Eight-day meet begins in Bangkok on Feb 12

UNCTAD chief calls for wide North-South trade debate

GENEVA, Feb 3: The head of the United Nations trade and development agency UNCTAD yesterday urged big powers to enter wide-ranging dialogue with poorer states on how to launch new trade liberalisation talks, says Reuters.

Rubens Ricupero, former Brazilian finance minister and trade negotiator, said UNCTAD's coming Ministerial Meeting in Bangkok would provide the ideal chance for exchanges on overcoming a current impasse on the issue.

"A major gathering of developing countries on trade and related issues should be a great opportunity to bring positions together," Ricupero told a news conference.

He said UNCTAD was not seeking to replace its Geneva neighbour, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) which is not a UN body, as the forum for negotiating trade accords and setting rules for global commerce.

"But we can help the trading system embodied in the WTO to look at questions related to the development perspective," he declared. Developing countries backed liberalisation, he said.

The Bangkok meeting, from February 12 to 19, in the first gathering of a global, inter-governmental organisation dealing with trader and economic affairs since the collapse of the WTO's Ministerial Meeting in Seattle in December.

That gathering had been due to launch a new trade round, but broke up in acrimony both between big power — especially the United States and the European Union — and between the richer and poorer states in the 135-member WTO.

Envoys to the WTO met in Geneva on Wednesday to try to prepare the ground for relaunching a limited negotiating process, but diplomats said positions were still wide apart on the shape of any new round. Even analysts in the past wary of UNCTAD, in Cold War days seen as favouring Soviet-style economics, say Ricupero's ideas on how movement can be brought back into the stalled WTO process should be taken seriously.

"He had been doing some hard thinking," said David Woods, longtime spokesman for the WTO's predecessor, the GATT, and now publishing a widely-read trade newsletter from Geneva.

But so far the major trading powers, and particularly he United States, have shown little interest in using the Bangkok gathering for discussing key differences with the range of developing country leaders due to be there.

Presidents, prime ministers and trade minister from many emerging economies and poorer countries in the 190-member UN agency are attending.

But a provisional attendance list from UNCTAD showed that many Western countries have for the moment only assigned development ministers or junior foreign ministry officials.

The United States has noone on the list, although US officials have said the Washington delegation will include senior officials handling development aid programmes.

But the WTO is sending its Director-General Mike Moore, who has urged the big powers to open up their markets wider to poorer countries' goods, and several of his senior aides.

Moore, a former New Zealand prime minister, will have talks in the Thai capital with leaders from many emerging economies, including Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and South Africa's president Thabo Mbeki.

Also there will be James Wolfensohn, head of the World Bank, outgoing International Monetary Fund Managing Director Michel Camdessus, and heads of several other UN agencies dealing with labour issues, environment and development.

At his news conference, Ricupero declined to say whether he was disappointed at the stance of the major powers. "We can only provide the relaxed forum for an essential debate. We cannot make anyone attend," he said.

But one senior emerging economy envoy said the richer countries' attitude did not bode well for any progress towards putting the trade round project back on track — despite an appeal by US President Bill Clinton at the World Economic Forum in Switzerland last weekend for a concerted effort to help the poorest countries.

"It does not say much for the sincerity of the big powers if they turn their back on a dialogue with us," the envoy said.

UNCTAD report finds

LatAm overtakes Asia as FDI recipient

GENEVA, Feb 3: Latin America moved ahead of Asia for the first time last year as a recipient of foreign direct investment (FDI), the United Nations trade and development agency UNCTAD said, reports Reuters.

In a report based on preliminary figures, it said FDI to Latin America and the Caribbean as a whole rose last year by 32 per cent to $97 billion against $73 bln in 1998.

Last week the agency — which opens its four-yearly Ministerial Conference on trade and development issues in Bangkok on February 12 — said FDI flows to Asia in 1999 totalled $91 billion, one pct up on 1998.

