Foreign businessmen keep fingers crossed as talks enter 5th day

US, China talk down to wire over WTO entry issue

BEIJING, Nov 14: US and Chinese negotiators talked down to the wire today over Beijing's entry into the world Trade Organisation after Premier Zhu Rongji weighed into the "difficult" discussions, reports Reuters.

Chief US negotiator Charlene Barshefsky left the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation, where most of the talks have been held over more than four days just 45 minutes before her scheduled flight home was due to leave.

There was no immediate comment from either side on whether the long and difficult talks had ended.

A US official said the two sides had been talking all night and Barshefsky and her Chinese counterparts had been involved following Barshefsky's meeting with Zhu on Saturday.

US President Bill Clinton has called the latest round of discussions "difficult" but said he hoped they would end China's 13-year quest to join the WTO before the body meets at the end of this month to launch a new round of talks.

Meanwhile, another report from Guangzhou says: Senior executive from US and multinational corporations attending a conference here Sunday held their breath as crucial bilateral talks on China's WTO entry went into an unscheduled fifth day.

Even those who did not foresee a direct short-term benefit from Chinese market-opening concessions said they would gain if China had a fast entry to the global free-trade today.

Asked if he would be disappointed if the prolonged high-level talks in Beijing came up with nothing, Gerald Butters, the president of Lucent Technologies' optical networking group, said: "absolutely." "China needs to be in the World Trade Organisation, period," he said.

The terms of an agreement between, Washington and Beijing — seen as the last big hurdle to China's 13-year accession battle — would have relatively little direct impact on information technology (IT) equipment manufacturers like Lucent, he said.

But Chinese concessions allowing foreign telecoms service providers to enter the market for the first time would gives sales a strong boost, he predicted. "We'd be the beneficiary of the American-European effects of lots of ISPs (Internet service providers), lots of application service providers as well as the traditional and long-distance carriers (appearing) . . . more competition, more clients," Butters said.

Talks in Beijing between US and Chinese negotiators, originally scheduled to last just two days, went into a fifth day Sunday after the two sides met through the night, reporters in Beijing said.

US Trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky and her delegation had been due to check out of the Palace Hotel but changed their minds at 9:30 am (0130 GMT), a hotel staff member said.

Henry Chow, the president of IBM's Greater China Group, likewise said he was "keen" to see a deal wrapped up.

Stepped-up trade and investment would "indirectly improve the economic situation and make economic growth in China even faster."

"With economic growth, the IT industry is bound to benefit," he said.

Foreign investment in certain sectors would shoot up in the short term as a result of WTO entry, Chow said.

"For example banking, for example insurance, for example telecoms, these are big information-technology users," he said.

Chow said it would be a "milestone" leading to even bigger things in the long term for China, which he described as a major market for IBM regardless of WTO status.

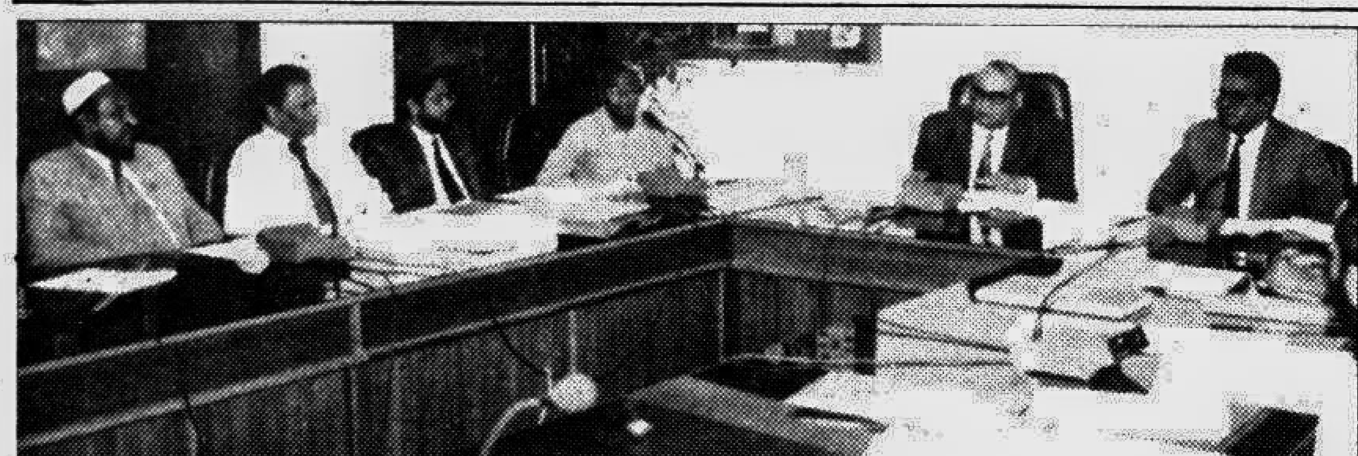
"You've really got to be accepted as a part of the world economy before you can step forward and become a leader of the world economy," he said.

