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**Mercantile Bank opens branch at Dhanmondi**

LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Zillur Rahman yesterday said transshipment is not contrary to national interest, reports UNB.

"No country can expect progress in trade and economy by closing its land, air and river routes..." he said at the inauguration of a Mercantile Bank branch at Dhanmondi.

Chairman Abdul Jalil, the meeting was also addressed by the bank's chief advisor Lutfor Rahman Sarker, Managing Director M Taheruddin and Dhanmondi branch manager M Rafiquzzaman.

The minister said the government is determined to ensure uninterrupted progress of the country by eradicating irregularities, discipline and corruption in banks and financial institutions.

He called upon all to boycott the loan defaulters socially and said the present government after coming to power realised Tk 3000 crore out of the previous government's unrealised Tk 11000 crore bank loan.

**Walmart still in Bangladesh: BGMEA**

Walmart, a giant garment buyer has not left Bangladesh, said Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) yesterday.

The American company has expressed its confidence in Bangladeshi garments suppliers and been placing big volume of orders, BGMEA said in a press statement.

"The business of Walmart with Bangladesh is growing every year," it said.

**2-week BIA course begins**

Bangladesh Insurance Academy (BIA) has started a two-week Basic course on General Insurance at Sylhet, Sadharan Bima Corporation yesterday, says a press release.

Executive officers from Sadharan Bima Corporation, different insurance companies, bank and other organisations are participating in the course.

**UK, EU warn Germany over beef ban**

LONDON, Aug 4: Britain warned Germany yesterday that it was obliged to accept an EU decision to lift a ban on British beef, and the European Commission threatened legal action if Germany did not comply, reports Reuters.

German Health Minister Andrea Fischer had said Germany would continue to keep out British beef over fears of mad cow disease - despite the European Union ruling last month lifting a worldwide embargo imposed more than three years ago.

The global ban was triggered by the British government's admission in March 1996 that people eating infected beef could be vulnerable to a new form of the deadly brain disorder Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease.

British Agriculture Minister Joyce Quin said last month's EU ruling, which came into effect at the weekend, was a clear sign that the European Commission believed British beef was safe.

"It is now up to all EU governments to abide by the commission's decision and lift their own bans," Quin said in a statement.

"The German government is treaty-bound to lift the ban. We are sure they will do so."

Martine Reicherts, the commission's chief spokeswoman, said Germany risked being taken to court if it did not comply.

**US economic index signals record period of growth**

WASHINGTON, Aug 4: A major US economic forecasting gauge rose in June for the second straight month, signalling that the economy could be headed for a record period of growth, a private research group said yesterday, reports Reuters.

The Conference Board said its widely-watched Index of Leading Economic Indicators, a measure of future economic activity, rose 0.3 per cent in June after a matching 0.3 per cent gain in May.

"The leading indicators point to continuation of the expansion through early 2000," the Conference Board said in a statement.

Now in its second longest expansion in US history, the economy is poised to break the record of 106 months of continuous growth if the upturn lasts past early 2000.

The June gain exceeded the 0.2 per cent rise expected by Wall Street economists surveyed by Reuters.

**Bid to ensure real-time market information SEC calls for brokers' trading monitors in public places**

By M Shamsur Rahman

With a view to providing real-time information to investors, the capital market watchdog has asked both the bourses to place brokers' trading monitors in public places.

Inviting both the bourses to set up screens in public places like the Zia International Airport, Kamalapur Railway Station and the lobbies of stock exchanges and banks, the SEC pointed out that there was hardly a brokerage house which provides investors with the facilities of separate monitors or screens to see price and index movements.

It is a common demand of the investors that they should have the access to real-time in-

formation on price, index movements and corporate news which are made public through brokers' workstations during the trading period, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) officials say.

"The investors are often deprived of these real-time information which are very important for making quick and informed decisions," according to a stock market expert.

Brokers mostly take advantage of price-sensitive information like dividend announcements, corporate disclosures etc, he said. "Easy access to information like these helps them in making profits or re-

ducing their losses," the expert added.

In a formal letter to the CEOs of both the stock exchanges, the SEC said: "In the developed and emerging stock exchanges including those in the neighbouring countries, we see that brokerage houses provide their customers and general investors with real-time information through separate monitors or screens."

