

Australia's trade deficit hits a record of \$1.2b in April

SYDNEY, May 31: Australia's goods and services trade deficit hit a record 1.9 billion Australian dollar (1.2 billion US) in April as exports fell to a two-year low, the Australian Bureau of Statistics said today, reports AFP.

But Treasurer Peter Costello said the data reflected pressures from the Asian economic downturn and low export prices and the domestic economy remained strong.

"At a time when your export prices are at historical lows, you will get pressure on your trade position," Costello told parliament. "The Australian economy is still a strong domestic economy, growing at one of the fastest rates in relation to the developed world."

Australia's trade deficit ballooned by more than 400 million dollars in April from just under 1.5 billion dollars in March, surprising economists who had expected only a slight increase.

The Australian dollar suffered a sell-off following the release of the figures after losing

ground already ahead of the data.

The currency fell to 64.70 US cents, having traded at 64.93 cents just ahead of the release. But it recovered some ground in the hours afterwards.

Foreign exchange dealers said they expected worse news for the Australian dollar ahead with the statistics bureau set to release current account deficit data Tuesday and economists forecasting an increase in that number as well.

Economists have forecast first-quarter current account data to show the deficit exceeding six per cent of gross domestic product.

But the trade data could bode badly for that and lead to a level approaching seven per cent in the next quarter, they said.

The blowout in the trade deficit came as exports plunged 5.8 per cent in April to their lowest level since April 1997 — 8.8 billion dollars — while imports fell just 1.1 per cent to 10.7 billion in the month.

Economists said the unexpected blowout served as a

warning that the Australian economy was vulnerable on the external front.

"The deterioration in the trade deficit to a new record high served as a timely reminder that despite strong growth in the domestic economy, the external accounts remain a weak spot," Bankers Trust economist Kieran Davies said.

Part of the fall in exports was caused by cuts in iron ore and coal prices negotiated late last year with Japanese steel producers and were to be expected, Davies said.

Colonial State Bank economist Craig James said financial markets had reacted relatively calmly to the data, despite the surprise blowout, possibly because of an anticipated bounce back in the coming month.

The market digested the quite well as these were a bit of an aberration, and we are likely to see a rebound next month," James said.

James said the trade data did nothing to change his upbeat

outlook for the Australian dollar in the months ahead with recovering Asian economies and low interest rates in Europe to support a recovery in commodity prices.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics said April's merchandise exports to 10 major trading partners in southeast and north Asia fell by 14 per cent while exports to other countries fell 11 per cent.

Sales to Australia's largest market, Japan fell 17 per cent to their lowest level since February 1994.

There were also significant falls in exports to Korea (down 32 per cent) and Hong Kong (down 35 per cent).

But exports to Indonesia surged by 28 per cent while those to Singapore rose by 11 per cent.

Overall, exports to the group of 10 Asian countries fell 7 per cent in the 10 months to April 1999 compared with the 10 months to April 1998.

During the same period, exports to all other countries rose nine per cent.

More flights cancelled No thawing signs yet in Cathay-pilot deadlock

HONG KONG, May 31: An escalating standoff by pilots forced Cathay Pacific Airways to cancel more flights Monday, as neither the company nor its pilots appeared willing to reopen negotiations on proposed pay cuts, reports AP.

The government's Labour Department has stepped in to help mediate, but John Findlay, secretary-general for the Hong Kong Aircrew Officers' Association, told government-owned Radio Hong Kong early Monday that no progress had been made.

"The ball's in their court," Findlay said.

The two sides have been locked in a dispute since Cathay asked its senior pilots in March to take an 8-per cent pay cut in exchange for stock options.

After nine weeks of talks, Cathay abruptly pulled out last week and gave its pilots a June 11 deadline to decide whether to accept a revised pay offer, including a smaller pay cut and better stock options resign or be fired.

The Hong Kong carrier said the pilots' counter offer, which includes annual pay increases after two years of cuts and a year of pay freeze, was unacceptable, and that it would not reopen talks until the pilots agree to forgo the guaranteed pay rises.

Pilots have been calling in sick en masse since Friday, claiming they are under too much stress because of the layoff threats. Cathay has canceled a total of 97 flights since Friday.

The airline said more flights could be canceled later Monday as many pilots called in sick only at the last minute.

But Tony Tyler, Cathay's director of corporate development, told Radio Hong Kong that the "situation has stabilized" as more planes from associated airlines were flying in to help transport Cathay passengers.

