

Taiwan says talks
breakdown won't
delay WTO entry

TAIPEI, Dec 5: Taiwan's economy minister said the World Trade Organisation's (WTO) failure to launch a new round of negotiations will not delay the island's bid to enter the global trade body, local newspapers reported today, reports Reuters.

The Commercial Times quoted Minister of Economic Affairs Wang Chih-kang as saying the breakdown in the WTO's Seattle talks would not have any negative effect on Taiwan's plans to enter the trade body in the spring of 2000.

Taiwan's entry process could even move faster as the WTO turns to discuss other items on the organisation's agenda, the United Daily News said, quoting Steve Chen, director of the economic ministry's board of foreign trade.

NBL declares
10:1 bonus
share

The 16th annual general meeting of National Bank Limited was held at its premises at Kauran Bazar on Saturday.

M Nurul Islam, Chairman of the bank presided over the meeting, says a press release.

In his inaugural address Islam said NBL achieved great success in 1998 in respect of profitability, export and import business, and deposit mobilisation.

"NBL is ready to face the challenges of the 21st Century. National Bank has already established its key position by introducing different products including computerised net work, NBL MasterCard, Western Money Transfer Services etc.," he said.

The bank declared 10:1 bonus share and this was unanimously approved by the shareholders in the meeting.

NBL's deposit stood at Tk 1734.47 crore at the end of 1998. Its net profit stood at Tk 40.09 crore.

Brazil committed
to reforms: US

RIO DE JANEIRO, Dec 5: US Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers said yesterday top Brazilian officials had assured him they were committed to reforming South America's largest economy and improving the daily lot of their people, reports Reuters.

On the last leg of a four-day trip to the region, Summers met Brazilian president Fernando Henrique Cardoso for a 40-minute closed-door session before he addressed an anniversary meeting of the Inter-American Development Bank later on Saturday.

"We agreed on the importance of fiscal consolidation, on the importance of... investments in people and the importance of social capital, both of which are really very large longer-term issues for Brazil," Summers told a small group of reporters after the meetings.

Brazil has started repaying some of the money it borrowed from a \$41.5 billion rescue package put together by the International Monetary Fund last year to prevent the nation's economy from collapsing in the face of global financial turmoil.

The loan programme had to be renegotiated in January after the government, bowing to fierce market pressures, abandoned a cherished inflation-busting policy under which its currency was firmly tied to the US dollar.

21st AGM of
Hotels Int'l
held

The 21st annual general meeting of Hotels International Limited, the owners of The Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel, for the year 1998 was held at The Pacific Sonargaon Hotel on Friday, says a press release.

Chairman of the Board of Directors of HIL and Secretary of the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism Chowdhury Mohammad Mohsin presided over the meeting.

The company earned a net profit of Tk 16.08 crore during 1998. The company would, therefore, be expected to pay dividend from 1999.

The year 1998 was a remarkable financial year for HIL when its costs and expenses were lower by 3.71 per cent and revenue earning was higher by 2.04 per cent compared to the previous year.

In consideration to the satisfactory volume of business and profit and to accommodate the delegates to the ensuing NAM Summit in Dhaka, the government has taken expansion programme of the hotel.

Chances for new trade era dim
as WTO talks tumble

SEATTLE (Washington), Dec 5: A new era of prosperity and unfettered global commerce, envisioned by President Bill Clinton, now seems a dim prospect at best following the stunning collapse of a WTO trade conference here, reports AFP.

The 135 ministers from the World Trade Organisation who met in Seattle last week were to have concluded four days of debate with the formal launch of a three-year round of trade liberalisation negotiations.

It didn't happen. Unable to overcome deep divisions and distrust, delegates could not agree on what should and should not be up for discussion in the new round.

The failure in Seattle was a failure of political will, said a clearly despondent Charlene Barshefsky, US Trade Representative and co-chair of the conference.

"Governments were not

ready to take the leap," she told a midnight press conference.

Negotiations are to resume in Geneva in January but only on trade liberalisation in agriculture and services, issues that ministers are mandated to review under provisions of the previous Uruguay Round that ended in 1994.

