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WB approves aid package for eco-friendly shrimp culture

As environmentalists and policy makers cast a stern eye at one of Bangladesh's major export earners, shrimp, the World Bank has approved a package of assistance for boosting 'environment-friendly' fish and shrimp production in the country, report BSS.

"Unplanned development of shrimp culture has had negative environmental impacts in terms of water quality, disease, mangrove deforestation, and the degradation of agricultural lands," a Bank statement in city yesterday said announcing the approval of the assistance for the country's Fourth Fisheries Project.

It said the assistance was aimed at addressing some of the environmental and social problems being faced by the rapidly-growing shrimp farming, which has been categorised in the 'yellow' group under Bangladesh's 1997 environment protection act. The Bank's lending affiliate IDA would provide 28 million dollars credit, while another five million dollars would come as grant under its Global Environment Facility Programme.

The government earlier this month announced that a shrimp policy was being formulated to control unplanned expansion of shrimp farming to protect agriculture and environment and ensure social peace in view of the growing concern and protests from scientists, social scientists and local people.

The contribution of shrimp culture, which has rapidly grown since the early 1980s in southern Bangladesh, is a major source of export earnings. Despite a little setback due to last year's devastating floods, shrimp earned Bangladesh about 200 million taka (four

million dollars) during the 1998-1999 fiscal year.

But Forest and Environment Minister Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury echoed the concern at a workshop earlier this month that the price Bangladesh was paying for the indiscriminate shrimp culture, ignoring its adverse impact on nature, is affecting the profitability of the industry.

"Despite its contribution to the economy, shrimp farming was systematically harming public health, soil fertility, livestock, fresh water fisheries and the mangrove forests because of the increase in salinity," she told a workshop in Dhaka earlier this month.

Scientists say that leaching of salt, an essential ingredient for shrimp culture and indiscriminate use of chemicals for the farming was the major damaging factor which is causing reduced crop yields and the size of fresh water bodies and grazing areas and growth of trees and forests. They also allege that the salinity also affect ground water and pollute drinking water in vicinity.

"Nearly 200 billion different fish fry are destroyed while gathering two billion shrimp fry from natural water bodies due to the crude method adopted," a fisheries department official said.

Prof. Aminul Islam of the Agriculture University said the loss of bio-diversity would ultimately cause harm to shrimp cultivation itself. He suggested selecting appropriate land for shrimp culture without affecting crop lands.

Dr M A Sattar of Bangladesh Institute of Nuclear Agriculture said 50 per cent of land, which is suitable for shrimp culture still remained unused, while

"we are allowing the destruction of fertile paddy lands which is nothing but exploitation in the name of earning foreign currency."

"Planned systems could promote both shrimp and paddy cultivation," he said.

Social scientists also blame the unplanned expansion of shrimp culture for social problems such as violent clashes between entrepreneurs and residents.

"Areas traditionally used by the community are turning to be private properties of the tycoons and thus the landless and marginal peasants, with their right on resources increasingly shrinking, face an unbearable life," said Mesbah Kamal, Professor of History Department, Dhaka University.

Researcher Dr M A Gaffar said: "Lured by the very attractive rate of return" some entrepreneurs from urban areas took lease on lands or forcibly occupied them from farmers and set up shrimp farms. In many cases, the lease money was not paid, resulting in violent conflicts between the entrepreneurs and local residents.

Achinta Biswas, a school teacher in Khulna, said many local farmers were forced to cultivate shrimp against their will because of the land degradation caused by its cultivation in neighbouring plots.

Union Parishad chairman Abdur Rashid alleged that "murders and rape are not uncommon phenomenon in the region" because of the resultant social conflicts. He also alleged that indiscriminate expansion of shrimp lands were silting up rivers and destroying several valuable fish species.

Renowned economist Prof. Anisur Rahman said some people

were making "abnormal profits" on shrimp culture due to "imperfect market."