The executives were speaking on the sidelines of the International Consultative Conference on the Future Economic Development of Gaungdong Province, a key industrial and export powerhouse for China.

Both were members of a hand-picked panel of 20 advisors to provincial Governor Lu Ruihua, although the meeting pulled in more than 90 executives from a range of foreign companies and institutions.

Earlier in the day, the governor said he thought WTO entry would help the country become "more competitive in the world market."

Construction workers work on a pyramid-type structure on what is to become the future Philippine Stock Exchange Sunday. The future exchange is located within the former military base of Fort Bonifacio being converted into an investment enclave to rival the Makati central business district in Manila. —AFP photo



Prof Dr M A Mannan, Founder Chairman of SIBL, speaks at the inauguration of the course on "Cash Management" at the Boardroom of the bank on November 13. Also seen in the picture are M Shahjahan Mantu, Deputy Managing Director, Academic Consultant M Hedayetul Haque, M A Mannan, and M Abdur Rahman Chisty, Executive Vice President. — SIBL photo

SIBL cash management course begins

A week long course on "Cash Management" was inaugurated by Prof M A Mannan, founder Chairman of Social Investment Bank Ltd (SIBL), November 13 at the Boardroom of the bank's head office.

The inaugural function was presided over by Deputy Managing Director M Shahjahan Mantu.

Mannan advised the participants to be dutiful, dedicated, honest and a firm believer in the principles of SIBL.

Mantu urged the participants to be committed to the task of rendering services to the distressed people.

Among others, senior executives and Academic Consultant also attend the inaugural session.

UAE expects OPEC to extend output cuts

ABU DHABI, Nov 14: Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources of the United Arab Emirates Obeid Bin Saif Al Nasir said here Saturday that there was growing support within major oil producing countries for an extension of oil output cuts, says Xinhua.

"There is a lot of support on this issue and I think the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) will take the right decision at its March meeting," Nasir told reporters.

Oil prices have doubled since producers inside and outside OPEC agreed last March to cut 2.1 million barrels from daily output.

But the organisation said the average of oil prices since the start of this year is still very low — less than 17 US dollars a barrel — and stockpiles are still too high.

So it may consider extending its production cutback beyond next March when the agreement expires, analysts said.

The OPEC powers Iran and Saudi Arabia have indicated their willingness to extend the output curbs if stockpiles remain too high in March 2000.

Kuwait indicated on Tuesday that OPEC had agreed in principle to an extension.

"Ideas and suggestions are being exchanged by ministers of OPEC member countries. The organisation will be capable of taking the right decision in its March meeting," said Nasir.

Mexican austere budget good for poor: Zedillo

MEXICO CITY, Nov 14: The Mexican government's proposed budget for 2000 maintains a tradition of austerity but nevertheless allows spending on health, education and poverty eradication to leap, President Ernesto Zedillo said yesterday, reports Reuters.