Over 10,000 passengers had been affected by the pilots' action, which the union denied it had organized. Findlay said Hong Kong law allows pilots to stay home because of stress.

Hong Kong television reported that many passengers at the airport were frustrated with the chaos.

Booking has also stopped taking bookings since late Friday for flights flying from now to June 11.

Exchange Rates

Following are yesterday's Standard Chartered Bank rates of major foreign currencies against Taka:

Central Bank USD/BDT Rate: Buying - BDT 48.35/Selling - BDT 48.65			
Selling		Buying	
TT/OD	BC	TT	OD
48.7300	48.7700	USD	48.3500
0.4117	0.4120	JPY	0.3964
32.6368	32.6636	CHF	31.0520
28.6816	28.7051	SGD	27.4545
33.7442	33.7719	CAD	32.1106
5.7034	5.7080	SEK	5.6107
33.0731	33.1002	AUD	29.8714
12.9432	12.9539	MYR	12.5981
6.3382	6.3434	HKD	6.2065
13.0984	13.1092	SAR	12.7807
13.3771	13.3881	AED	13.0461
0.0409	0.0409	KRW	0.0405
79.0693	79.1342	GBP	76.1696
51.9267	51.9693	EUR	49.5328

Usance Export Bills			
TT/DOC	30 days	60 days	90 days
48.2204	47.9228	47.5257	47.0690
			46.5725
			45.4605

Exchange rates of some Asian currencies against US dollar			
Indian Rupee	Pak Rupee	THAI Baht	Mal. Ringgit
42.38/42.46	50.18/50.26	37.42/37.52	3.7999/3.8001
			8850/8925
			1.723/1.724

US dollar			
Buying	Selling	1 Month	3 Months
48.15	48.75	5.62875	5.28063
		5.15813	5.15609

Libor			
6 Months	12 Months	18 Months	24 Months
6.5	6.34813	6	5.67531

On Monday in the interbank market demand for US dollar was moderate and traded in a range of BDT 48.65 and BDT 48.67. Payment against Treasury bills worth of BDT 7.08 billion pushed the call money rate higher at the range of 11 per cent.

In the interbank market cash US dollar notes traded between BDT 49.90 and BDT 50.00.

In the international markets, Euro traded about half a cent higher against dollar as this European trading got underway on Monday and dealers on the continent closely monitored the exchanges for any hint of European Central Bank intervention. Euro's slide to a lifetime low last week has prompted ECB officials to voice concern about market trends for the first time since the unit's launch in January.

At 1511 hours local time dollar traded at 121.36/46 JPY, GBP traded at 1.6099/19 USD and EUR at 1.0462/68 USD.

Shipping Intelligence

Chittagong port
Berth position and performance of vessels as on 31.05.99

Berth No	Name of vessels	Cargo	L Port call	Local agent	Date of arrival	Leaving
J/1	Rattana Naree	Rice(P)	Sing	USTC	8/5	10/6
J/2	Dubai Orient (48)	CI	Col	Seacomb	29/5	1/6
J/3	Yong Jiang	CI	S.Hai	Bdship	18/5	7/6
J/4	Banglar Doot	Rice(P)	Pak	BSC	11/5	4/6
J/5	Jubland (PKT)	GI/LOC	Yang	USTC	24/5	3/6
J/6	Handy Islander	CI	Sing	Rainbow	16/5	6/6
J/7	Progress-1	Wheat(P)	Sing	Seaglor	13/5	8/6
J/8	Ocean-1	CI	Yang	SMSL	8/5	3/6
J/9	Wind Fall	CI	Sing	Oil	18/5	1/6
J/10	Sun-11	Wheat(P)	Turk	Rainbow	3/5	10/6
J/11	Vishva Parimal (N.PKT)	Dap	Sing	Litmond	4/5	1/6
J/12	Alam Tegas	Sugar (G)	Koshi	Seaglor	2/5	31/5
J/13	Kota Cahaya	Cont	Sing	Pil (BD)	18/5	2/5
CCT/1	Xpress Resolve	Cont	Sing	RSL	23/5	31/5
CCT/2	Bunga Mas Lima	Cont	P.Kel	EOSL	25/5	31/5
CCT/3	Q/C Teal (Flag)	Cont	Mong	QCSL	28/5	30/5
CCT/4	Budi Teguh	Cont	Sing	RSL	19/5	29/5
RM/14	Humber	Cement	Jaka	Able	7/4	7/6
RM/15	Sea Eagle	Cement	Fuda	Uniship	15/5	6/6
CGJ	Yongli	C Clink	Jaka	PSAL	20/5	5/6
GSJ	Arti	Wheat (G)	Dunk	Lams	18/5	2/6
TSP	Blue Angel	Sulph	Iran	CCNL	21/5	3/6
RM/5	Pratibha Godavari	HSO	Mina	MSTPL	28/5	31/5
RM/6	Kyong Song	Cement	Jaka	USTC	R/A	1/5
DOJ	Trolanu	GI(Bit)	B.Abb	Cla	25/5	10/6
DD	Jaami	Repair	Kara	Royal	26/4	7/6
DDJ/1	Tanary Star	Idle	Para	PSAL	-	-
RM/8	Unity	Idle	Mong	SSST	17/5	5/5
RM/9	Banglar Urmi	Repair	BSC	R/A	11/6	1/6
CUFLJ	Mary Nour	Cement	Lang	RSL	21/5	6/6
KAFCU(U)	Tia Estela	Urea	Uniship	R/A	1/6	1/6