"These stock exchanges also have rooms/lobbies presenting up-to-date market information through separate monitors," according to the letter.

Talking to this correspondent, officials of both the bourses said that the automa-

tion process was yet to be fully completed.

"Automation is a continuous process, and what we have done so far is not all," according to one CSE official. "In our original scheme, we have plans for setting up such monitors in public places," he added.

"But the present market depression does not permit us to go for fresh investments," he said.

In its formal reply, the CSE said that it was assessing the technical needs and hopes to place a few display boards soon. The Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) was yet to respond to the SEC call.

**Biman earns Tk 1261cr in '98-99 fiscal**

Bangladesh Biman, the national flag carrier, earned Tk 1261.35 crore as revenue during the 1998-99 fiscal, which is Tk 32 crore higher than that of the previous year, a press release of Bangladesh Biman said in city yesterday, reports BSS.

Biman also earned Tk 1228.72 crore as revenue in the fiscal 1997-98.

It was informed at the three-day 17th system Marketing Conference of the airline which ended at its head office yesterday.

Biman carried 12,33,673 passengers in 1998-99 as against 12,46,453 passengers during the fiscal 1997-98, showing a one per cent fall in passenger carriage.

In 1998-99, Biman also carried 29,803 tonnes of cargo, revenue-wise registering a growth of 1.33 per cent over the previous year, the release said.

In passenger carriage, cargo provided 13 per cent of Biman's total revenue, it added.

The source-wise contributions to Biman's total revenue are, passenger 78 per cent, cargo 13 per cent, excess baggage 3 per cent and Hajj 6 per cent, the release said.

With a modest fleet of four DC-10s, two Airbus A310-300s, three F-28s and two ATPs, Biman has operated 11,445 flights during 1998-99 the fiscal, the release said.

The national flag carrier has set the target of earning sales revenue to the tune of Tk 1,400 crore for the year 1999-2000, it added.

Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, Chowdhury Mohammad Muhsin addressed the concluding session of the conference. All country managers, regional managers and district managers attended the conference.

**Water death may cut global food supply**

NEW DELHI, Aug 4: Increasing water shortage in many countries, including India, is threatening to reduce the global food supply by more than ten per cent, says a new study, reports PTI.

Left unaddressed the shortage could lead to hunger, civil unrest and even wars over water, says the study by Washington-based Worldwatch Institute.

Irrigation problems are widespread in the grain growing regions of central and northern China, northwest and southern India, parts of Pakistan, much of the western USA, North Africa, the Middle East and Arabian Peninsula.

Though about 40 per cent of the world's food comes from irrigated cropland, the productivity of irrigation is in jeopardy from the over extraction of groundwater from the growing cities and built up of salts in the soil, the study says.

Water tables are dropping steadily in several major food producing regions as groundwater is pumped faster than nature can replenish.

So much of water is being diverted for irrigation and other human uses that major rivers like the yellow in China, the Indus in Pakistan, the Ganges in India and the Colorado in USA, run dry for large portions of the year.

The yellow river, the cradle of Chinese civilisation, failed to reach the sea for as long as 226 days in 1997.

The institute blames rapidly growing world population as the main reason behind the water shortage.

**'Euro zone money supply growth no threat to rates'**

DRESDEN, Germany, Aug 4: German economics research institute Ifo today said that accelerating money supply growth in the euro-zone did not pose a threat to interest rates, reports Reuters.

From March to May, money supply growth in the 11-country euro area grew at an average rate of 5.2 per cent compared to the average rate of 5.1 per cent for the three-month period that ended April, Ifo said in its latest report.

"At that level, money supply growth was only slightly over the European Central Bank's reference value of 5 per cent, so from this perspective there is no reason to increase interest rates," the institute wrote.

**Oil prices edge narrowly up**

LONDON, Aug 4: Oil prices edged narrowly higher yesterday amid widespread confidence that OPEC will maintain its supply curbs, reports Reuters.

Brent for September delivery in London last traded four cents up at \$19.45 a barrel, consolidating within sight of a 20-month high of \$19.95 struck last Friday.

Activity was cautious as traders awaited weekly energy data from the United States - which consumes a quarter of world oil - to better assess stock levels and provide short-term price direction. The information is to be released late on Tuesday.