In his weekly radio address to the nation, Zedillo said next year's spending and revenue plans, submitted to Congress on Thursday, represented the highest allocation of resources to social development in Mexico's history.

"In the budget I'm proposing for 2000, we maintain the austerity and discipline that we have observed in every year of this government," the Mexican leader said.

But, he said, at the same the proposals for election year 2000 would ensure basic health services for 99 per cent of all Mexicans, the highest spending ever on education and more money to fight poverty.

"If the project is approved, we will have the highest budget for social development in all our history," Zedillo said.

The Mexican economy is expected to grow by around 3.0 per cent this year, the fastest pace of economic expansion among Latin America's main economies, and according to the budget proposals, by around 4.5 per cent in 2000.

Despite the positive economic performance, the government estimates that 26 million of Mexico's 98 million inhabitants live in extreme poverty.

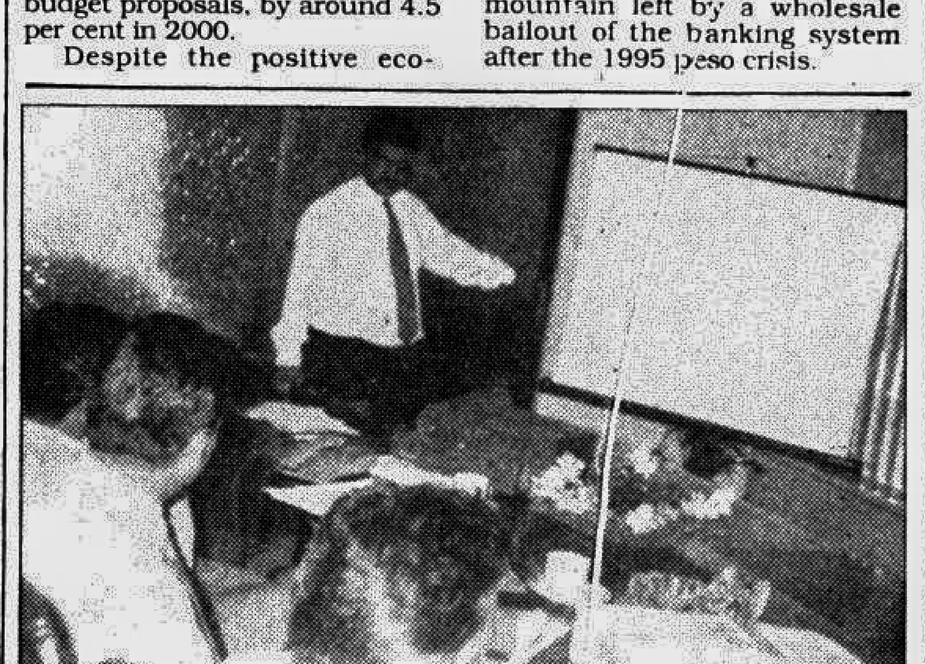
Official statistics show the number of poor has increased since 1995, when a disastrous peso devaluation shortly after Zedillo took power in Dec 1994 plunged the country into deep recession.

Sociologists also say the wealth gap has widened between the industrialised north, benefiting from the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which came into force among Mexico, the United States and Canada in 1994, and Mexico's largely indigenous, backward south.

In the budget plan for next year, the government proposed a 5.9 per cent increase, in real terms, in social spending.

Traditionally, Mexican governments have boosted spending wildly in election years to drum up votes for the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which has ruled Mexico since 1929.

According to the law, Congress must approve next year's budget by Dec 15. Some opposition parties have warned they will oppose it because of the high cost of servicing a debt mountain left by a wholesale bailout of the banking system after the 1995 peso crisis.



Regional Marketing and Sales Executive of Johnson and Johnson Prasenjeet Chaterjee conducts a session on Johnson's credo, personal code of conduct and standard of leadership recently. The Area Managers and Marketing Sales Manager MM Siddiqui of MF Consumers Ltd, the sole importer of Johnson and Johnson products in Bangladesh, participated in the session. — Cassandra photo

Indian govt mulls cutting RBI stake in SBI

BOMBAY, Nov 14: The government is considering cutting the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) stake in the country's largest commercial bank, the State Bank of India (SBI) SBI.BO to 33 per cent, a senior SBI official said today, reports Reuters.

