

US, China inch closer to resuming WTO talks

AUCKLAND, Sept 9: China and the United States moved closer to resuming negotiations on Beijing's admission to the WTO following talks here today that a senior US trade official described as progress, says AFP.

US Trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky told reporters that she and Chinese Trade Minister Shi Guangsheng had "discussed the resumption of WTO talks with respect to China's entry" in a meeting that lasted more than two hours.

China suspended contacts with US negotiators following the May 7 NATO air attack on the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, refusing to accept Washington's explanation that the bombing had been a mistake.

"The discussion was constructive," Barshefsky said after conferring with Shi on the sidelines of a gathering here of ministers from the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum.

We of course re-affirmed the importance of China's entry into the WTO (World Trade Organization) on commercially meaningful terms.

"Minister Shi and I agreed to work jointly to resolve the outstanding issues as soon as possible. We did not establish a specific time-line but I do think that the discussions underscored the desire to re-engage in substantive discussions. I think that itself is progress."

But Chinese concessions aimed at meeting Washington's demand that China make its markets more accessible to foreign goods fell short. Efforts to resolve the differences fell apart in the aftermath of the embassy bombing.

Barshefsky earlier Thursday said agreements still needed to be reached on banking and securities transactions, textile trade and on overall protocols governing bilateral commercial relations.

Her talks here with Shi followed US-China talks at the expert level in Beijing on Monday and Tuesday that she said had been helpful despite the fact that Chinese accession to the WTO was only discussed in general terms.

In addition to winning US backing for its admission to the Geneva-based trade monitoring body, China must also reach an accord with the European Union.

Moves to secure a full agreement could get a boost on Sat-



Alhaj Abdul Kader Miah, the founder-Chairman of BYMA, inaugurates the Narayanganj branch of Dutch-Bangla Bank Limited (DBBL). Others seen in the picture are (from left) Mohammed Sahabuddin Ahmed, Chairman, Nurul Azim Chowdhury, Managing Director, Alhaj Abdul Kader Miah, DM Oof, First Secretary of the Netherlands Embassy, and Nizamuddin Mahmood Selim, Director of DBBL.

— DBBL photo

Dutch-Bangla Bank opens branch in N'ganj

The Dutch-Bangla Bank Limited (DBBL) has opened its branch in Narayanganj, says a press release.

It was inaugurated by octogenarian Alhaj Abdul Kader Miah, founder-Chairman of Bangladeshi Yarn Merchants Association (BYMA).

Many local elite and dignitaries, including representatives of BTMA, BYMA, BHMA, BKMEA and BGMEA were present. Among others, Managing Directors of many reputed industries and business houses attended the opening ceremony.

Also present on the occasion were the First Secretary of the Netherlands Embassy, DM Oof, Mohammed Sahabuddin Ahmed, Chairman, Nizamuddin Mahmood Selim, Abdur Rashid Khan, Shafi Rahman, and Abdus Salam, Directors, Dutch-Bangla Bank Limited, Nurul Azim Chowdhury, Managing Director and Senior Executives of the Bank were also present.

The branch will focus on lending support to the export-oriented industries in general, with special emphasis on the knitwear industries of Narayanganj.

EMU march to stay on track

Greek quake costs seen at \$ 324m

ATHENS, Sept 9: Greece's EMU convergence will stay on track as the earthquake impact on the budget and the economy will be contained and will not exceed 100 billion drachmas (\$324 million), officials and analysts say, reports Reuters.

"So far, there has been no adverse impact from the earthquake on the currency and fixed income markets in Greece. We expect no implications on near term inflation or economic growth," said Soc Gen economist Debbie Bennelick.

Greek finance ministry officials estimate the financial cost of the 5.9 Richter earthquake which shook Athens on Tuesday will not exceed 100 billion drachmas — its budgetary impact to be spread over three years.

Top finance ministry officials told Reuters on Thursday that based on these damage estimates, this and next year's budgets — crucial for Greece's EMU membership plans — will

not be overstretched.