Strength in US gasoline following refinery problems in California and improving world demand this year also contributed to constructive sentiment.

"It's all quite a positive picture," said Christopher Bellew of Prudential Bache International.

Signals by the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) that it would continue to abide by an agreement struck in March aimed at curbing supplies continue to bolster the market.

Since the implementation of the accord, oil prices have doubled, giving succour to the economies of oil-dependent OPEC members in the Middle East, Asia, South America and Africa.

A preliminary report by Geneva-based consultants Petrologistics to its clients said the cartel's compliance on production cuts improved in July.

Figures dated July 29 showed OPEC output averaging 26.04 million barrels per day (bpd) for all but the last few days of the month, the report said. This compared to OPEC June output which the consultancy had estimated at 26.33 million bpd.

The output cuts, due to last until the end of March 2000, are aimed at trimming global over-supplies which dragged prices to historical lows at the start of the year.

Unrest in Nigeria which has hit output has indirectly helped OPEC compliance, analysts say. Industry sources said on Monday a joint venture operated by Royal Dutch/Shell was producing about 700,000 barrels per day, compared to 800,000 bpd which was previously Shell's limit after OPEC cuts.

Shell output feeding its Bonny and Forcados terminals has been hit by unrest in the Niger Delta. Mobil has been asked to raise its own output to make up for Shell's losses.



A Japanese boy plays Sega's video game Dreamcast at a video game shop in Tokyo Wednesday. Sega Enterprises announced it was in talks with US telecom giant AT and T about an Internet access supplier deal for Sega's Dreamcast video game consoles.

— AFP photo

**Genetically-modified rice to boost nutrition**

ST LOUIS, Aug 4: By inserting genes from the daffodil and other plants into rice, scientists said yesterday they boosted the staple's nutritional value with the aim of preventing millions of cases of anaemia and blindness, reports Reuters.

Swiss scientists who developed the genetically-modified rice in the laboratory said it increases the levels of iron and Vitamin A and counteracts an acid found in rice that inhibits the body's ability to absorb iron.

The new rice prototype is being tested and a variety could be freely available within two to four years to farmers, especially in poorer countries where rice is sometimes the only staple food, researcher Ingo Potrykus of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology said.

He said the rice was genetically modified solely to boost its nutritional value, unlike other crops which have been bioengineered to ward off plant disease. Bioengineered crops have sparked health and environmental concerns and been vilified in Britain as "Frankenstein foods".

"There is no environmental argument in this case, because we have made an improvement

in the nutritional character which does not give the plant any advantage in the environment," Potrykus said in a telephone interview.

With rice the dietary staple for an estimated 2.4 billion people, iron deficiencies afflict

millions with mental and physical developmental problems, and shortages of Vitamin A lead to millions of cases of childhood blindness, he said. Populations at risk are unable to supplement their diets with iron- and vitamin-rich vegetables, fruits and meat.

A major problem with rice is that it contains phytic acid, which inhibits the digestive system's ability to absorb iron.

The scientists obtained a gene from a French bean that boosts rice's iron content and another gene that produces an enzyme that counteracts the phytic acid.

"The beauty of this gene and the protein from the gene is that it is stable even after cooking," Potrykus said.

They also transferred two genes from the daffodil that produce beta-carotene - a good source of Vitamin A - that also creates the flower's yellow colour. Beta-carotene content was further enriched with the help of a gene from a bacterium.

"Our breakthrough was to engineer an entire pathway to Vitamin A. That has never been done before," said Peter Beyer, a cell biologist at the University of Freiburg in Germany who worked with Potrykus.

**IMF okays \$460m for Indonesia**

WASHINGTON, Aug 4: The International Monetary Fund approved a \$460 million payment from its loan to Indonesia yesterday in a sign that the government was meeting its reform promises to the IMF, reports Reuters.

An IMF spokesman said the payment was approved at a regular meeting of the IMF board. It is the sixth disbursement from a multi-billion dollar loan approved in 1997 as Indonesia's economy buckled under the strain of Asia's financial crisis.

Indonesia's top economics minister Ginandjar Kartasasmita said in a July 22 letter to the IMF that the government had met its economic promises to the fund and taken action to strengthen its economic reform programme.