The stake could be reduced by divesting a part of the central bank's shareholding in the bank, currently at 59.7 per cent, or by the issue of fresh equity, the source, who requested anonymity, told the news agency.

"The Finance Ministry has held preliminary discussions with SBI's top management about this. They (the Finance Ministry) have indicated a figure of 33 per cent," he said.

Any cut in RBI's stake in the bank below 55 per cent will require a parliamentary amendment to the State Bank of India Act of 1955.

The government was also working on another amendment in the act to increase the maximum stake that foreign funds can hold in SBI to 30 per cent from 20 per cent currently.

The holding limit will have to go up if foreign funds are to participate in any fresh capital issue or divestment.

The Bharatiya Janata Party-led coalition government, which initially had reservations about including SBI in the list of banks for privatisation, seems to have changed its stance.

India's Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha had earlier expressed is support for reducing government stakes in state-run banks, excluding SBI, below 50 per cent as part of a second generation of economic reforms.

"If you look at the Finance Minister's recent statements, he does not leave out SBI from privatisation. After all, the government has to raise money and there are not many state-run banks which can fetch a good premium," the source said.

SBI and its seven associate banks account for 25-30 per cent of total commercial bank deposit and credit business in India.

SBI's shares rank among the top five in trade volumes in the last five years.

The government has targeted raising 100 billion rupees in 1999/2000 (April-March) from divestment of state-run firms, but the firms listed for privatisation do not include banks.

The source said any divestment of SBI shares was unlikely to take place this year.

WB blames Myanmar junta for stagnant economy

BANGKOK, Nov 14: The World Bank has blamed Myanmar's military for the country's stagnant economy, telling its ruling generals political and human rights reform are the solution to achieving prosperity on a par with its neighbours, it was reported, says AFP.

Copies of the scathing assessment were delivered secretly to Yangon's generals and democratic opposition leader and Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi by a special representative of UN chief Kofi Annan last month.

The leaked document, the conclusions of which were published in the International Herald Tribune Saturday, is based on an examination of Myanmar's economy that received "unusual cooperation" from the junta.

Its findings are critical of the military's economic management, pointing an accusing finger at the generals rather than Asia's financial crisis as the main source of the country's economic malaise.

It says the country is facing the same economic woes it did a decade ago when the current junta took power, and that no progress has been made.

The junta's current policies are likely to exacerbate poverty and devastate national cohesion, it adds.

The World Bank's findings stand in contrast to Myanmar's official policy, and that of some Asian governments, that a firm economic base can and must be achieved before the country can risk giving its people more political freedoms.

WTO members discuss rifts ahead of Seattle meet

GENEVA, Nov 14: Delegates from the World Trade Organisation's member states met on Saturday to discuss their differences ahead of the WTO ministerial meeting in Seattle, Washington, later this month, reports AFP.

The WTO's ruling body called the informal meeting to go over the issues that will be discussed at the Seattle meeting, due to run from November 30 to December 3.

The Seattle talks will launch the next round of talks on international trade relations.

Delegates attending the informal session said the main sticking points for the forthcoming talks remained agriculture, minimum working standards and the applications of decisions from the previous Uruguay round of talks.

Among the industrialised countries, the main differences are between the European Union member states who want to maintain agricultural subsidies, and others who do not.

The United States and Cairns Group of agricultural exporting countries, including Australia, are fiercely opposed to agricultural subsidies.

For developing countries, their main concern is to see measures agreed at the Uruguay round of talks, to help their textile exports for example, actually enforced.

This same group of countries, led by Brazil, India and Pakistan, are opposed to the imposition any minimum standards of labour conditions: this is the domain of the International Labour Organisation, they say.

