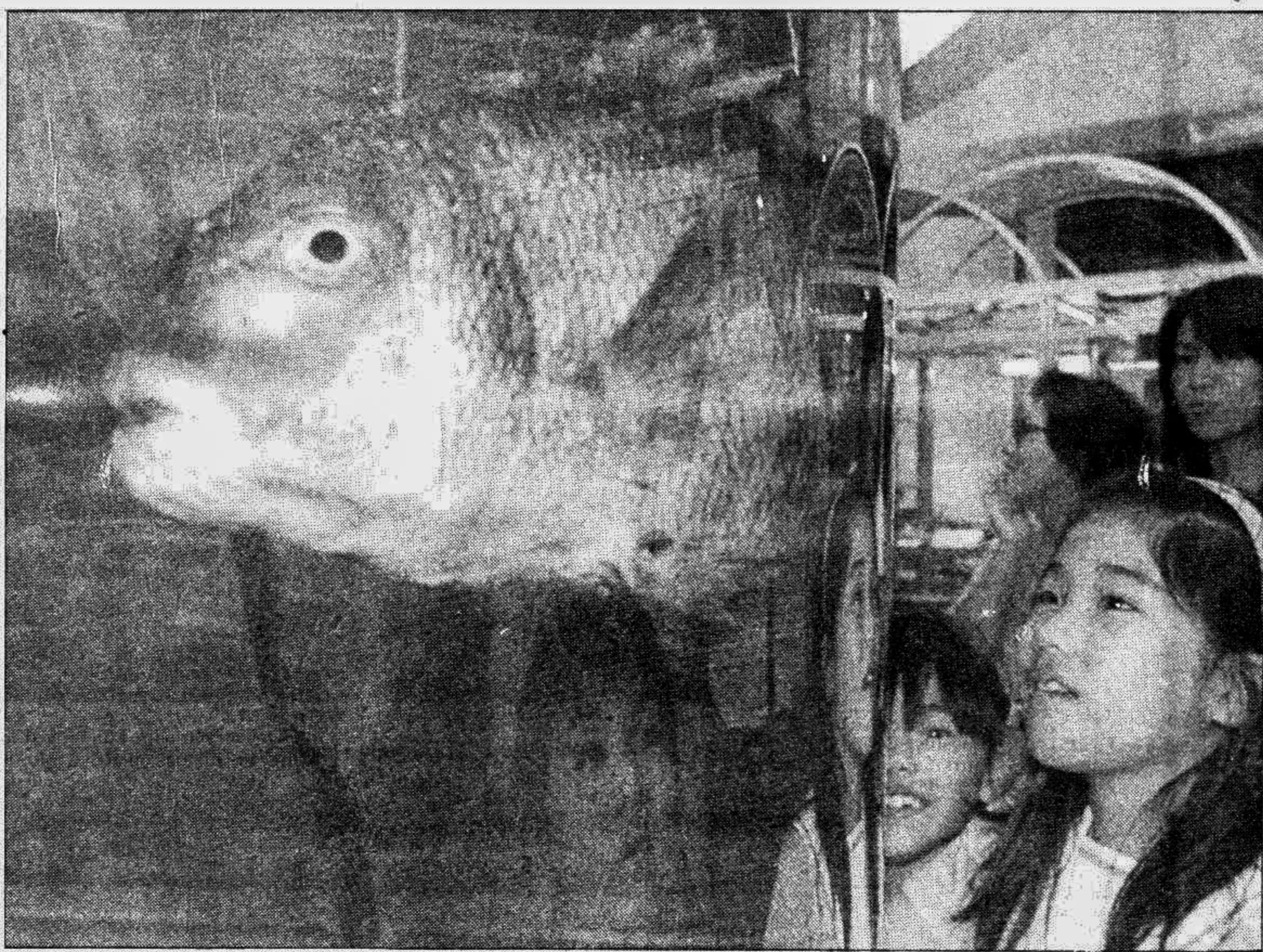
Amjad, a major exporter of the item, brushed aside the criticism of environmental degradation and said both

shrimp cultivators and processors are now maintaining environment friendly farming system.

He said about one crore people are engaged in the frozen foods sector, which contributes six per cent of the total export earning.

He urged the government to arrange alternative financial support in the forthcoming budget to save the sector from ruin.