Beijing halted talks with the United States is nearing, the paper said. This was in light of an improvement in Sino-US relations following the accord over compensation for NATO's attack on the Chinese embassy in Belgrade and the US reiteration of its one-China policy, it added.

Chinese authorities will decide whether to resume talks with the United States at their annual August policy retreat at the Beidaihe seaside resort, the newspaper said.

Washington after NATO bombs hit the Chinese embassy in Belgrade on May 7.

Last week, the United States agreed to pay US\$4.5 million in compensation for three Chinese killed and 27 wounded in the attack.

Meanwhile, a report from

Washington said that the United States is nearing, the paper said. This was in light of an improvement in Sino-US relations following the accord over compensation for NATO's attack on the Chinese embassy in Belgrade and the US reiteration of its one-China policy, it added.

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Meanwhile, a report from

**LED BD starts leasing software this month**

The management of LED Bangladesh, a Swiss software developing company operating in Bangladesh yesterday announced a brand new service - software leasing, says a press release.

LED is keen to contribute actively towards building up the software sector in Bangladesh. The target is to make sophisticated business software available to even small companies, the release said.

With this in mind, LED came up with the unique offer to lease software.

LED's software is modular and can be fitted together according to the needs of the customers. The modules can be used without any further adjustment.

The advantage of leasing is not only the low monthly payment, but also allows customers to immediately start using a generic and standardised ERP software package and slowly build his own tailor-made system over time.

LED will start leasing its software this month with only a few limited customers as a test phase.

**ADB may consider anti-laundering commitment of borrowers**

MANILA, Aug 4: In evaluating loan applications, the Asian Development Bank may consider whether countries are strongly committed to fighting money laundering, a bank official said Wednesday, reports AP.

ADB vice president John Lintjer said the step would encourage countries to enact tough anti-money laundering laws.

"International concern arises from the very serious threat that money laundering poses for economic development and the world financial system, and from the potential it has for undermining national integrity systems," Lintjer told a regional conference on money laundering.

He said smaller economies are particularly vulnerable and should adopt adequate protection while dismantling foreign exchange controls and liberalising capital markets.

About 100 delegates from 27 countries are attending the three-day ADB-hosted conference, which began Wednesday. Participants plan to discuss possible strategies for combating money laundering.

Philippine President Joseph Estrada, in a speech delivered by an aide, said it has become virtually impossible to identify funds from criminal sources because of the speed by which money is transferred from one country to another through electronic wire transactions.

**Weekly Tea Sale All types witness strong demand**

CHITTAGONG, Aug 4: The weekly tea sale held here yesterday was marked by fairly strong demand for almost all types of teas at generally firm rates, market sources said, reports BSS.

Both the internal and some foreign buyers lent strong support to different types of teas at dearer rates. But with the progress of sale there was less demand, which made prices ease by Tk 2 to Tk 4 per kg.

However, a few well-made varieties maintained their previous price levels.

Internal buyers were operating strongly with less support from blenders.

Poland made strong presence along with buyers from CIS countries.

There was also slightly improved enquiry from Pakistan and out-markets.

Bold brokers were strongly completed for and generally appreciated by Tk 17 to Tk 17.50 per kg, while larger brokers met with a similar trend. The

browner types were often neglected.

Clean medium and smaller brokens were initially a strong type, selling at firm to slightly dearer rates. But with the progress of sale prices were mostly steady to sometimes easier following quality.

Fannings, particularly the cleaner varieties, initially met with a strong demand, selling at Tk 2 to Tk 3 above previous levels. But towards the middle of the sale, demand slackened with prices barely steady to slightly easier shedding Tk 2 and sometimes more.

750 chess and 2,246 gunny sacks of dust on offer met with less demands at easier rates. Better liquoring pekoo dust, red dust and dusts eased by Tk 2, while others eased by up to Tk 5. Churaman dust was lower by Tk 10 while loose tea buyers and blenders were selective.

There were 10,054 chests and 11,934 gunny sacks of teas on offer.



Japan's cosmetics giant Shiseido unveils the world's first perfume to awake vitality and uplift the spirit Wednesday at the company's headquarters in Tokyo. The "Energizing Fragrance" features a bright, sheer fusion of floral spicy and musky notes. Shiseido will launch it on November 1 with a price of 4,000 yen (34 USD) for the 100ml bottle.