They also suspect that this measure, backed by the industrialised nations, is simply a thinly designed protectionist measure aimed at impeding their own economic development.

Despite this, the 135 member states — soon to be joined by Estonia at the start of the Seattle talks — remain committed to reaching an agreed position over the next three months.

After an acrimonious six-month battle over appointing the new WTO chief — former New Zealand premier Mike Moore — the member states now have to heal the wounds and work towards a consensus for the new round of talks.

An indication of how far they still have to go came from the Commonwealth summit in South Africa, when Commonwealth spokesman Kaye Whiteman described talks on the issue as difficult.

"For small states, there is a feeling that richer countries are calling for free trade because they are trying to get markets open for them," said Whiteman.

"Small states feel they are entitled to protect their markets and seek free access to larger markets" at the same time, he added.

Jordan announces $3.11b budget for year 2000

AMMAN, Nov 14: The government announced Saturday a 2.21 billion dinar ($3.11 billion) draft budget for fiscal 2000, says AP.

The draft, which has to go to Parliament for approval, projects a deficit of 410 million dinars ($577.5 million), or 6 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product — within the targets set by the International Monetary Fund.

The budget is 2 per cent over 1999.

exchange rates

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

Currency	Selling TT & OD	Selling BC	Buying T T Clean	Buying OD Sight Export Bill	Buying OD Transfer
US Dollar	49.7300	49.7700	49.3200	49.1570	49.0850
Pound Stg	80.8113	80.8763	79.1191	78.8577	78.7422
Deutsche Mark	26.6292	26.6506	25.6511	25.5508	25.5134
Swiss Franc	32.1606	32.1865	31.4721	31.3681	31.3222
Japanese Yen	0.4771	0.4775	0.4638	0.4623	0.4616
Dutch Guilder	23.6339	23.6529	22.7658	22.6768	22.6435
Danish Krona	6.9523	6.9579	6.7951	6.7726	6.7627
Australian $	32.6030	32.6292	31.3231	31.2196	31.1739
Belgian Franc	1.2911	1.2921	1.2437	1.2388	1.2370
Canadian $	34.3344	34.3621	33.3378	33.2277	33.1790
French Franc	7.9399	7.9463	7.6842	7.6183	7.6072
Hong Kong $	6.4120	6.4171	6.3338	6.3129	6.3036
Italian Lira	0.0269	0.0269	0.0259	0.0258	0.0258
Norway Kroner	6.3002	6.3053	6.1972	6.1767	6.1677
Singapore $	30.1157	30.1399	29.1472	29.0509	29.0083
Saudi Rial	13.2954	13.3061	13.1146	13.0712	13.0521
UAE Dirham	13.5770	13.5880	13.3909	13.3466	13.3271
Swedish Krona	5.9668	5.9716	5.8897	5.8702	5.8616
Qatari Riyal	13.6978	13.7089	13.5068	13.4621	13.4424
Kuwaiti Dinar	169.1497	169.2857	156.9451	156.4264	156.1973
Thai Baht	1.2832	1.2842	1.2700	1.2658	1.2639
Euro	52.0822	52.1241	50.1692	49.9730	49.8998

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	5.44375	6.07125	6.2375	6.08	6.125
80.4601	82.0644	GBP	5.32859	5.75375	5.94516	6.09594	6.24125
Cash/TC	Cash/TC	Euro	3.0025	3.4515	3.45563	3.52	3.60313

Exchange rates of some Asian currencies against US dollars

Indian Rupee	Pak Rupee	Thai Baht	Malaysian Ringgit	Indonesian Rupiah	Korean Won
43.36/43.42	51.87/51.90	38.77/38.82	3.7995/3.8005	7030/7080	1170/1171

Amex notes on Sunday's Market

USD/BDT rates moved between 49.49-49.50 in dull trading today. The call market was locked in 5.75-6 per cent level.

