

# EU holds out for quality WTO deal with China

Beijing's membership talks with Brussels begins today

BRUSSELS, Jan 23: China resumes WTO membership talks with the European Union on Monday, with Brussels ready to hold out for as long as necessary to squeeze the best possible deal out of Beijing, reports UNB.

Two days of intensive negotiations are expected between teams led by Vice Trade Minister Long Yongtu, China's chief WTO negotiator, and Hans-Friedrich Bessler, the European Commission's director general of trade.

Hopes are high in Brussels that the commission — bargaining on behalf of the 15 nations in the European Union — can ride the momentum set in November when China shook hands on a WTO agreement with the United States.

That deal automatically resolved 80 per cent of the differences between the Chinese and Europeans — but Eurocrats stress they have no intention of giving way to haste as they try

to win greater EU access to China's growing markets. "We are ready to conclude this week," an EU official said, speaking on condition of anonymity. "But for us, the quality of a deal is more important than the quickness of a deal."

If good progress is made, EU Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy might get Beijing as early as February, although aides say his schedule is already jam-packed with other engagements.

This week's talks coincide with a visit to Belgium by Chinese Vice Premier Wu Bangguo. He is not directly involved, but does have meetings scheduled on Tuesday with Lamy and External Affairs Commissioner Chris Patten.

Washington will be looking on closely too. US commerce undersecretary David Aaron, in Brussels last Thursday, said a Sino-EU agreement would

make it easier to win congressional ratification of the US-Chinese pact. The European Union is among 20-odd trading partners that China has yet to conclude bilateral WTO agreements with, as its 13-year quest to join the World Trade Organisation goes into the home stretch.

This week's talks are the first with the Europeans since October, when Long met EU negotiators in Geneva, where the WTO is based.

Negotiations broke off in acrimony last May after NATO bombed the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, apparently by accident, during the Alliance's air war against Yugoslav to end Serbian atrocities in Kosovo.

At the EU-China summit in Beijing last month, European Commission president Romano Prodi said: "We look forward to China being as constructive with the EU as it has been with the US."

Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji, however, suggested that the ball was in Brussels' court, and called on the European Union to progressively lift import quotas on Chinese goods.

EU officials are reluctant to discuss the talks in detail — partly so as not to give the Chinese any advantage, partly because the commission must later sell any deal it makes to the 15 EU member states.

Reports from Beijing, however, indicate that the two sides have been at odds over EU anti-dumping rules, which Chinese regards as a trade barrier, and European companies' access to China's telecommunications and insurance markets.

The European Union is China's biggest trading partner after Japan and the United States, with a 21 billion euro (dollar) deficit in the January-September period last year, according to the EU statistics agency Eurostat.



S A Chowdhury, Managing Director of Janata Bank, inaugurates the new premises of Janata Bank Training Institute at Kakrail in the city and the first Training Course of the new millennium yesterday. Younus Ali Howladar, Deputy Managing Director, Nurul Islam Mollah and Aziz Ahmed, General Managers, spoke on the occasion. W R Tawheed, DGM (PR), S A Khan, Director/DGM of JBTI, Abul Fazul Mahmud, DGM ID (Export), executives, officers and employees of the bank were also present.

# Narasimha Rao flays sale of Indian state-run firms

Move seen detrimental to overall interest of the country

NEW DELHI, Jan 23: Former Indian prime minister PV Narasimha Rao, who initiated radical free-market reforms nine years ago, has strongly opposed the sale of state-owned companies to foreign investors, reports AFP.

The Press Trust of India (PTI) quoted Rao as saying late yesterday that the proposed sale of public sector companies by the government was "detrimental to the overall interests of the country."

The nation is now on the verge of being deprived of its fully owned infrastructure, assiduously built up over this difficult half century," he was

quoted as saying in the southern city of Hyderabad. "Whatever the hype, this is how the citizen understands the implications of this decision."

Rao, a member of the main opposition Congress party, launched India's economic reforms after becoming prime minister in 1991. He quit office in 1996 after leading the Congress to a rout in elections.

The liberalisation overturned four decades of close-door economy.

Rao told a select audience that when he ruled India, he made it clear to prospective investors not to eye the government-owned public sector com-

panies, but instead to set up new industries. He said he was in favour of partly privatising Indian public sector companies notorious for inefficiency and corruption, but opposed to selling them off completely.