— AFP photo

**Move to block Taiwan's bid for membership China to resume WTO entry talks with US this month**

HONG KONG, Aug 4: China will resume talks with the United States around late August on its entry into the World Trade Organisation (WTO) provided no major changes in Sino-US relations arise, a Hong Kong newspaper said on today, reports Reuters.

The Hong Kong Economic Times quoted unidentified sources as saying China and the United States could reach a preliminary agreement by the time of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in New Zealand in September.

But Chinese authorities were only cautiously optimistic about entry into the trade bloc this year, the daily said.

China has recently sent a small negotiating team to WTO headquarters in Geneva to hold talks with representatives of Northern European countries on the WTO issue, it said.

Some Chinese leaders think the time to reopen WTO talks with the United States is nearing, the paper said. This was in light of an improvement in Sino-US relations following the accord over compensation for NATO's attack on the Chinese embassy in Belgrade and the US reiteration of its one-China policy, it added.

Chinese authorities will decide whether to resume talks with the United States at their annual August policy retreat at the Beidaihe seaside resort, the newspaper said.

Washington after NATO bombs hit the Chinese embassy in Belgrade on May 7.

Last week, the United States agreed to pay US\$4.5 million in compensation for three Chinese killed and 27 wounded in the attack.

Taipei says: China has taken moves to block Taiwan's accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) amid brightened cross-strait tension, a top trade official said here today.

"Communist China has manoeuvred to get countries, such as Pakistan, to make unreasonable demands in the (WTO) working meeting," said Chen Ruyong, director general of Taiwan's Board of Foreign Trade (BOFT).

"We are not surprised as communist China has insisted that it has to enter the WTO ahead of Taiwan," Chen said.

Beijing, furious at Taiwan's call last month to be recognised as a state, has asked its allies to lobby against Taiwan, which has already completed negotiations for entry into the WTO, said Wu Hsin-hua, a BOFT official.

and Bangladesh opposed a review of Taiwan's application in an unofficial WTO working meeting in Geneva last Friday, Wu said.

Cuba also made a request to open bilateral talks with the island in another blocking move, according to the United Daily News.

The newspaper said China had for the first time come out into the open in its efforts to undermine Taiwan's accession to the WTO. China, which views Taiwan as a rebel province, opposes all attempts by the island to seek a greater international role.

Beijing was enraged after Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui on July 10 said China and Taiwan should hold a dialogue on equal terms and that ties between the two sides should be re-defined as a "special state-to-state relationship".

**Asian stock markets close mixed**

SINGAPORE, Aug 4: Asian stock markets were mixed today as Tokyo stocks sank on waning hopes of joint US-Japan intervention to boost the dollar, and Hong Kong shares climbed on buoyant bank issues, reports Reuters.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 average ended down 1.6 per cent at 17,685 led by selling in blue-chip electronics makers, while Hong Kong's Hang Seng index closed 0.9 per cent higher at 13,591, led by HSBC Holdings.

The dollar stood at 114.52/61 yen at 0930 GMT, against 115.22/32 in late New York on Tuesday.

It held that weak level despite Japanese Finance Minister Kiichi Miyazawa's comment that the possibility of the dollar falling under 115 yen on Tuesday had prompted a call between him and US Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers.

US and Japanese officials said the two discussed recent foreign exchange movements, but both sides refused to give further details and Washington pointedly omitted any reference

to the dollar or concerted intervention.

"There is a sense of disappointment after the yen failed to weaken much afterwards," said Tatsuo Kurokawa, deputy general manager at Nomura Securities.

The euro surged to \$1.0782/87, compared with \$1.0680/87 in late New York trade on Tuesday, led by buy-backs by overseas speculators amid concerns over US asset markets.

Key September 10-year Japanese government bond futures ended easier, as sentiment remained weak despite sporadic bids from public and private investors.

In Seoul, the Korea Composite Stock Price Index rose 0.2 per cent to 975.45 as foreign and institutional sales offset retail buying.

"Retail punters, in particular, took the news of Daewoo Group's imminent sale of Daewoo Electronics as a positive signal meaning that the group's restructuring will bear fruit," said Kim Dae-jung.