

Japan readying new phase of Asia aid plan

SINGAPORE, Oct 3: Japan is preparing a second phase of its Asian assistance plan that would offer technical and development aid, a senior trade ministry official said yesterday, reports Reuters.

Himitsu Arai, Ministry of Trade and Industry (MITI) vice minister for international affairs, told Reuters the time was ripe for a 'second stage' of the \$30 billion Miyazawa plan.

'During the first year, the very important measure was to provide financing,' he said.

'To have a stable economic recovery [in Asia], it is necessary for Japan to provide technical assistance or human resources development assistance or ... in market restructuring.'

He declined to say when the new phase would be announced or whether its need would be precluded by Asian economic recovery, but said Japan could do more.

'It's time for Japan to provide [for] those areas more than before.'

Arai was visiting Singapore to meet Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) economic officials.

In a separate press briefing, Arai sidestepped the question of financial support, saying it must be coordinated with organisations such as the Asian Development Bank and World Bank.

Only one-third of foreign cos in China posted profits in '98

BELJING, Oct 3: A study of tax returns showed that only one in three foreign or foreign-invested firms in China posted a profit in 1998, the official of China's Business Weekly reported Sunday, reports AP.

The State Administration of Taxation based its calculation on income tax verifications involving 98 per cent of the foreign and foreign-invested firms in China. Of 100,922 such businesses, only 34,683 reported profits, a decrease of 2,024 compared with the year earlier, it said.

Total profits climbed 6.36 per cent from the year before to 124.3 billion yuan (\$14.9 billion) but the rate of increase slowed, the report said.

It cited Yu Shuchun of the administration's Foreign Tax Department as saying that many of the firms were too small to take advantage of economies of scale, while others suffered from poor planning and fierce competition.

Unocal finds oil, gas, condensate in Thai Gulf

BANGKOK, Oct 3: Energy giant Unocal said today it had discovered significant oil, natural gas and condensate deposits in the Gulf of Thailand, says AFP.

The discoveries came as Unocal Thailand drilled its first exploration wells in previously unexplored fields in the resource-rich Pattani basin off Thailand's southeast coast.

'We are excited about the success of our continuing exploration programme, particularly the discovery of a potentially commercial oil reservoir,' said Unocal Thailand president Randy Howard.

Howard said one of the wells south of the Tatanwan field was 'significant' because it tested oil in a region where we have typically found natural gas and condensate.

'If the resources is commercial we will look at tying it into existing oil pipelines to bring this oil and gas to market,' he added.

Howard noted that while the present market for gas was limited in Thailand, the discoveries could add to the country's domestic energy supplies as the economy recovers from the Asian crisis.

Mixed blessing for Asia if China enters WTO

body.

China held out a glimmer of hope, with top trade negotiator Long Yongtu telling CNN television that China and the United States were 'very close' to a deal.

Stumbling talks between Beijing and Washington on a WTO deal seem to be raising few rates in financial markets. Yet analysts say a deal would have big implications for the Chinese economy, regional trade and the spectre of yuan devaluation.

London-based analysts said the markets appeared to be discounting Chinese accession to the WTO, and could be in for a nasty shock if there were a major setback in the talks.

The market's not holding its breath, but if it got the wrong result would probably gasp for breath — it would be a punch in the solar plexus,' said Nick Douch, currency strategist at Barclays Capital.

Key to Asian currency markets is any whisper that China might or might not devalue its

yuan currency, an analysts said WTO membership would tend to reduce the likelihood of a devaluation.

Perhaps the biggest plus from WTO membership would be the likely rise in foreign direct investment to China.

China would benefit from fresh capital inflows and breath new life into its stalled reform programme, analysts say.

Ironically for a trade agreement, the trade implications of Chinese entry to the WTO are less clear-cut.

Some analysts argue that China would benefit from clear access to US markets to increase its export growth and boost export-oriented companies. Others note that China already has a huge trade surplus with the United States, and further expansion may be limited on that front.

Other Asian countries could gain as China opens its markets.



The Iraqi stand is adorned with portraits of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and Iranian President Mohammad Khatami Saturday at the 25th international trade fair. More than 80 countries, 1,466 Iranian firms and 785 foreign companies are due to take part in the fair, the biggest in the country since the 1979 Islamic revolution.

—AFP photo

Buoyant gold to save thousands of South African jobs

JOHANNESBURG, Oct 3: A surge in gold prices will save thousands of jobs in South Africa's mining sector but the country still needs to expand its non-gold exports for future stability. Finance Minister Trevor Manuel said yesterday, reports Reuters.

Speaking on his return from the annual meetings of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, Manuel also hailed a US-led debt relief programme for the world's poorest nations, saying it would help Africa tackle poverty.

The comeback of gold prices is important because it allows for longer planning in the industry. I believe there will be some saving of jobs. I believe there will be an impact for the future,' Manuel told reporters at Johannesburg airport.

South Africa is the world's largest gold producer and despite a decline in its importance, the bullion industry still accounts for around 15 per cent of the country's hard currency earnings every year.

If the current rally is sustained, economists say, it will add billions of rand to annual export earnings, improving the balance of payments position. The outlook for the rand, interest rates and sustainable growth.

This enhances enormous opportunities for Africa. The move throws a fair amount of the spotlight on Africa.'

Britain said on Thursday it would consider writing off 100 per cent of debts owed by poor countries, saying it would help Africa, the world's poorest continent, realign its economy.

Only wines from countries which had bilateral, or were part of multilateral, accords with the EU on traditional terms like 'vintage,' 'superior,' 'reserve' and 'extra' would be admitted to the vast EU market.