"It is not a most unfortunate irony that our government should be thinking of selling off Air India?" he asked. "Can anyone think of the Singapore Airlines being put up for outright sale."

"I simply cannot think of India selling off her national carrier, which carries the national flag."

"If you cannot part with an inch of the country's land, how can you sell off the country's property?"

Rao said liberalisation did not mean "total privatisation, although it did mean a vast enlargement of private enterprise."

He said in the evolution of the liberalisation process, "a time will come when a decision would possibly be taken with the basic pattern of the economy."

Until then the public sector as a whole will have to remain, with whatever effort, to serve the country while improving itself."

# IMF, budget pledges in hand Indonesia turns again to bank woes

JAKARTA, Jan 23: With the ink still wet on the new government's first budget and a pledge of five billion dollars in aid from the IMF over the next three years, Indonesia is now moving fast on pledges to make the law apply to the country's notorious bankers and their allies, reports AFP.

The budget unveiled Thursday, the first of the government of President Abdurrahman Wahid and covering the nine months to the end of the calendar year 2000, contained few surprises and was generally hailed as realistic.

But the bitterest pill to swallow was the 23 per cent of expenditure gobbled up by the government's efforts to restructure the collapsed banking sector, still foundering despite the

closure of scores of state and private banks since the financial crisis hit in 1997.

In parliament, no longer the rubber stamp body it was for decades under former strongman Suharto, members of the house finance commission were quick to grumble that taxpayers' money was being used to cover private banks' past skull-duggery.

But the commission, armed with the government's new letter of intent to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) packed with pledges of transparency, independent audits and good governance in the banking sector, got down to work on Friday, less than 24 hours after the budget was presented.

# Shared G7 concern over yen strength seen not enough

TOKYO, Jan 23: Japan managed to include concern over a strong yen in a communique at the weekend Group of Seven meeting here but should not be complacent with the result, Japanese dailies said today, reports AFP.

Japan's opinion that the yen's rise would hinder an economic recovery had been "understood" at Saturday's meeting of finance ministers and central bank chiefs from the G7 economic powers, the Nihon Keizai Shimbun said.

"But the communique did not mention concrete action to stop the yen's appreciation," the

business daily said in an editorial. "There is no possibility for the moment that the United States and Europe will embark on concerted intervention (with Japan) following the communique."

The G7 joint statement issued after the one-day meeting expressed concern over the potential impact of a strong yen in similar wording to a statement issued after previous meeting in Washington in September.

"We welcomed the reaffirmation by the Japanese monetary authorities of their inter-

national to conduct policies appropriately in view of their concern, which he share, about the potential impact of yen appreciation for the Japanese economy and the world economy," it said.

"We will continue to monitor developments in exchange markets and cooperate as appropriate."

Japanese Finance Minister Kiichi Miyazawa had been seeking the common G7 statement expressing concern about excessive strength of the yen, feared to be eating into the value of Japanese exports.

# S Arabia warns against impacts of globalisation

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 23: Economic globalisation has to some extent hurt the developing economies, warned Saudi Minister of Commerce Osama Ibrahim Faqih yesterday, reports Xinhua.

Faqih sounded the alarm in his opening speech at the Jeddah international economic forum titled "The Impact of Globalisation and Economic Challenges to the Middle East in the 21st Century," according to reports reaching here.

NCCBL earns Tk 29.07 crore operating profit

National Credit and Commerce Bank Limited (NCCBL) earned an operating profit of Tk 29.07 crore during the year 1999, showing a growth of 39 per cent over the previous year, says a press release.

This was disclosed at a two-day branch managers' conference at the bank held at a local hotel recently.

The bank earned an operating profit of Tk 21.09 crore in 1998.

The deposit of the bank stood at Tk 901 crore in December, 1999, which was Tk 692 crore in 1998.

The loans and advances stood at Tk 610.84 crore as against Tk 467.82 crore of 1998.

The bank handled export and import business of Tk 1003.00 crore in 1999, which was Tk 300.00 crore in the previous year.