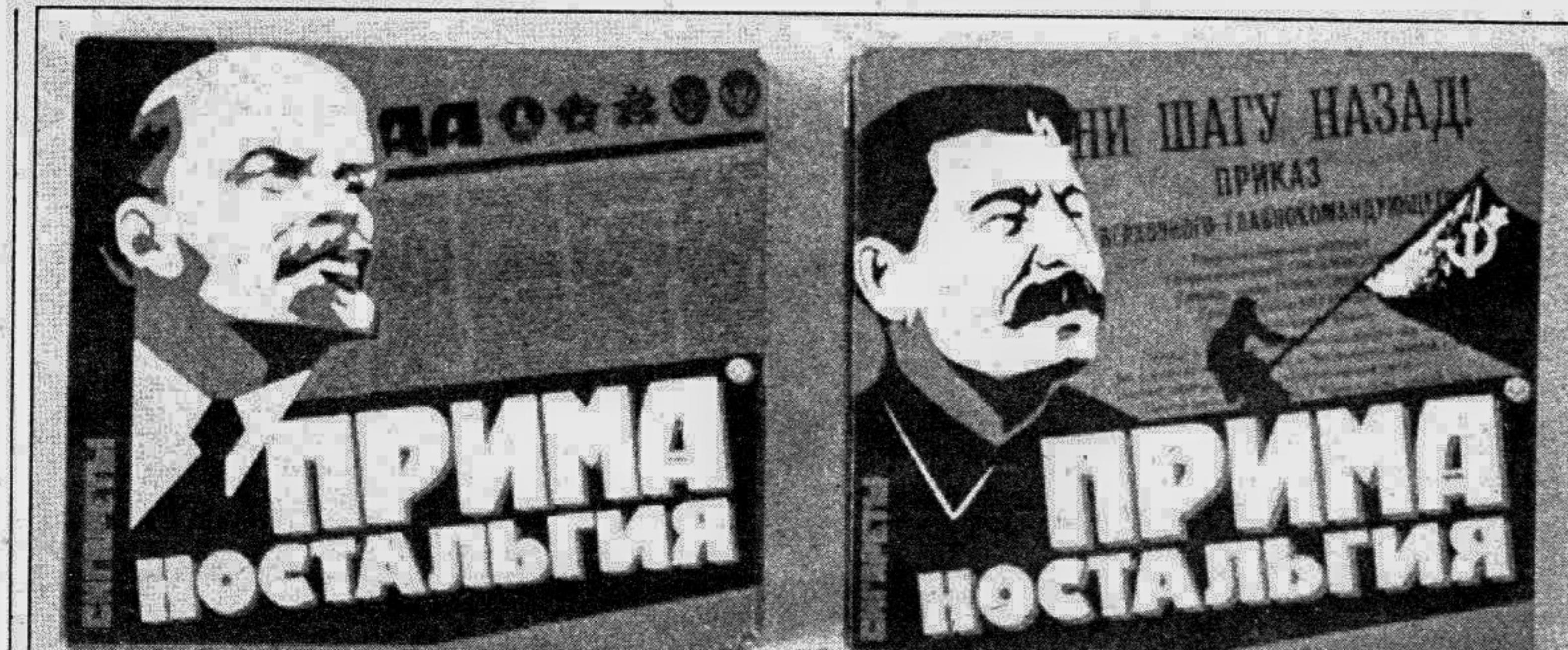
"We must look at how the profit-making process is affecting the poorest there and they must be compensated for the sake of social justice," he said and suggested introduction of a "community tax" on the entrepreneurs for sharing "developmental benefits." The World Bank said that its programme under the government's Fourth Fisheries Policy would encourage adoption of alternative shrimp fry harvesting systems to reduce wastage and inadvertent impacts on non-target species.

"The project will undertake a full-feasibility study that will cover engineering, aquaculture, socio-economic and community organisational aspects, incorporate the results of consultations with local communities and examine environmental and economic feasibility of proposed interventions," the WB statement said.

Fisheries Minister A S M Abdur Rob admitted that shrimp farming had led to some social and environmental problems due to lack of planning and "aggressive attitude" of some entrepreneurs who have prompted the government to formulate a shrimp policy.

He said that the proposed policy was aimed at restoring social peace and saving croplands, prohibiting indiscriminate use of chemicals and introducing saline-resistant rice varieties.