The new cycle of negotiations launched in Seattle — and with the enthusiastic endorsement of the Clinton administration — was going to be vastly more comprehensive.

The agenda would not be limited to tariff barriers but would encompass quality of life issues such as the environment, labour rights and food safety.

The Seattle round had also been spoken of as the "development round", signalling an awakened sensitivity among rich countries to the needs and legitimate demands of the poor nations.

That ambitious and inspira-

tional scenario is now in shambles. Last week's conference showed that no matter how eloquent the lip service is to globalisation, governments at the end of the day were either unwilling or unable to make it happen.

In the aftermath of the Seattle breakdown, an initiative by the United States, the European Union, Canada and Japan that would offer duty-free access to nearly all goods exported by the world's most impoverished nations is uncertain.

The campaign was to have been officially unveiled with great fanfare here and would surely have been among the most tangible gains from the Seattle meetings. In the end, the United States and Europe were unable to resolve last-minute textual language difficulties and a press conference to announce the plan was scrapped.

Also unresolved after Seattle

is the link between WTO-sanctioned trade agreements and such non-trade matters as the environment and labour rights.

Under fire from ecologists who say its policies dilute environmental standards, the WTO was to have responded here by committing itself in the new round to becoming more environmentally sensitive.

In response to demands from developed country labour unions, the WTO was to have adopted new policies proposed by the United States and Europe forging a link between trade agreements and workers' rights.

But that initiative ran afoul of suspicions in developing nations that such concerns are really part of a scheme to protect developed country markets from competition.

Regulations on biotechnology were likewise to have been on the agenda in the round in order to settle a bitter row between Washington, which says

its genetically altered food is safe, and Europe, which has doubts and wants the right to bar its entry.

With the collapse of the talks here, the WTO showed itself incapable of broadening its mandate — to the great delight of its legions of deregulationists.

Grass-roots movements were out in force last week, flooding journalists with tracts and invitations to press conferences and teach-ins. Their position is that the WTO is too powerful, too secretive and too subservient to big business.

But they were also out to prove that by conscientious organising they could pressure politicians in the world's most powerful countries to put the brakes on economic globalisation and free trade.

The debacle in Seattle has now given them a chance to claim that they have done precisely that.



M Nurul Islam, Chairman of National Bank Limited, delivering his speech at the 16th annual general meeting of the bank held at the bank's own premises at Kauran Bazar in the city on Saturday. Moazzem Hossain Habibullah, Abdul Halim, Ali Akbar Khan, Directors, Rafiqul Islam Khan, Managing Director, and Md Solaiman Khan Mojib, Deputy Managing Director, and Secretary to the board of the bank, are also seen in the picture. — NBL photo

Supachai finds hope in collapse of talks
Clinton optimistic about new
round of global trade talks

WASHINGTON, Dec 5: President Bill Clinton said yesterday he was still optimistic for a new round of global trade talks, even though trade ministers failed in their efforts to launch new talks in Seattle this week, reports Reuters.

"I remain optimistic that we can use the coming months to narrow our differences and launch a successful new round of global trade talks," Clinton said in a statement after four days of World Trade Organisation talks in Seattle collapsed late on Friday.

Clinton who tried to put a positive spin on the mass anti-trade protests in Seattle by saying they were key to opening up the whole trade negotiation process, continued in that vein in his statement.

"We made progress at the Seattle WTO trade meetings although significant differences remain," he said.

Clinton said a successful round of talks would include bringing down barriers in agri-

culture, manufacturing and services, keeping e-commerce tariff-free and ensuring that trade will lift living standards while protecting the environment.

"I am determined to move forward on the path of free trade and economic growth while ensuring a human face is put on the global economy," he added.

The failure of the negotiations was seen as an embarrassment for Clinton, who had called for this round of talks.

Despite phone calls by Clinton to world leaders including Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi, negotiators were unable to break a deadlock over politically sensitive agriculture and labour issues.

According to an AP report from Bangkok, the future leader of the World Trade Organisation said Sunday that the collapse of talks in Seattle to set an agenda for a global trade negotiations proved that developing countries were now a force

to be reckoned with.