The impact on this year's budget will be around 10 billion drachmas. The main portion of the 100-billion-drachma impact will be absorbed in next year's budget and will include the state's subsidies on the construction of new homes.

One day after the strong earthquake which so far has killed 74 people and left at least 16,000 homeless, Prime Minister Costas Simitis unveiled a package of relief measures.

These include a 200,000 drachma (\$ 649) stipend for homeless families to cover immediate needs and financial aid for homeless pensioners and those forced into unemployment because of quakerelated damages to businesses.

The state will also subsidise rents and provide financial assistance for repair works in the form of a free grant for one third of the total cost and interest-free 15 year loans.

Yeltsin denies money laundering involvement

WASHINGTON, Sept 8: Russian President Boris Yeltsin denied that he was involved in the alleged multi-billion dollar Russian money laundering scandal during a telephone conversation with President Bill Clinton Wednesday, the White House said, says AFP.

The Russian leader "dismissed the allegations" and suggested they were "politically motivated," according to US National Security Adviser Sandy Berger.

US and British investigators are looking into whether up to 15 billion dollars funnelled through US bank accounts may have been laundered by Russia's political and business elite.

The funds may include loan money from the International Monetary Fund, US aid and mafia money, some of which may be linked to senior members of the Russian government and Yeltsin's inner circle.

Yeltsin also assured Clinton that Russia was ready to cooperate with the US investigation into the alleged scam centering on the Bank of New York.

During the conversation, Yeltsin said he was ready to sign an anti-money laundering bill that Russia's lower house, the Duma, passed, adding however that the text had to be revised to conform to the Russian constitution.

But while a handful of nervous passengers cancelled



Former Prime Minister of Norway and Director General of World Health Organisation (WHO) Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland was cordially welcomed by the new Norwegian General Manager of The Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel Hans G. Winnes, upon her arrival on Wednesday afternoon at the Hotel to attend a reception accorded to her by Bangladesh Medical Research Council.

— Sonargaon photo

Asia shrugs off 'all nines' cyberbug

HONG KONG, Sept 9: Asia defied the prophets of doom predicting a meltdown Thursday because of the dreaded 9-9-99 cyberbug, with most states reporting little disruption and a successful dry run for the millennium, reports AFP.

Computer glitches had been expected because the sequence 9999 -- Thursday's date -- is used in some old mainframe computers and outdated programming languages to indicate "end of file".

It was feared any system confusing the date for a command could crash, and countries across the region swung special action plans into force in a bid to transform the lethal bug into a damp squib.

In the region's financial centres of Tokyo, Hong Kong and Singapore task forces set up to tackle the Y2K bug reported initial success in seeing off the "all nines" threat.

Hong Kong mobilised extra police, put power workers on standby and a task force of bank workers was on hand to resupply ATM machines if nervous customers decided to withdraw their life savings.

But while a handful of nervous passengers cancelled

flights, the territory's airport and financial watchdog reported a smooth day's trade.

The absence so far of any reports from banks of Year-2000 related problems seems to be confirming our expectations that 9 September would not produce problems," said David Carse, HKMA deputy chief executive.

The Bank of Japan was forced to inject an extra 300 billion yen (2.8 billion dollars) into the overnight call market late Wednesday to counter a rise in rates sparked by fears over the bug.

Japan's government task force on the Y2K problem asked companies and local governments to send in reports of any problems as a test-run for the millennium bug.

"We had no reports of problems related to the four nines computer problem," said Kei Nakamura, a task force official, while the Japanese Bankers Association said none of its 147 members had reported any faults.

Singapore's National Computer Board Y2K office also trumpeted its success, giving the country a clean bill of health for the millennium.

Exchange Rates

American Express Bank Ltd foreign exchange rates (indicative) against the Taka to major currencies.