"Neither can we threaten our future for our present happiness nor should we give up the current benefits for an unknown danger. We have to make a balance through efficient planning," he added.



A picture taken Thursday of Russian cigarettes "Prima-nostalgia", carrying the portraits of Lenin and Stalin on the boxes, which were introduced on the Ukrainian market on the day. The box of filter cigarettes, popular in the Soviet-era, costs 0.6 hryvnia (0.15 US dollars).

—AFP photo

BGWF seminar calls for safety of working women

Speakers at a discussion in city have emphasised the formation of a national steering committee to look into the problems of the working women, reports UNB.

The security and safety of working women in Bangladesh is at stake and is getting worse day by day," they said at a seminar on "Measures necessary for ensuring security and safety of working women in Bangladesh" at Jatiya Press Club in the city yesterday.

Bangladesh Garments Workers Federation (BGWF) organised the seminar while Secretary General of Rural Development and Welfare Society presented the keynote paper.

The speakers said among the working women the situation of those working in garments and other related factories are worse than those working in government offices and non-government organisations.

Jatiya Sramik Party leader Shah Mohammad Abu Jafar, NCCI president Bazzur Rahman, Chairman of Labour Standing Committee of BGMEA Md Giassuddin Khan, President of Karmajibi Nari Ms Shirin Akther and BGWF president Khurshid Alam took part in the discussion.

NSU business creation course participants get certificates

State Minister for Youth and Sports Obaidul Quader gave away certificates Thursday among the participants of the New Business Creation course organised by Professional Development Programme (PDP) of North South University (NSU).

The course was offered in collaboration with German Technical Cooperation (GTZ), a press release.

The state minister said that this programme would help develop and enhance personal and entrepreneurial competencies of the educated unemployed youths of the country.

"We don't want to give them a fish, rather we want to equip them with the techniques of how to catch a fish," he said.

The minister also declared Taka fifty thousand as grant for NSU Sports Club.

MA Kashem, Chairman, Board of Governors, North South University Foundation, said that proper education was a must to overcome the backwardness of the country's economy.

Professor M Shamsul Haque, Acting Treasurer, said that the NSU School of Business was committed to produce skilled managers as well as entrepreneurs with the knowledge and skills that 21st century demands.

Dr ANM Meshquat Uddin, Director, BBA Programme, gave vote of thanks while Quazi Mahmud Ahmed, Assistant Director of PDP, conducted the programme.



State Minister for Youth and Sports Obaidul Quader gives away certificates among the participants of the New Business Creation course of Professional Development Programme of North South University Thursday. — NSU photo

IBBL training courses end

The closing ceremony of the two training courses on "Foreign Exchange and Foreign Trade" and "Foundation Course" for the officers of Islami Bank Bangladesh Limited was held Thursday at the auditorium of Islami Bank Training and Research Academy (IBTRA), says a press release.

Shah Abdul Hannan, Director of the bank, attended the function as the chief guest.

Earlier, the closing ceremony of the training course on "Islamic ideology, courtesy and customer service" for sub-staff of the bank was held.

Both the functions were presided over by ASM Fakhrul Ahsan, Director General of IB-TRA.

Belgium hit by new food scare

BRUSSELS, July 23: Belgian farmers were today facing a new crisis following reports that toxins up to 50 times the permitted level had been found at big farms across the country, reports AFP.

High levels of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), a known carcinogen, were found at 70 pig farms, according to a report published Friday by the daily De Morgen.

Belgian Health Minister Magda Alvoet dubbed the situation "very serious". She told the RTBF radio station that several of the farms had been barred from selling their products.

The source of the PCBs was not immediately clear. The farms had not bought contaminated animal feed from companies cited in an earlier dioxin-in-food scare, the report said.

Agriculture Minister Jaak Gabrels said several hundred pork farms could be added to the list of 800 where the sale of produce has been banned following the dioxin scare.

Eight companies are suspected of supplying feed contaminated with cancer-causing dioxin to Belgian farms in January this year.