Vessels due at outer anchorage

Name of vessels	Date of arrival	L Port call	Local agent	Cargo	Loading port
Star Glory	6/5	-	PSAL	Cement	-
Hai Nan No.1	30/5	Bang	OWSL	Sugar (G)	-
Spiros-C	30/5	Shoko	Litmond	MOP (In Bag)	-
Karana Sembilan (48)	10/5	31/5	-	Everett	CI
Cardhu	30/5	-	Everett	CI	Cal, Sing
Triumph Hongkong (48/20/5)	1/6	Sing	RML	ST Coil	-
Alve	2/5	-	SMSL	CI	-
Zouo Ocean	4/6	-	Pil (BD)	Cement	Sing
Dragon Kalimantan (Cont)	23/5	31/5	-	APL	Cont
Briza Azul (48/10/5)	28/5	Yang	Everett	CI	-
Handy Esperance	30/5	Vanc	Litmond	Shelled Pease	-
Andhika Tarunaga (48/27/5)	3/6	Yang	RMI	GI(St.Coil)	-
Eka Lestari	31/5	-	PSAL	C.Clink	-
Bu Venture	31/5	-	simi	Scraping	-
Buxmon (Cont) (18/5)	30/5	Sing	QCSL	Cont	Sing
Erkan Mete	1/6	ilyc	Litmond	Mop In Bulk	-
Bhavabhuhi (48/20/5)	2/5	Sing	SSLL	ST. Coil	-
Banga Biraj (Cont) 18/5	2/6	Sing	Bdship	Cont	Sing
Sin hai (Cont) 25/5	2/5	Sing	RSL	Cont	Sing
Phaethon	2/6	Sant	OWSL	Sugar(G)	-
Banglar Robi (Cont) 23/5	3/6	-	BSC	Cont	-
Jaya Mars (Cont) 24/5	2/6	-	Baridhi	Cont	Col
Revenge	3/6	-	Sunshine	Salt	-
Achiever (Cont) 25/5	4/6	Sing	RSL	Cont	Sing
Shannon	4/6	-	Litmond	Sugar	-
Banga Birol (Cont) 24/5	5/6	Sing	BD Ship	Cont	-
Ingenuty (Cont) 25/5	6/6	Sing	RSL	Cont	Sing
Bunga Mas Lapan (Cont) 27/5	6/6	PKL	EOSL	Cont	Sing
APL Violet (Cont)	7/6	-	NOL	Cont	-
Qc Pintal (Cont) 27/5	7/6	-	Nol	Cont	-
Banglar Moni (Cont) 25/5	8/6	Sing	NOL	Cont	Sing
D Fa (Cont) 27/5	1/6	Sing	RSL	Cont	Sing
Green Ace (Roro) 24/27/5	16/6	P.Kel	JF	Vehi	-
Well Run	31/5	-	H&S	Cement Clinker	-

Tanker due

Name of vessels	Date of arrival	L Port call	Local agent	Cargo	Date of arrival
Aniwa	30/5	Kalla	Litmond	C.Oil	-
Al Badiyah	30/5	Kawa	MSTPL	HSD/Jet-A-1	-
Hesiod	30/5	Sing	Mbl	R/A (19/5)	-
Jet Tanker	31/5	-	Tsl	CPQRM/4	-