The surge into Latin America was largely due to a leap in flows to Argentina, from $6 bln in 1998 to $25 billion last year, and to continued high-level investment in Brazil.

Brazil saw a slight increase — from $28.5 billion in 1998 to $31 billion last year, UNCTAD said.

The report said a significant part of FDI to Argentina in 1999 was through mergers and acquisitions, of which one single large-scale deal — the takeover of oil company YPF SA by Spanish energy group Repsol SA — accounted for $17 billion.

In Brazil, FDI related to the country's privatisation process grew from 22 per cent of the total in 1998 to 28 per cent.

The report said FDI flows also increased to Chile, Ecuador and Peru due to cross-border mergers and acquisitions. But flows to Colombia and Venezuela declined.

Malaysia economy recovering slowly: IMF

WASHINGTON, Feb 3: Malaysia is recovering from a slump caused by the 1997-99 world financial crisis, but the rebound is slower than that of Asia's star performers and there are still problems ahead, the head of the International Monetary Fund said yesterday, reports Reuters.

Michel Camdessus told a meeting at Georgetown University that Malaysia, which incurred the wrath of the international community when it brought in capital controls in 1998, faced "serious problems with corporate restructuring.'

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	82.6391	82.7036	81.4129	81.1677	81.0523
Deutsche Mark	25.9839	26.0042	24.9656	24.8904	24.8550
Swiss Franc	31.2397	31.2641	30.5955	30.5034	30.4600
Japanese Yen	0.4768	0.4772	0.4684	0.4670	0.4664
Dutch Guilder	23.0612	23.0792	22.1574	22.0906	22.0592
Danish Krona	6.7665	6.7718	6.6210	6.6010	6.5917
Australian $	33.1151	33.1409	31.8020	31.7062	31.6612
Belgian Franc	1.2598	1.2608	1.2104	1.2068	1.2051
Canadian $	36.0343	36.0625	34.9763	34.8709	34.8214
French Franc	7.7475	7.7635	7.4438	7.4214	7.4109
Hong Kong $	6.5976	6.6027	6.5170	6.4974	6.4882
Italian Lira	0.0262	0.0263	0.0252	0.0251	0.0251
Norway Krone	6.2475	6.2524	6.1460	6.1275	6.1188
Singapore $	30.6418	30.6657	29.6631	29.5738	29.5318
Saudi Rial	13.6971	13.7078	13.5115	13.4708	13.4517
UAE Dirham	13.9869	13.9979	13.7958	13.7543	13.7347
Swedish Krona	5.8783	5.8829	5.8055	5.7880	5.7798
Qatari Riyal	14.1110	14.1220	13.9148	13.8729	13.853
Kuwaiti dinar	173.0159	173.1510	160.6640	160.1802	159.9526
Thai Bhat	1.3652	1.3663	1.3512	1.3471	1.3452
Euro	50.8202	50.8598	48.8284	48.6814	48.6122

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	48.2695

US dollar London Interbank Offered Rate (LIBOR)

Buying ($)	Selling ($)	Currency	1 Month	3 Months	6 Months	9 Months	12 Months
50.5850	51.2300	USD	5.92075	6.10	6.32	6.55125	6.79
81.0523	82.6391	GBP	6.60684	6.21688	6.40438	6.60675	6.79438
Cash/ TC	Cash/ TC	Euro	3.2975	3.49	3.69	3.8975	4.065

Exchange rates of some Asian currencies against US dollars

Indian Rupee	Pak Rupee	Thai Baht	Malaysian Ringgit	Indonesian Rupiah	Korean Won
43.60/ 43.605	51.892/ 51.90	37.61/ 37.66	3.7998/ 3.8003	7525/ 765	1130/ 1131

Amex notes on Thursday's market

There was little demand for USD in the interbank, with the USD/BDT rate moving between 51.10 and 51.11. The interbank call market was liquid, the rates moved between 5.25-5.75 per cent.