Mir Zahir Hossain, Chairman of the Board of Directors of National Credit and Commerce Bank Ltd, delivers his speech as chief guest at the Annual Branch Managers' Conference at a local hotel recently. Yakub Ali, Vice Chairman, Mohd Sajidul Haq, Managing Director, and Directors M A Quasem, Principal M Wazhiullah Bhuiyan, Mohammad Ali and KZ Mahmud were present. —NCCBL photo

# Beijing gears up for WTO-compatible trade rules

SHANGHAI, Jan 23: China's willingness to revamp its regulations to conform with WTO rules could lead to a more transparent trade regime, but not all the changes will appeal to foreign investors, trade experts say, reports Reuters.

Foreign Trade Minister Shi Guangsheng has made it clear China would make sweeping changes on foreign trade, joint ventures and foreign investments according to the demands of the market economy and membership of the World Trade Organisation.

Shi, however, has not given a timetable for the changes. China, which holds key talks with the European Union on Monday to hammer out an accession deal, expects to enter the world trade group this year after a 13-year quest.

It has already surmounted the biggest hurdle by reaching an agreement with the United States in November.

American companies are lobbying Congress to put its seal on the deal. They are excited by the prospects of the world's most populous nation opening up to their goods and services.

But the Chinese market is far from an easy one. Foreign companies operating in China face a myriad of restrictions ranging from geographic areas, equity limits, export requirements and foreign exchange balances.

The changes China must make will be big and difficult to put into action in a country where local governments frequently find ways to circumvent orders from Beijing if they are not in their own interests.

Trade consultants also say foreign investors may lose some of the perks, such as the preferential tax treatment they have enjoyed since the early 1980s.

Zhang Zhiyong, chief of the international section of the State Tax Bureau was quoted in a Hong Kong newspaper as saying China would have to consider unifying taxes for Foreign and domestic enterprises as it prepares for the WTO.

"In theory, foreign enterprises could lose their parks," said an accountant with an international firm. "It could directly affect the rate of returns on their investments."

Foreign funded enterprises, for example, are exempt from paying duties on imported machinery. Domestic firms have long complained that was unfair, he said.

Since WTO membership would bring more competition to bear on domestic companies on many fronts, the clamour to repeal the preferential treatments would get stronger, he said.

Huang Zeming, an economics professor at Huadong Normal University, said China could either take proactive steps to make its trade rules more acceptable to other WTO member states now, or do it reactively later under pressure from them.

"The Chinese leadership has shown a great deal of willingness to make the changes, he said. "Rules enacted in laws would be far more transparent than the administrative directives as they exist now."



Mir Zahir Hossain, Chairman of the Board of Directors of National Credit and Commerce Bank Ltd, delivers his speech as chief guest at the Annual Branch Managers' Conference at a local hotel recently. Yakub Ali, Vice Chairman, Mohd Sajidul Haq, Managing Director, and Directors M A Quasem, Principal M Wazhiullah Bhuiyan, Mohammad Ali and KZ Mahmud were present. —NCCBL photo

HONG KONG, Jan 23: In Asia's currency markets last week most units eased slightly as investors waited for the results of the weekend meeting of Group of Seven (G7) finance ministers and central bank chiefs, reports AFP.

On Saturday, Japan won G7 backing to prevent its currency from rising further against the dollar, as it continues to depend on exports for its hesitant recovery.

Seoul, also eager to keep its currency soft, strongly hinted at intervention should its currency rise, while the Thai baht dipped along with a drop in the stock market.

Japanese yen: The yen gained ground against the dollar in Tokyo over the week as investors traded cautiously in the run-up to a weekend Group of Seven (G7) meeting of finance ministers and central bank chiefs.

It hit 104.77-80 to the dollar late Friday, up from 105.72-75 a week earlier.

It is difficult to make moves before seeing if the G7 joint statement refers to a correction of the yen's strength," said a Sanwa Bank dealer.

## Weekly Currency Roundup

# Most Asian units but yen weaken

strong yen, which could derail its fragile economic recovery, but the United States has grumbled the issue was a distraction.

After holding firm early in the week, the yen slipped to 105.51-54 late Wednesday due to steady dollar demand among Japanese banks, dealers said.

But the gains were constrained ahead of the G7 meeting.

The yen came back toward the weekend as foreign banks locked profits on the dollar's gains.

Australian dollar: The Australian dollar is expected to hold above 66 US cents next week, supported by firm commodity prices, but the initial direction Monday will be determined by the outcome of the G7 meeting Saturday, dealers said Friday.

The currency closed the week at 66.43 US cents, slipping 0.15 cents from 66.58 US cents last week.