Straits Times wants WTO to junk consensus style

SINGAPORE, July 23: The World Trade Organisation (WTO) should junk the consensus style of choosing a leader in favour of elections after a face-off between Thailand and New Zealand nearly paralysed the group, a Singapore daily said today.

"There is no reason whatsoever now to retain consensus for choosing the director-general. It is unwieldy and it has caused bad blood among members," said an editorial in the Straits Times, believed to reflect the government's views.

"The leadership should be made an elective job after Dr. Supachai completes the other half of the split term in 2005," it said.

A three-month stalemate ended Tuesday after the WTO appointed rival candidates to consecutive terms as its director-general.

Second, the WTO's interests and credibility would not be

sabotaged by a pliant chairman of the General Council," the daily said, referring to Ali McMchum of Tanzania, who "adjudicated in a manner which gave impartiality a bad name" and had asked Supachai to step aside in favour of Moore.

"Neither man can feel like a winner," the daily said.

"If these proceedings had been crude, shoddy and a bit shady, blame it on the system. Neither man can feel like a winner. The WTO is proudly advertised consensus principle... has been exposed as a myth."

"That weakness very nearly paralysed it in only its fifth year of existence," it said.

If elections are held in the future, there may still be blocks within the WTO supporting certain candidates, but no time would be lost in the WTO's work.

The organisation's ability to act as a sort of court to settle trade disputes between nations is its most important function, especially as smaller states can take on bigger powers, such as the United States, on an equal footing.

Under a hard-fought compromise, the WTO's 134-member general council agreed that former New Zealand prime minister Mike Moore and Thai Vice Premier Supachai Panitchpakdi would serve successive three-year terms.

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"If elections are held in the future, there may still be blocks within the WTO supporting certain candidates, but no time would be lost in the WTO's work."

The House approved the bill by a vote of 223-208. Six Democrats joined the Republicans to majority to pass the bill: Four Republicans sided with Democrats against it. The Senate is expected to vote next week on a competing tax bill. The House and Senate must then work out the differences.

The House-approved plan would gradually reduce all five income tax rates by 10 per cent. A family with taxable income of \$85,700 would get a tax break of about \$1,000. A single person earning \$25,000 would get \$380 back.

Democratic leaders and the White House vehemently opposed the House bill. They ac-

cepted Republicans of offering huge tax breaks to businesses and investors at the expense of the poor and middle class and said the bill was so costly this year as part of a compromise with the White House.

"Your bill is what we call in

Harlem a trip to nowhere," said New York Representative Charles Rangel, the top Democrat on the House Ways and Means Committee. "What you want is a veto from President Clinton."

Strategists said Republicans could use a presidential veto to rally voters in 2000 against Vice President Al Gore, the Democratic front-runner.

Some lawmakers saw the

bill as an opening gambit by Republicans, which would be scaled back to between \$400 billion and \$500 billion later this year as part of a compromise with the White House.

"We're going to come to some

kind of a meeting; I'm not sure exactly what that number will be," House Speaker Dennis Hastert of Illinois said at a campaign-style victory rally.

The White House said Clinton was unwilling to accept any tax cut greater than \$300 billion over 10 years.

Uniting Republican factions behind a \$792 billion tax cut for 1999, the government surplus totalled \$94.28 billion, up from \$67.07 billion for the same period last year.

Corporate tax payments totalled \$39.26 billion in June, and individual income tax receipts totalled \$92.99 billion.

For the first nine months of fiscal 1999, which began Oct. 1,

the government surplus totalled \$94.28 billion, up from \$67.07 billion for the same period last year.

And he raised questions over

APEC's role in handling re-

US House okays massive tax cut despite Clinton's veto threat

WASHINGTON, July 23: The US House of Representatives narrowly passed a \$792 billion tax cut on yesterday, a win for Republicans who have staked their political future on a massive bill they know will never become law, reports Reuter.

The measure, which President Bill Clinton pledged to veto, would slash income and capital-gains tax rates for individuals and businesses over 10 years.

It was rolled out a week ago by the Republican leadership as the centrepiece of the party's legislative agenda and promises the most sweeping tax cut since 1981, when Ronald Reagan was president.

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