Supachai Panitchpakdi, who is Thailand's commerce minister and takes over as WTO director-general in 2002, said that the meeting was bound to fail because too many issues remained unresolved when ministers from 135 countries gathered Monday.

For Supachai, the breakdown amounted to a wake up call to rich countries to ensure that the interests of developing nations are taken into account in a new trade round.

"We should not squeeze out any round from Seattle if it's not going to be beneficial to all of us," Supachai told reporters in Bangkok.

"This time, developing countries were well prepared," Supachai said. "It might look like it was rather confusing, but it was positive for the WTO that more and more developing countries are feeling they are part of the organisation and are being active participants."



The 21st annual general meeting of Hotels Int'l Limited (HIL) held at Sonargaon Hotel on Friday. — HIL photo

WTO talks failure may doom farm trade hopes

SEATTLE, Dec 5: The failure of the Seattle World Trade Organisation (WTO) meetings could doom world governments to endless wrangling over farm subsidies with European Union that will be less likely to make concessions, trade diplomats say, reports Reuters.

The much-heralded four-day WTO ministerial conference ended in acrimony late Friday with no agreement to launch a new "Millennium" round of world trade liberalisation talks.

WTO Director-General Mike Moore will try to bridge wide gaps between the WTO's 135 members over the agenda for negotiations in hopes of launching the round at some unspecified future date.

In the meantime, previously scheduled WTO talks on agriculture and services will begin in January but it is much less likely that the EU will agree to far-reaching concessions on farming than would have been the case in a broad round.

The EU had called for a comprehensive new round lasting three years. In addition to negotiations on liberalising trade in agriculture, services and industrial goods, the 15-nation bloc wanted talks on global competition and investment rules and to discuss environment and labour issues.

EU officials said European sensitivities on agriculture are so great that they needed gains in other areas to balance any concessions they made on farming.

If new talks are limited to agriculture and services, there will be no time limit and little incentive for the Europeans to bow to demands from the United States and the Australian-led Cairns group of major agricultural producing countries to go beyond already-agreed reforms to its \$40 billion farm budget.

"They (the talks) could drag on forever. It's hard to see trade-offs," one EU diplomat said.

EU Farm Commissioner Franz Fischler made clear at a news conference early on Saturday that any concessions the EU discussed in Seattle were now off the negotiating table.

'No WTO deal better
than a bad one'

PARIS, Dec 5: France said yesterday that the failure to launch a fresh round of global trade talks at a World Trade Organisation meeting in Seattle was better than striking a flawed accord, reports Reuters.

"The absence of a result at this stage is preferable to a bad agreement," French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine said in a statement, adding Europe had approached the four-day talks from a position he described as ambition, coherent and constructive.

"Europe was right not to renounce that position, nor to accept the launch of a truncated agreement that would have opened in bad conditions," he added.

Organisers of the Seattle talks, which were called to set an agenda for the next round of global trade discussions, halted the meeting with the WTO's 135 member states in deep discord over issues ranging from labour standards to farm subsidies.

The meeting of the trade

watchdog was also marred by clashes between riot police and protesters in the streets of Seattle.

French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin said the failure of the talks should not be over-dramatised, but added that the fault lay chiefly with the world's big players.

"This failure is above all attributable to those countries, some of them very large, which did not seek an attitude of compromise (between the demands of developing countries and those of the European Union)," he told reporters at a nautical show in Paris.

He added that the meeting could have been organised better.

France's leading farm activist Jose Bove said the result of the Seattle meeting was a triumph for ordinary people.

"It is a real victory," he said as he arrived from Seattle at Paris Charles de Gaulle airport on Saturday. "What happened was a very good thing."

India likely to miss
divestment target

BOMBAY, Dec 5: India is likely to miss the government target for the sale of stakes in state-owned firms in the year to March 2000, as the government dithers in its search for decent sell-off prices, reports AFP.

In the 1999-2000 budget, Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha set a revenue target of 100 billion rupees (2.3 billion dollars) from selling shares of state companies — a process the government terms divestment rather than privatisation.

The target looks unlikely now. Perhaps about 50 per cent could be achieved by the end of the fiscal year, said Indranil Pan, analyst at domestic rating agency CRISIL.