Vessels at Kutubdia

Name of vessels	Cargo	Last Port call	Local agent	Date of arrival
Energy explorer-IV	-	-	BBAL	5/4
Seabulk Command	-	-	IBS	R/A (5/5)
Walter	-	Kara	JF	R/A (19/5)
MacTide-27	-	-	JF	R/A (19/5)

Vessels at outer anchorage

Ready on			
Morning Star	Tasmania	Aghios Nicolas	Sun Bright
Urea	UAE	Turk	Nishan
Wheat(P)	UAE	MSA	24/4
GI	Sing	Seaglor	21/5
GI	Kaus	Prog	21/5
Rice(P)	Kochi	PSAL	22/5
Cement	Pada	RML	8/5
Cement	-	USTC	22/5
Cement	Pada	Able	26/5
CDSO	Pase	TSL	26/5
Cont	Sing	QCSL	26/5
Cont	Sing	Pil(BD)	26/5
Cement	Sing	HSL	27/5
Cont	Col	Baridhi	27/5
GI/Rice	Kara	BSC	27/5
GI/Rice	P.Kel	EOSL	27/5
Wheat(P)	P.Said	OWSL	3/5

The above are shipping position and performance of vessels of Chittagong Port as per berthing sheet of CPA supplied by HRC Group, Dhaka.



The fourth annual general meeting of Paragon Leather and Footwear Industries Ltd was held recently at Chittagong Eye Infirmary and Training Complex Auditorium. Picture shows (from left) Belayet Hossain, General Manager, Alhaj M A Salam, Chairman and Managing Director, M A Salam, FCA, FICS, Corporate Advisor, and Eftekarul Hasan, AICS, Company Secretary.

India records highest Remote Access Market growth

By Suman Guha Mozumder

NEW YORK, May 31: The Remote Access Market (RAS) in India registered a 442 per cent growth during 1998, the fastest in the Asia Pacific region, according to a report.

"Due to the recent liberalisation of the Internet Service Provider (ISP) market, India experienced a growth of 442 per cent," said the report prepared by the International Data Corporation (IDC), a reputed market research firm based in Massachusetts.

The report noted that in the other countries of the region, market performance had been grim. "With the exception of the Philippines, no other country managed any significant growth in its RAS market during 1998," it said.

However, despite registering the fastest growth, India's market share in the region was only four per cent as against Korea's ten per cent, Hong Kong's nine

per cent, Thailand's 13 per cent and China's 27 per cent market share, which was the highest among the countries of the region. "China alone accounted for 27 per cent of the region's RAS market, displacing Australia as the number one Asia Pacific country in the RAS market, outside of Japan," the report said.

It said the Asia Pacific region's RAS market posted an anaemic growth of six per cent during 1998, which was in stark contrast to the 81 per cent growth recorded in 1997. The primary reason for the drastic slowdown in RAS market growth in 1998, the report said, was a significant decline in the average street value (ASV) of concentrators.

"Prices for concentrators decreased by 32 per cent, from \$410 per port in 1997 to \$279 per port in 1998," according

Akhil Agarwal, senior analyst for IDC Asia Pacific's Communications Research Group. "This decline was due to increased competition from vendors in the carrier and ISP segment," he said.

"The large business segment was not attractive to RAS vendors due to the economic crisis and the carriers and ISPs were the only segments that were still spending," he said.

However, despite the depressed information technology (IT) market conditions in 1998, concentrators still managed to grow by 19 per cent and 75 per cent in terms of revenue and ports respectively, the report said.

The IDC expects a recovery in 1999 and predicts that the total RAS market will be about \$233 million in 1999, a 26 per cent increase over 1998.

— India Abroad News Service

Call for amending child labour laws

KHULNA, May 31: A day-long workshop on 'Child labour problem and the Existing Law of Bangladesh' was held at the auditorium of Caritas here on Sunday, says UNB.

Organised by Pradipan, a voluntary organisation, with the cooperation of Bangladesh Child Rights forum, the workshop was presided over by its Executive Director Ferdous Rahman.

Deputy Commissioner Azhar Ali Talukdar was the chief guest in the programme while ADAB Chairperson of Khulna Kazi Wahiduzzaman and UNICEF Coordinator Santana Montaz spoke on the occasion.

The speakers demanded amendment of the existing Child Labour Law and called upon all to launch a social movement against child labour.

New GM of RAKUB



F R M Hafiz-Ul-Islam has recently joined Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank as General Manager on promotion.

Prior to his present assignment, he was Zonal Manager of Rajshahi Zone of the same bank, says a press release.