The dollar held the high ground close to recent peaks against the euro and yen on Thursday after successfully absorbing an expected quarter-point rise in US rates in the previous session. Further dollar gains against the euro were likely following the European Central bank's policy setting meeting later, regardless of the outcome, due to the greater credibility which the US central bank enjoys with the markets, analysts said. "No matter what the ECB does in terms of rates, the die is cast. We are still going down to $0.95", said a market analyst at in London. The Fed raised its target for the federal funds rate by 25 basis points to 5.75 per cent, as expected, and increased its discount rate to 5.25 per cent from 5.00 per cent. The central bank chose to emphasize that the risks in the economy were towards higher inflation, but the market has long been discounting further hikes, so US assets were hardly damaged. The Dow lost 38 points but the NASDAQ firmed and Treasury prices rallied on news the US government intended to issue far less debt than expected. The dollar reached a peak against the euro of $0.9718, from Tuesday's record peak of $0.9660. It dipped briefly below 108 yen, but was little more than one yen below near-five-month highs set on Wednesday. Comments by senior Japanese Finance Ministry officials in Tokyo that they remained concerned about the effect of the strong yen on Japan's economy gave the dollar some support against the yen.

The European Central Bank might tighten its policy on Thursday. analysts said that with the market inclined to see only the negative in very situation, the euro was damned whatever the bank did. "Any move now would be seen as aimed at protecting the currency and, as past experience has shown, would be more likely to do harm than good," economists commented in London. The euro fell in November when the ECB raised the refinancing rate by 50 basis points to 3.0 per cent. "That said, no move would simply reinforce the rate gap with the US. The euro looks to be in something of a lose-lose situation," said a dealer. Nevertheless, traders did detect one potential positive for the euro's speculation that Vodafone Airtouch Plc's record-breaking bid for Mannesman AG would be recommended to share holders by the German telecoms and engineering group. Analysts said that in one stroke the 174 billion euro deal would eclipse the entire deficit in foreign direct investment suffered by the euro zone last year. They emphasised that the actual direct FX flow would not be anything as great as the nominal bid value, as it was an all-share offer. But the sheer size of the deal suggested Vodafone would have a need to purchase euros at some stage. A deal would also help counter investor concerns that the German authorities were hostile to foreign takeovers and to corporate restructuring in general. The Canadian dollar, meanwhile, strengthened beyond 1.44 to the US dollar, its strongest since Friday, amid speculation the Bank of Canada will match the Fed's rate move, possibly as early as its 1400 GMT window for announcing policy moves on Thursday. The Swiss franc tracked the euro's moves against the dollar, trading within half a cent of 10-year lows against the US currency set on Friday.

Sterling dollar ticked up from eight-week lows around $1.6000 after UK CIPS services activity index came in softer than forecast but in line with January European MPI surveys this week. CIPS index dropped to 57 in January from 58.3 in December and was below 58.3 expected.

At 9:00 GMT, the exchange rates of major currencies against USD were GBP/USD 1.6012/6017, USD/CHF 1.6555/6560, USD/JPY 108.28/108.34, EUR/USD 0.9732/9738.

India, Lanka to relax trade barriers in March

COLOMBO, Feb 3: India and Sri Lanka will relax trade barriers next month, more than one year after they signed a free-trade agreement, officials said Thursday, reports AP.

The two sides sorted out differences over the list of commodities to be traded without duty, officials said.

An Indian delegation visited Colombo last month and accepted the Sri Lankan demand that tea, rubber and garments be excluded from India's negative list and qualify for concessions.

Sri Lanka can now export up to 15 million kilograms (33 million pounds) of tea and eight million garments at 50 per cent tariff concession, said a joint statement issued by India and Sri Lanka.

The two countries will still have a negative list under which no duty concessions will be given to protect local industries.

The two sides signed an agreement in December 1998 to establish a free trade area, which was expected to lead to a steady growth of trade and investment through a graduated reduction of tariffs.

India is to abolish most tariffs over the next three years and Sri Lanka will accomplish that in eight years.