Dealers said they expected the Australian dollar to continue in the 66.0-66.8 US cent range next week.

The dollar had been unable to make fresh headway over the week, despite further increases in commodity prices, said Rob Hollands, at Dresdner Kleinwort Benson.

Hollands put this down to an expected further widening in the interest rate differential between Australia and the United States, and to the Australian currency being overbought.

Even so, while commodity prices maintain their firm bias, the Australian dollar is expected to attract buying interest.

On the Reserve Bank's Trade Weighted Index the Australian dollar ended Friday at 57.5, marginally down from 57.6 the previous week.

New Zealand dollar: The New Zealand dollar closed Friday worth 51.56 US cents, down from 52.12 cents a week earlier. There was good selling of

Kiwi, buying Aussie, last night which drove the cross (rate) down to some key technical levels around 77 Australian cents. Then we saw some profit-taking on that from offshore interests which has driven the cross higher on the day and led to a little bit of Kiwi buying (by selling Australian dollars)," a currency dealer said.

This week there had been "frustration for some offshore interests with regards what seems uncertainty or indecision between the Reserve Bank and where inflation is and comments from (Finance Minister Michael) Cullen," the dealer said.

"I believe there was a bit of unwinding of equity-related asset flows as some US guys were unwinding equity here in New Zealand and switching to Australia."

Hong Kong dollar: The Hong Kong dollar stood at 7.7785 - 7.779 Friday from 7.7785 - 7.7788 the previous week.

Philippine peso: The Philippine peso was marginally slipped week-on-week at 40.645 pesos to the dollar on Friday, from 40.585 pesos the week before.

South Korean won: The won weakened to close at 1,127.90 won Friday from 1,124.00 won a week before.

Government officials have strongly hinted they would directly intervene in the foreign exchange market to curb the appreciation of the won.

Dealers said the government would intervene immediately should the won appreciate to about 1,200 won per dollar.

Indonesian rupiah: The Indonesian rupiah ended the week slightly weaker Friday at 7,280.7, 295 to the dollar compared with 7,200-7,220 the previous week.

Thai baht: The Thai baht moved in a very narrow range over the past week, falling back against the dollar Friday due to a weak local stock market, which fell 1.6 per cent as the country's major banks reported multi-million dollar losses for 1999.

The baht was also influenced by regional currencies, such as the Singapore dollar, which was marginally softer at the end of the trading week, dealers said.

The Thai unit closed Friday at 37.23-27 baht to the dollar compared with last week's close of 37.50-55.

## 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	51.2300	51.2700	50.8100	50.6570	50.5850
Pound Stg	85.0316	85.0979	83.2674	83.0167	82.8987
Deutsche Mark	26.8143	26.8352	25.9021	25.7244	25.6878
Swiss Franc	32.2912	32.3164	31.6081	31.5129	31.4681
Japanese Yen	0.4936	0.4940	0.4799	0.4784	0.4778
Dutch Guilder	23.7981	23.8167	22.8998	22.8308	22.7984
Danish Krona	6.9929	6.9984	6.8385	6.8179	6.8082
Australian \$	34.4880	34.5150	33.1637	33.0638	33.0168
Belgian Franc	1.3001	1.3011	1.2510	1.2472	1.2454
Canadian \$	35.9383	35.9663	34.8850	34.7800	34.7305
French Franc	7.9951	8.0013	7.6933	7.6701	7.6592
Hong Kong \$	6.5988	6.6040	6.5187	6.4991	6.4898
Italian Lira	0.0271	0.0271	0.0261	0.0250	0.0250
Norway Kroner	6.4291	6.4341	6.3248	6.3057	6.2968
Singapore \$	30.8707	30.8948	29.8794	29.7895	29.7471
Saudi Rial	13.6975	13.7082	13.5115	13.4708	13.4517
UAE Dirham	13.9962	13.9971	13.7951	13.7535	13.7340
Swedish Krona	6.0381	6.0428	5.9605	5.9425	5.9341
Qatari Riyal	14.1118	14.1228	13.9156	13.8737	13.8540
Kuwaiti dinar	174.0445	174.1804	161.8837	161.072	160.862
Thai Baht	1.3781	1.3792	1.3638	1.3597	1.3578
Euro	52.4442	52.4851	50.4645	50.3125	50.2410