Amjad said that frozen foods worth Tk 975 crore were exported till March this year against the target of Tk 1500 crore in the fiscal 1998-99.



Girls watch a sea bream robot as it swims like a real fish developed by Japan's Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Co. Ltd. at its museum in Yokohama on Sunday. The silver-orange sea bream, 60-centimetres (24-inches) long, has crowds agog as he swims confidently around his tank wiggling the tail without any help. Japanese engineers have built a life-like, fully automatic, mechanical fish using technology they hope will one day power ships and submarines. — AFP photo

Pacific basin states strongly support WTO expansion

The Pacific basin countries have voiced strong support for the expansion of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to help contribute to the stability and prosperity in the region.

At its 32nd international general meeting (IGM) in Hong Kong, the Pacific Basin Economic Council (PBEC) also voiced support for the new round of WTO negotiations due to begin in the year 2000, says an ICC press release issued in city yesterday.

The PBEC meeting, attended by some 600 delegates from over 30 countries, observed that the upcoming negotiations were of particular importance in the light of recent trends and development in world economy.

On a special invitation from the PBEC Organising Committee, Mahbubur Rahman, President of ICC Bangladesh, who is also a Member of ICC Central

Board of Governors (Executive Board) in Paris, attended the concluding session of the IGM and exchanged views with representatives of the different participating countries including PBEC Chairman Dr Helmut Sohlen and Secretary General Robert G Lees on matters of common concern.

Several international dignitaries attended the 6-day meeting which ended on Wednesday. They included Philippine President Joseph Estrada, Hong Kong Chief Executive Tung Chee Hwa, IMF Managing Director Michel Camdessus, State Councilor of the China Madame Wu Yi, Korean Finance Minister Kyu Sung Lee, Vice Minister of International Affairs of Japan Hisamitsu Arai, Australian Treasurer Peter Costello, Transparency International Chairman Peter Eigen and John R H Bond, Chairman of

Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC) Holdings plc.

Later, Mahbubur Rahman attended the first ICC Regional Meeting and National Committee workshop held in Hong Kong Thursday. There he presented a paper on the importance of media in accelerating the private sector development and policy initiative to help international trade to grow without let or hindrance. Members of the National Committees of Bangladesh, Hong Kong, China, Sri Lanka, Philippines, New Zealand, Australia, Thailand, Nepal, Chinese Taipei, Japan and India also attended the meeting.

The meeting was arranged to strengthen and expand the network of ICC, in the Asia-Pacific region and to foster a close relationship among the regional economies to spearhead a uniform trading system.

Imported vehicle sales down in Japan

TOKYO, May 11: Hurt by the continuing recession, sales of imported cars, trucks and buses in Japan slipped 0.6 per cent on year in April, the Japan Automobile Importers Association said Tuesday, reports AP.

Total import sales in April amounted to 19,962 vehicles, down from 20,084 the same month a year ago.

The decline was the second straight monthly drop in auto import sales, the association said.

Sales of imported passenger cars jumped 1.8 per cent to 19,382, but truck imports plummeted 44.6 per cent to 579. One imported bus was sold in April, the same as last year.

Kunihiko Ono, a spokesman for the association, said imported vehicle sales were likely to remain weak amid few signs of a significant economic recovery in Japan.

Mercedes-Benz was the leading import brand in April for the sixth straight month, Mercedes-Benz had a 21 per cent share of the import market,

Jute goods fetch Tk 600 cr in 6 months

Bangladesh earned more than Tk 600 crore in foreign exchange by exporting over two lakh tonnes of jute goods during the first six months of the current fiscal, says BSS.

The export performance exceeded the figures of the corresponding period last year by 32 per cent and 11 per cent in quantitative and financial terms respectively.

This was disclosed at a meeting of the Jute Advisory Committee held at the Ministry yesterday with State Minister for Jute A K Faezul Huq in the chair.

The meeting reviewed the overall situation of the country's jute sector and laid stress on pragmatic steps for exped-

ing the performance in the export sector.

It also considered various proposals put forward by the jute traders and exporters.

Faezul Huq said the government is sympathetic regarding the demands for reducing the bank interest and extending marketing assistance for jute exporters.