Money raised from the sell-off was meant to help reduce the fiscal deficit and pay for development activities.

New Delhi recently raised 35 billion rupees by selling minority stakes in the Gas Authority of India Ltd (GAIL) and National Hydro Power Corp (NHPC).

NHPC was actually taken over by another state-owned

firm, while opposition parties complained that the GAIL shares were sold too cheaply.

Several other companies are on the sell-off list, but Pan said the current market had no appetite for fresh paper.

"Pricing will be an issue given the state of the stock markets now. It is unlikely the government will get a good price. The market could go down if new paper comes in from the public sector companies," Pan said.

Vasudeo Joshi, at foreign brokerage HSBC Securities, said investors would be attracted if the government parried with its majority stake in several key companies.

"This year, however, the time is limited. Perhaps a combination of strategic sales with cross holdings by government companies in each others' equity could bring the target closer," he said.

Gul Tekchandani, at Sun FC Mutual Fund, said the government had to lend more momentum to the divestment process.

Nepal parties agree to
Enron power plant

KATHMANDU, Dec 5: Nepal's political parties have agreed to allow Enron Co to build a 10,800 megawatt, 3.5 billion dollar power plant on the northwestern Karnali river, sources said yesterday, reports AFP.

The US company had refused to go ahead with the country's largest-ever hydro-power project unless it had the backing of all major parties.

An official with the hydro-power project ministry said it was aiming to have the plant built sometime in the early part of the next decade.

Enron committed itself to the project last year, but demanded a party consensus be-

cause of the country's political instability.

It had approached India about buying output from the plant, but talks were suspended due to the political situation.

Representatives from the ruling Nepali Congress, major opposition Nepal Communist Party-United Marxist and Leninist (NCP-UML), the National Democratic Party and the Nepal Communist Party-Marxist and Leninist reached the agreement at a meeting Friday at the prime minister's residence.

Minister for Water Resources Govinda Raj Joshi and other ministry officials also attended the talks, official sources said.

Exchange Rates

Following are yesterday's Standard Chartered Bank rates of major currencies against Taka.
Central Bank USD/BDT rate: Buying-BDT 50.85/Selling-BDT 51.15

Selling		Currency	Buying	
TT/OD	BC		TT Clean	OD Sight
51.2300	51.2700	USD	50.8200	50.6516
0.5140	0.5144	JPY	0.4806	0.4790
32.4919	32.5173	CHF	31.6143	31.5095
31.1618	31.1861	SGD	29.4609	29.3632
35.6209	35.6487	CAD	33.4518	33.3410
6.0176	6.0223	SEK	5.9118	5.8923
33.4225	33.4485	AUD	30.5886	30.4872
13.6268	13.6375	MYR	13.2327	13.1888
6.6438	6.6489	HKD	6.4888	6.4673
13.7771	13.7878	SAR	13.4469	13.4024
14.0637	14.0747	AED	13.7236	13.6782
0.0444	0.0444	KRW	0.0436	0.0435
82.8082	82.8728	GBP	80.5802	80.3132
52.1265	52.1672	EUR	50.1644	49.9982

Usance Export Bills

TT/DOC	30 Days	60 Days	90 Days	120 Days	180 Days
50.7152	50.4023	49.9846	49.5042	48.9821	47.8126

Exchange Rates of Some Asian Currencies Against US Dollar

Indian Rupee	Pak Rupee	Thai Baht	Malaysian Ringgit	Indonesian Rupiah	Singapore Dollar
43.35/43.40	51.89/51.90	38.87/38.91	3.7995/05	7250/7275	1.6882/1.692

Market Commentary
On Sunday, the interbank market was subdued and the call money rate ranged between 5.5 and 6 per cent. Bangladesh Bank held its 65th Treasury Bills auction. International markets were closed on weekend. In New York closing on Friday, US dollar traded at 102.66/74 against JPY, 1.0021/25 against euro and GBP at 1.6006/14 against dollar.