Europe's single currency caught its breath after a dramatic one per cent fall on Friday out remains vulnerable to new losses as the 11-nation regions economy is still no match for America's robust growth rates. By early afternoon, when many traders had squared positions for the weekend, the euro traded about a quarter of a cent above its session low of $1.0290 but remained about a cent of its session high of $1.0413. Dealers said a close above $1.0350 is necessary to stanch further euro declines next week. Fresh economic data showed US worker productivity expanded at an annual 4.2 per cent in the third quarter, helping cement the market's optimistic outlook. US retail sales were flat in October after declining slightly, in September, held down by a second straight month of sharply weaker new car sales. The euro's plunge meanwhile had a negative knock-on effect for the Swiss franc and sent it to four month lows above 1.56 francs. Dealers said dealers were now hoping to extend gains toward the 1.58 franc level even though the dollar backed off against the Swiss franc in midday trading.

Meanwhile the US currency kept a low profile against the yen, pushing only modestly higher but still hugging a three-quarter-yen range around 105. The Bank of Japan board meeting produced no change in policy, which analysts said came as little surprise after Governor Masaru Hayami had reiterated his opposition to a quantitative easing earlier in the week.

Sterling fell to an eight-week low against the dollar on Friday, toppling as the US currency enjoyed a broad-based rise on benign US data and the euro was undermined by weak German retail sales figures.

Analysts said there had been little independent sterling movement on the day, with the British currency tracking euro/dollar moves. "The euro has fallen and consequently so has sterling has against the dollar", said Adrian Schmidt, international economist at Chase Investment Bank in London.

The pound extended initial losses which stemmed from a fall in the single currency against the dollar after Germany reported a 2.7 per cent fall in September retail sales.

At NY close the exchange rates of major currencies against USD were GBP/USD 1.6142/1.6150 USD/CHF 1.5563/5571, USD/JPY 105.23/105.33, EUR/USD 1.0316/1.0323.

Shipping Intelligence

Chittagong Port

Berth position and performance of vessels as on 14.11.99

Berth No	Name of Vessels	Cargo	L Port Call	Local Agent	Date of Arrival	Leaving
J/1	Santa Suria	GI	Yang	Ambl	30/10	18/11
J/2	Astro Bright	Onion	Mars	Msa	15/11	17/11
J/3	Xuan Cheng	GI	Sing	Bdship	27/10	15/11
J/4	St Criox	Wheat (P)	Bris	Limond	20/10	25/11
J/5	Al Bauraq	C Clink(Aramit)	Kara	Rml	22/10	14/11
J/6	Socol-8	GI	Yang	Everett	7/11	16/11
J/7	Agia Philothei	Wheat(P)	Houst	OWSL	16/10	27/11
J/8	Sarah-1	GI	Yang	SMSL	4/11	-
J/9	Ken Koku	Wheat(G)	K Dia	Lams	28/10	17/10
J/10	Mehmet Emin	GI(Maize)	Panj	Angelic	20/10	14/11
J/11	Med Hope	Wheat(G)	K.Dia	Lams	26/10	15/11
J/12	Pandynamic	Wheat9P)	Adel	Angelic	13/10	18/11
J/13	Achiever	Cont	Sing	RSL	10/11	16/11
CCT/1	Bungamas Lima	Cont	Sing	EOSL	12/11	16/11
CCT/2	QC Millard	Cont	P Kel	QCSL	10/11	14/11
CCT/3	Bungamad Enam	Cont	P KEL	Eosl	11/11	14/11
RM/14	Sibrisk	Cement	Sing	Apex	17/10	21/11
RM/15	Mu Du Bong	TSP	Zhan	Delmure	8/11	20/11
GSJ	Ken Zui	Wheat(G)	K Dia	Lams	R/A	17/11
DOJ	Banglar Shourabh	C Oil	-	BSC	R/A	15/11
DD	Banglar Maya	Repari	-	BSC	R/A	25/11
DDJ/1	Al Marzan	Repair	Tuti	BSL	6/10	20/11
RM/8	Banglar Mookh	Repair	BSC	R/A	R/A	-
RM/9	Phaethon	-	-	-	-	19/11
KAFCO(U)	Martina	Fert	Mong	SMSL	17/10	24/11