Trade sources said the complaint was backed by Australia, Argentina, Chile, New Zealand and Uruguay — all of whom, like the United States, have made inroads into Europe at the expense of French, German, Spanish and Italian wines.

The EU official said the measure had not been notified to the WTO, as members of the body are obliged to do if they enact any decisions affecting imports, because it believed there would be no significant impact on trade.

The United States had provided no clear examples of how it would affect US wine on the EU market, he said.

Their decision effectively removes the fear of major official sales.

Manuel also welcomed US-led moves to forgive debts owed by poor countries, saying it would help Africa, the world's poorest continent, realign its economy.

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SYLHET: Mahbubur Rahman Khan, Managing Director of Sonali Bank, speaks at a meeting of the officers in Sylhet on Thursday.

—Star photo

Move aims at saving own producers' US snipes at EU's new wine-labelling plan

Implementation postponed

But the sources said an EU official told the meeting the measure's implementation had been postponed to August next year, and was aimed at preventing wine producers misleading customers by improper use of the labels.

The United States itself had extensive wine labelling requirements, he added, according to the sources.

The EU was consulting on the issue with many other countries in the 134-nation WTO and was ready for multilateral discussions on labelling for consumer protection, the official said.

In its submission, the United States said what it called a host of traditional terms being barred by the EU 'are used by winemakers the world over to describe the nature and quality of their own products.'

But Brussels was treating them as 'proprietary property' as if they were a geographical designation, it asserted.

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S Arabia optimistic about joining WTO

RIYADH, Oct 3: Saudi Arabia has finished an advanced phase of its membership talks with the World Trade Organisation. Saudi Trade Minister Osama bin Jaafar al-Faqih said today, reports AFP.

'There is no obstacle blocking the kingdom's membership in this organisation,' the minister said, quoted by the official SPA news agency. But he did not say when Saudi Arabia will join the WTO.

Faqih submitted to the WTO in September a working plan and timetable for bringing Saudi commerce laws in line with WTO standards.

Saudi Arabia, the world's top crude oil producer, wants to join the WTO to open the world market to its powerful petrochemical industry, represented by the Saudi Basic Industries

Corp group.

European and US companies oppose this, saying that SABIC receives subsidies in the form of 30 per cent reductions on purchases of gas and liquefied petroleum gas from government-owned Saudi Aramco.

SABIC says that the discount represents the rate for storage, transportation and other services Saudi Aramco provides to its foreign clients which local industries do not need as much.

Another bone of contention between the WTO and Riyadh has been investment.

Foreign investors can only hold minority shares of companies created in Saudi Arabia and they are not guaranteed visas to visit the kingdom.

In addition, the WTO demands greater transparency in registering Saudi companies.

Shipping Intelligence

CHITTAGONG PORT

Berth position and performance of vessels as on 2,10,99.

Berth No	Name of Vessels	Cargo	L Port Call	Local Agent	Date of Arrival	Vessel
J/1	Chopal-2	Fert	Beth	Apex	20/9	3/10
J/2	Well Pescadores	Wheat (P)	Sing	Rainbow	13/9	5/10
J/3	Orient Rose	G	Hald	Everett	29/9	2/10
J/4	Bulk Emerald	R Seed	Fran	MSA	3/9	3/10
J/5	Salton-2	G	Saig	Royal	22/9	7/10
J/6	Handy Esperance	G	Sing	Prog	20/9	8/10
J/7	Banglar Urmil	Wheat (G)	BSC	R/A	4/10	
J/8	Sarah-1	G	Yang	SMNL	19/9	2/10
J/9	Neptune Akbar	Wheat (P)	Sing	FSL	15/9	5/10
J/10	Trident	G	P Said	MSA	23/9	11/10
J/11	Millennium Hawk	Wheat (G)	Sorol	Ancient	23/9	5/10
J/12	Bunga Mas Enam	Cont	P Kel	EOSL	29/9	3/10
J/13	Kota Berjaya	Cont	Sing	Pil (BD)	28/9	2/10
CCT/1	Xpress Makalu	Cont	Sing	Baridhi	27/9	2/10
CCT/2	QC Teal	Cont	P Kel	QCSL	30/9	2/10
CCT/3	Confidence	Cont	Sing	RSL	28/9	2/10
RM/14	Ever Chear	Fert	Sing	SSTL	19/9	7/10
RM/15	Revenge	Idle		MumbSunshine	3/8	7/10
CCJ	Paulina	C Cement	Pada	AMBL	25/8	4/10
GSJ	Al Bauraq	CDSO	Darb	TSL	29/9	4/10
RM/3	Salamis	HSD/SKQ	Sing	ECNL	27/9	3/10
RM/6	Ervilia	C. Clink (J)	Lumet	Apex	30/9	14/10
DDJ	Ocean Pride	Repair	Sing	BDShip	13/9	4/10
DDJ/1	Bangla Birol	Bunker		BSC	R/A	2/10
RM/8	Bangla Kallo	Repair	Durb	OWSL	25/9	10/10
RM/9	Phaethon	Repair	Durb	OWSL	10/6	15/10
CUFL	Mary Nour	Cement	Mala	BSL	25/9	5/10

Vessels due at outer anchorage

Name of Vessels	Date of Arrival	L Port Call	Local Agent	Cargo	Loading Port
Teresa Everett (48) 9/9	4/10	Yang	Everett	G	
Mira	2/10	-	MSA	Wheat (P)	-
Santa Rosa	3/10	Rouen	Ancient	Wheat (G)	-
Bold Alliance	4/10	-	Uniship	Cement	
Bunga Mas Lapan (Cont) 22/9	3/10	P Kel	EOSL	Cont	Sing
Jurong Balsam (Cont) 26/9	3/10	Sing	NOL	Cont	Sing
Ultima (Cont) 23/9					