Shipping Intelligence

Chittagong port

Berth position and performance of vessels as on 05.12.99

Berth No	Name of vessels	Cargo	L port call	Local agent	Date of arrival	Leaving
J/1	Dewan-1	GI (Bt)	B/Abb	Oswl	28/11	13/12
J/2	Dubai Success	CI	Mumb	Seacom	25/11	-
J/3	Fantasy	GI/R/S	Kaki	Litmond	3/11	-
J/4	Tao Dong Gang	GI (Maize)	Dhl	Total	18/11	-
J/5	Meghna	R/Seed	Voro	Fortune	14/11	12/12
J/6	Al Muztuba	Rice(P)/GI	Kara	Clia	19/11	7/12
J/7	Xiang Jiang	GI	Col	Bdshp	27/12	10/12
J/8	Ujjanik	Wheat (G)	Aust	Ancient	20/11	8/12
J/9	Bao Ji Shan	GI/Stc	Sing	RML	03/12	7/12
J/10	Dustia Narce	D. P/M.s	Sing	Litmond	10/11	6/12
J/11	Ken Koku	Wheat(G)	Sing	Lams	R/A	6/12
J/12	Yasul Kikavan	Wheat(P)	Varna	Angelle	16/11	12/12
J/13	Achieve	Cont	P/Kel	ISL	28/11	3/12
CCT/1	Kota Cahaya	Cont	Sing	Pil/BD	03/12	7/12
CCT/2	Xpress Resolve	Cont	Sing	ISL	3/12	8/12
CCT/3	QC Pintail	Cont	P/Kel	QCSL	3/12	6/12
RM/14	oceanPride	C. Clerk (D) Mond	Karab	Apex	28/11	-
CGJ	Corali	C. Clerk	Kata	RML	27/11	6/12
CSJ	Wavelet	Wheat(G)	P/Suez	Lams	15/11	7/12
TSP	Gill	R Phos	EGYP	Seacom	14/11	6/12
RM/5	Erillia	HSD	Sing	ECSL	28/11	6/12
DOJ	Bangla Shourabh	C Oil	-	BSC	R/A	6/12
DMJ/1	Bangla Maya	Repair	Darb	BSC	R/A	14/12
RM/9	Phaethon	Repair	Sing	BSC	21/11	5/12
KAFCO(U)	Martina	Fert (Bag)	Mong	OWSL	10/6	6/12
				SMSL	17/10	30/12

Vessels due at outer anchorage

Vessel Name	Arrival Date	Origin	Agent	Cargo	Port
Jaya Mars 21/11	5/2	Mong	Baridhi	Cont	Col
Jutha Sarunpak	5/12	-	Ancient	Wheat(G)	-
Jurong Balsam	5/12	Sing	Nol	Cont	Sing
Rahmuna 18/11	6/12	T. Prk	QCSL	Cont	-
Nochoenask	5/12	Mong	Seacom	M. Seed	-
Xpress Makulu	8/12	Sing	ISL	Cont	Sing
Banglar Kallol	6/12	Kara	BSC	Cont	-
Jon Jin	6/12	-	Apex	GI	-
Bao Lian Shan	7/12	-	Jaycee	Cement	-
Skimmer	7/12	-	Jaycee	Cement	-
Qc Mallard	8/12	-	QCSL	Cont	Sing
Bunga Mas Enam	8/12	P. Kel	ECSL	Cont	Sing
tiger River	8/12	Sing	NOL	Cont	Sing
Banga Birol	9/12	Sing	Bdshp	Cont	Sing
Xpress Nilgiri	10/12	Sing	ISL	Cont	Sing
Nor Franchise	11/12	Qarb	SSST	Wheat(G)	-
Kota Berjaya2/12	11/12	Sing	Pil (BD)	Cong	Sing
Bunga Mas Lima 2/12	12/12	P. Kel	ECSL	Cont	Sing
Banglar Kallol	12/12	Male	BSC	Cont	Sing
Dafa 28/11	14/12	Sing	ISL	Cont	Sing
Banga Biraj	14/12	Sing	Bdshp	Cont	Sing
Roro Siam	18/12	P. Kel	JF	Vehi	-
St. Irena 5/12	12/12	-	QCSL	Cont	Sing