Vessels Due at Outer Anchorage

Name of Vessels	Date of Arrival	L Port Call	Local Agent	Cargo	Loading Port
QC Teal (Cont) 4/11	14/11	P.Kel	Qcsl	Cont	Sing
Kota Naga (Cont) 4/11	14/11	Sing	Pil(BD)	Cont	Sing
Mary Nour	14/11	P.Kel	Bsl	Cement	-
Kota Singa (Cont) 4/11	15/11	Sing	Pil(BD)	Cont	Sing
Confidence (Cont)2/11	18/11	Sing	RSL	Cont	Sing
Bhababhuti(48)/7/10	17/11	-	SSL	GI	
Gill	14/11	-	Seacom	R Phos	-
Reat Universe	18/11	Mong	Litmond	Scraping	-
Al Muztuba	16/11	Kar	Cla	Riec (P)/GI	-
Wavelet	15/11	Rouen	Lams	Wheat (G)	-
Bunga Mas Lapan(Cont)7/11	17/11	P.Kel	Eosl	Cont	Sing
Xpress Resolve 10/11	16/11	Sing	Rsl	Cont	-
Cristian-1 (Roro/24) 4/11	16/11	-	Everett	Vehi	-
Tierra Azul (48)10/11	16/11	-	Everett	GI	-
Joya World (48)28/10	17/11	MAD	SSLL	GI (ST PROD)	-
Banglar Biraj(Cont)3/11	17/11	Sing	Bsc	Cont	Sing
QC Pintail (Cont) 4/11	17/11	Sing	QCSL	Cont	Sing
San Mateo (Roro/24) 3/11	17/11	P Kel	JF	Vehi	-
Tae Dong Gang	17/11	Sing	Total	GI(Y.Maize)	-
Sunglight Jewel	17/11	Sing	JF	Scraping	-
Jaya Mars (Cont) 9/11	16/11	-	Baridhi	Cont	Col
Banglar Shikha (Cont)8/11	18/11	Sing	Bsc	Cont	Sing

Tanker Due

Komandarm Fedko	17/11	Chen	OWSL	CDSO	-
Eburna	14/11	Sing	ECSL	HSD	-
Iver Splendor	17/11	-	TSL	CDSO	-

Name of Vessels	Cargo	Last Port Call	Local Agent	Date of Arrival
Vessels at Kutubdia				
Energy Explorer-IV	-	-	BBAL	5/04
Ismaya	-	-	BBAL	17/08
De Champion	-	-	BBAL	6/10
MFB Devi Matha	-	-	BBAL	24/10
MFB Sona	-	-	BBAL	24/10
MFB Lakshmi	-	-	BBAL	24/10
Seabulk Eagle	-	-	IBS	R/A(4/11)
Searbird-1	Cement	Sing	Apex	R/A(30/10)
Hassbat Qatar	C.Oil	Rast	USS	6/11
Banglar Jyoti	C.Oil	-	Bsc	R/A
Board Gate	Wheat(G)	-	Lams	R/A(11/10)
Vessels at outer Anchorage				
				Ready on
Arisbe	Wheat(P)	Pena	Rainbow	29/10
Banglar Urmi	Wheat(G)	K DIA	LAMS	R/A
IBN Quatibah	Fert(P)	Tamp	Litmond	3/11
Banglar Gourab	Wheat(G)	K Dia	Lams	R/A
Fantasy (Attach: 14/11/99)	GI/RS	Kaki	Litmond	3/11
Sheng Yang	GI	Sing	Rml	11/11
Kota Berjaya(Cont)	Cont	Sing	Pil(Bd)	12/11

The above are today's Shipping position and performance of vessels of Chittagong Port as per berthing sheet of CPA supplied by **HRC Group, Dhaka.**