Among others, Secretary Ministry of Jute Mahfuzul Islam, Representatives from the Ministries of Finance and Agriculture, Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation (BJMC), Bangladesh Jute Association (BJA), Bangladesh Jute Exporters Association (BJEA) and BJMA attended the meeting.

Dow Jones closes week lower

NEW YORK, May 23: The Dow Jones Industrial Average closed the week almost a percentage point lower, even though Wall Street remained largely impervious to the weeks' economic news events, reports AFP.

The DJIA closed the week .77 per cent lower at 10,829.28 points, while the Nasdaq was off .31 per cent at 2,520.14 points and the Standard and Poor 500 index was lower by .56 per cent at 1,330.29 points.

On the bond market, the average yield on the 30-year Treasury bond was quoted Friday at 5.771 per cent against 5.909 per cent a week ago. Average bond yields move inversely to price.

Oddly, the market was unmoved by Tuesday's announcement by the US Federal Reserve that interest rates remained unchanged, but could go higher if inflation rears its ugly head.

Neither was the market affected by Thursday's announcement of a record 19.7 billion dollar US budget deficit in March.

"The news that policymakers have shifted to a tightening bias greatly increases the chances of a quarter-point rate hike over the next three months," said Robert Dilemante, with Salomon Smith Barney.

"And despite moderate drag from higher oil prices and some potential slackening in demand for big-ticket items, the prospect of solid economic

momentum would justify a preemptive move to 5-1/2 Fed funds in the first half of 2000, unless financial condition tighten more than we expect," he added.

Investors this week did not show any of the nervousness they had at the end of last week, when the announcement of a 0.7 per cent rise in the consumer price index in April sent bonds into a tail spin.

Nevertheless, some sectors did not fare well this week. United Airlines lost 7.7 per cent to 74-3/8. American Airlines fell 6.5 per cent to 66-3/8 and Delta slipped 6.8 per cent to 60-1/2.

The financial sector also ended the week lower with Citigroup losing 4.8 per cent to 67-5/8 and Merrill Lynch falling 7.0 per cent at 75-1/8.

Time Warner lost 5 per cent at 73-3/4. Wal-Mart lost 6.5 per cent at 43-1/4. US Steel fell 9.2 per cent at 28-9/16. Monsanto slipped 6.8 per cent to 44-3/8. Dow Chemical dropped 6.6 per cent at 126-7/16. IBM lost 4.0 per cent at 230-1/4 and Kodak fell 6.0 per cent to 73 dollars.

Among the gainers, Hewlett-Packard was up 11.3 per cent at 93-13/16. Exxon gained 5.0 per cent at 82-3/4. Coca-Cola was up 4.1 per cent at 68-3/16.

On the Nasdaq, Intel lost 1.7 per cent at 57 dollars. Microsoft gained 0.7 per cent at 77-9/16 while Yahoo slipped 3.9 per cent at 151-5/16.

Gulf Air launches addl flights to Morocco

Gulf Air has announced the expansion of its service to Morocco.

The airlines has started operating direct flights from Bahrain and Muscat to Casablanca as a code shared service with Royal Air Maroc, says a press release.

These new flights complement Gulf Air's existing services from Abu Dhabi to Casablanca, launched in 1998.

"We are pleased to be serving this market in cooperation with Royal Air Maroc," said Assistant Vice President Sales-Gulf Air, Salim Al Salmi.

"Working together offers our passengers increased access to Morocco, and even more convenient connections. It is proving a strong partnership that serves our customers well. Gulf Air will continually assess the evolving trends in the market to meet the needs of its customers," he added.

MIDAS course on marketing June 5-6

A two-day training on trade marketing and effective salesmanship will begin at MIDAS head office in the city on June 5, says a press release.

Marketing executives of multinational, foreign, local companies and interested individual may participate in the course.

The course will run from 4:00 pm to 7:00 pm.

Interested persons may contact MIDAS, House # 5, Road # 16 (New) 27 (Old), Dhamondi, Dhaka, the press release added.

Aminul Islam made MD of Janata Bank



Md Aminul Islam, Managing Director (current charge), Janata Bank has been appointed Managing Director of the same bank, says a press release.

Before joining Janata Bank, he was the General Manager of Agrani Bank. He also worked in Bangladesh Krishi Bank in different capacities.