## Bill buying rates

TT Doc	30 Days	60 Days	90 Days	120 Days	180 Days
50.7112	50.3866	49.9632	49.5398	49.1163	48.2895

US dollar London Interbank Offered Rate (LIBOR)		Currency	1 Month	3 Months	6 Months	9 Months	12 Months
Buying (\$)	Selling (\$)	USD	5.81375	6.04	6.22	6.4325	6.65
50.980	51.200	GBP	5.3060	6.1426	6.4121	6.6641	6.8738
82.987	84.0316	EUR	3.12	3.31	3.5238	3.73	3.92

Exchange rates of some Asian currencies against US dollars					
Indian Rupee	Pak Rupee	Thai Baht	Malaysian Ringgit	Indonesia Rupiah	Korean Won
43.52/43.60	51.8885/889	37.19/37.24	3.7988/3.8003	1315/7365	1127/1128

## Amex on Sunday's Market

There was demand for USD in the interbank, with the USD/BDT rate moving between 51.09-51.12. The interbank call market was liquid, the rates moved between 5-6.5 per cent.

Analysts said recent economic reports showing the British economy was coping well with sterling's lofty levels and the prospect of a further monetary tightening meant sterling could extend a rally which has already come under fire from British exporters. "I don't think we've seen the end to the bull run," said a currency strategist at HSBC in London. "Sterling has still got upside potential. British interest rates are rising, public finances are sound, and growth is strong so everything is going for it." Sterling's most recent bout of strength was triggered after the Bank of England hiked its key repo rate to 5.75 per cent from 5.50 per cent last week. Since then, a string of stronger-than-expected British economic releases have reinforced speculation that more rate hikes are on the cards. Expectations of higher rates have been reinforced as economic robustness has been seen even in sectors which are most affected by sterling's buoyancy, such as manufacturing. The pound had set near-three-month highs at \$1.6578 early on Friday, but had then given back part of its gains as the dollar appreciated against the broadly weaker euro. Against a background of British and global economic recovery, analysts said sterling's strength would not deter the BOE Monetary Policy Committee from raising rates in the coming months.

The euro dropped broadly on Friday and looked ripe for further losses as traders voiced disappointment at the currency's failure to capitalize on positive European data and a selloff on Wall Street this week. The euro's woes began with a wave of selling against the yen, which found fresh strength amid growing doubts a Group of Seven summit this weekend will result in a decisive show of support for Tokyo's concerns about the robust yen. The yen also closed higher against the dollar as traders awaited the outcome of the G7 meeting of finance ministers and central bankers in Tokyo. After tumbling to a two and half week low of 105.22 yen in early New York trading, the euro sank against the dollar to a three-week low of \$1.0051, and hit a record floor against the British pound for the sixth straight day at 60.89 pence.

The euro later pared some losses to close 0.82 per cent weaker against the dollar at \$1.0089, 1.34 per cent softer against the yen at 105.67, and down 0.46 per cent against the pound at 61.15 pence as the session wound down. Blue-chip US stocks dropped for the fourth consecutive day on Friday with little impact on the dollar. The euro on Thursday failed to benefit from a rise in a key index of the business climate in Germany, Europe's largest economy. Traders and technical analysts said the euro's failure to generate momentum this week, despite several stabs toward the \$1.02 area, set the stage for a possible retest of its lifetime lows against the dollar just under \$1.0000. Dealers said the euro could face a turbulent week after this weekend's G7 summit. Pre-G7 speculation helped the yen firm overnight after a slew of remarks from finance officials which dampened suspicion Tokyo might be able to enlist the G7's backing for engineering a milder yen. The dollar settled at 104.68 yen in New York. 0.62 per cent lower than its 105.33 Thursday close. Yen's rise was triggered after Tokyo's Economic Planning Agency chief Masaru Sakai said a stronger yen was not necessarily detrimental to the Japanese economy. Finance Minister Kiichi Miyazawa said he did not know what the G7 would conclude regarding the yen.

At NY close on Friday, the exchange rates of major currencies against USD were GBP/USD 1.6488/6498, USD/CHF 1.5965/5975, USD/JPY 104.78/104.88, EUR/USD 1.0082/0087.

## Shipping Intelligence

### CHITTAGONG PORT

Berth position and performance of vessels as on 23.1.2000

Berth	Name of vessels	Cargo	L port	Local agent	Date of arrival	Leaving
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