Currency	Selling TT & OD	Selling BC	Buying TT Clean	Buying OD Sight Export Bill	Buying OD Transfer
US Dollar	49.7300	49.7700	49.3200	49.1570	49.0650
Pound Sto	80.8361	80.9011	79.6271	79.3640	79.2477
Deutsche Mark	27.3640	27.3861	26.3293	26.2897	26.2512
Swiss Franc	33.0652	32.5545	32.4469	32.3993	32.3993
Japanese Yen	0.4578	0.4582	0.4495	0.4480	0.4474
Dutch Guilder	24.2861	24.8056	23.4242	23.3326	23.2984
Danish Krone	7.1461	7.1519	6.9839	6.9608	6.9506
Australian \$	32.8467	32.8731	31.5648	31.4605	31.4144
Belgian Franc	1.3267	1.3278	1.2796	1.2746	1.2728
Canadian \$	33.7771	33.8043	32.8187	32.7103	32.6624
French Franc	8.1590	8.1655	7.9694	7.8387	7.8272
Hong Kno \$	6.4162	6.4214	6.3379	6.3170	6.3077
Italian Lira	0.0276	0.0277	0.0267	0.0265	0.0265
Norway Kroner	6.4400	6.4452	6.3336	6.3127	6.3035
Singapore \$	29.7250	29.7490	28.7748	28.6797	28.6377
Saudi Rial	13.2950	13.3057	13.1142	13.0709	13.0517
UAE Dirham	13.5774	13.5883	13.3009	13.3466	13.3271
Swedish Krona	6.1289	6.1338	6.0523	6.0234	6.0234
Qatari Riyal	13.6971	13.7081	13.5071	13.4625	13.4428
Kuwaiti Dinar	168.9485	169.0844	166.8453	156.3269	156.0979
Thai Baht	1.2563	1.2573	1.2434	1.2393	1.2375
Euro	53.5194	53.5625	51.6201	51.4182	51.3429

Bill buying rates

TT Doc	30 Days	60 Days	90 Days	120 Days	180 Days
49.2112	48.9090	48.4980	48.0870	47.6760	46.8540

US Dollar London Interbank Offered Rate (LIBOR)

Buying	Selling	Currency	1 Month	3 Months	6 Months	9 Months	12 Months
49.0850	49.7300	USD	5.3800	5.5187	5.9600	5.9700	6.0675
79.2477	80.8361	GBP	50.0615	52.1422	56.6250	57.5991	59.4828
43.512	51.720	Cash/ TC	2.5887	2.6823	3.0968	3.18000	3.27688

Exchange rates of some Asian currencies against US dollars

Indian Rupee	Pak Rupee	Thai Baht	Malaysian Ringgit	Indonesian Rupiah	Korean Won
43.505	51.720	39.480	3.7995	8570	1190.3
43.512	51.790	39.530	3.8005	8620	1190.8

Amex notes on Thursday's market

Strong downward pressure on the USD/BDT rates due to liquidity of USD in the interbank market took it down 49.48/53 level. This level is expected to hold on in the coming week.

Market makers interest of keeping the call rates as high as possible kept the market steady at 7.8 per cent level. The pressure from the market makers should keep the call rate steady at this level but a slight downward movement may occur.

The yen swept higher on Thursday in Tokyo after Japanese growth figures surprised with their strength, confirming a recovery in the world's second-largest economy. Both the dollar and euro were buried beneath an avalanche of selling after data showed GDP rose 0.2 per cent in the April-June quarter. That easily outstripped forecasts of a 0.35 per cent fall and was considered a robust result given the stunning 2.0 per cent jump in Q1. And with market already confident the growth would continue in the third quarter, yen bulls were salivating at the prospect of further offshore investment in Japan. The impact was all the greater as soft capital investment figures early in the week had convinced many to short the yen in anticipation of a weak GDP result. Japanese exporters were also queuing up to hedge their foreign currency earnings, having delayed for a number of months in the vain hope the BOJ would force the yen lower through intervention. There was still some caution among yen bulls that the BOJ could yet intervene.

The yen rallied by two per cent against the dollar and by nearly the same amount against the euro on Thursday, cheered by Japanese second quarter growth.