Islam obtained MEC in Economics from the University of New England, Australia under the Colombo Plan scholarship in 1982 and MSc in Agricultural Economics in 1967. He also obtained Diploma in Management Development from the International Training Institute, Sydney, Australia and Banking Diploma with the Bangladesh Bank Gold Medal.

In 1967, he joined ICRRDP as Project Officer and then shifted to banking career as Assistant Controller in Agricultural Development Bank of Pakistan in 1970 and promoted to the post of General Manager in Bangladesh Krishi Bank in 1993.

Aminul Islam is a Fellow of the Economic Development Institute of the World Bank and worked as one of the resource persons at an international training programme on "Production Credit for the Rural Poor" at the College of Agricultural Banking in Poona, India in 1984.

Gold output drops in Australia

SYDNEY, May 23: Heavy rain forced up production costs and cut Australia's gold output in the March quarter, figures showed here, says AFP.

Production dropped to 75.2 tonnes, or 2.42 million ounces, compared to 81.2 tonnes in the December quarter, said industry statistic specialist Surbiton Associates.

"Gold production at more than a quarter of Australia's gold operations was significantly affected by cyclones Elaine and Vance which caused heavy rain in northern Australia, including parts of the Western Australian gold belt," said Surbiton managing director Sandra Close.

"This resulted in lower gold output and higher cash operating costs."

Over the period, average weighted cash costs rose about six per cent.

Around half of that could be attributed to Australia's largest producer, the Super Pit in Kalgoorlie, Western Australia.

Gold output fell to 139,000 ounces from 158,000 ounces. "Super Pit was affected by the cyclonic weather, the lack of development leading to the use of lower grade ore and the build-up of stocks prior to the switch to owner-mining," Close said.

Growth rates (pre and post-crisis)

	1996	1998
South Korea	+7.10%	-5.50%
Thailand	+5.50%	-8.00%
Indonesia	+7.80%	-13.70%
Philippines	+5.70%	-0.50%
Hong Kong	+4.90%	-5.10%
Malaysia	+8.60%	-6.70%
Singapore	+6.90%	+1.5%
Taiwan	+5.67%	+4.83%

Malaysia.

It was also important for the developed economies and agencies like the International Monetary Fund to make sure Asian flagship nations like South Korea did not go under because of their regional strategic importance.

The domino effect of a prolonged slump there would have had a dire impact on the rest of the region — not to the same extent Russia's disintegration had on Eastern Europe or Brazil's crisis on Latin America, but investors would have drawn parallels.

Indonesia is at the opposite end of the scale.

"They have no resources and the strategic interest in Indonesia is extremely limited," IDEA's Flint said.

The same kind of criteria can be applied to the rest of Asia in terms of just how fast they are likely to drag themselves out of the pit of crisis.

The strength of internal governmental, regulatory and legal systems also affect the pace of recovery. Having the tools to do the job is important.

"There is intrinsic worth in the infrastructure of the econ-

omy," said SE Banken's Woon Khien.

It will separate Korea from countries like Thailand where the infrastructure has always been weak. They (Thailand) never really spent enough effort on it, such that today even if they want to talk about fiscal stimulus, all the government machinery is so unused."

But, and there's always a but, big problems remain and rather than concentrate on the headline growth numbers it is extremely important to consider the sustainability of the recovery.

The operating environment has undoubtedly improved, with lower interest rates, an increase of money supply and fiscal expansion, so companies can begin to show signs of recovery.

In that regard no Asian country has an advantage.

The problem with the pace of recovery in places like Thailand is that you have actually destroyed a lot of the value

added part of the capital stock," said Chris Tinker, head of research at CL Capital Markets in Hong Kong.

"You have a significant deflation going on in asset prices in some markets which doesn't happen in others."

For example, Singapore property is fairly well insulated. But the gearing in South Korea was not in terms of fixed assets, it was in terms of the leverage of the corporate giants (chaebol) which are basically bust but still operating.

"In a normal working environment a company like Daewoo, with a 500 per cent debt to equity ratio, would not be allowed to continue unless a very severe shake-out and restructuring was going on," CL's Tinker said.

So it is glib to say that Asia has turned the corner given the only evidence is one set of improving GDP numbers, analysts say.

Asia finally emerging out of prolonged economic slump