Singapore to host high-tech confce in US next month

SINGAPORE, Feb 3: Singapore will host an event next month in the United States aimed at bringing together high-tech entrepreneurs from the city-state and Silicon Valley, organisers said Thursday, reports AP.

The National Science and Technology Board, which is organising the event on March 8-10 in San Francisco, said Singapore wants to promote itself as a good base for foreign high-tech companies seeking to enter the Asian market.

A report in Singapore's Straits Times newspaper said Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew would address the conference, but his office could not confirm the visit.

Lee's visit "is likely. There are plans in the pipeline," his spokeswoman, Wong Lin Hoe, said. She said the senior minister will confirm whether or not he will travel to the United States, in the next few days.

More than 20 Singaporean high-tech companies in different industries will attend the Singapore Techventure 2000 conference, the board, said in a statement.

Although European companies are also taking part, the event is particularly targeted at US high-tech companies, the board said.

Sri Lanka's Fisheries Minister Mahinda Rajapakse (L) Thursday tries out a morsel offered by Thai chef Manit Singhavichian (R) as restaurant manager Vichit Kosithpan (C) looks on. The restaurant, set up as a joint venture by an arm of the Sri Lankan fisheries ministry and a Thai firm, is a new attempt by the government to encourage value addition to the country's fishing industry.
— AFP photo

Japan automakers to raise output in Southeast Asia

BANGKOK, Feb 3: Sounding a note of confidence in Southeast Asia's economic recovery, Japanese automakers are saying they will raise production of vehicles in the region, says AP.

Toyota Motor Corp. and Honda Motor Co., which helped build Thailand into the region's auto manufacturing hub in the 1990s, say they want to pour in more resources to exploit increasing demand now that the Asian economic crisis is over.

The economy of Thailand is on the recovery path, as are economies of other ASEAN markets," Yoshihide Munekuni, Honda's chairman, said Wednesday at a trade fair organised by Thailand's Board of Investment.

The 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations was a major market for Japanese auto sales before the crash of the baht in mid-1997 set of a domino-effect recession in the region.

ASEAN comprises Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Koji Hasegawa, Toyota's managing director, said his firm would like to increase its production in ASEAN. Currently, 60 per cent of Toyota's sales and production are outside Japan.

Toyota's sales in Thailand fell 60 per cent in 1998, the worst year of the recession that engulfed Southeast Asia, while Honda suffered a 55 per cent decline.

Both automakers slashed production last year, but are now gearing up to take advantage of Thailand's recovery. Toyota expects the Thai market for passenger cars and one-ton pickups to grow 28 per cent this year, to 280,000 units.

Like nearly all the auto firms set up in Thailand's industrial Eastern seaboard, including Ford and General Motors, they see exports out of the Thai market as an important future strategy.

ASEAN's free trade agreement, aiming to reduce tariffs on many manufactured and agricultural products to 5 per cent and under by 2002, is crucial to developing Bangkok as an export center, Hasegawa said.

HK-S'pore telecom deal may hasten Asian liberalisation

HONG KONG, Feb 3: A proposed combination of the big Hong Kong and Singapore phone companies could nudge the Asian telecommunications industry toward more open markets, though gradual liberalisation seems likely than any merger mania, reports AP.

Analysts believe that if Singapore Telecommunications Ltd and Cable and Wireless HKT pull off their goal of creating a regional telecommunications player worth some 60 billion, other Asian companies will have to pay attention.

But it may not be enough to convince many Asian nations to pull down the protective barriers that have kept prices high and service often sloppy, making local phone giants, some of them monopolies, fat and lazy.

Instead, phone companies can be expected to seek more loosely linked alliances or purchases of minority stakes — rather than full mergers.

"Singapore and Hong Kong are probably the freest markets in Asia," said Kelvin Quek, who follows the telecoms industry for OCBC Securities in Singapore. "That's something other nations may not be willing to do. There's too many nationalistic considerations."

Telecom mergers have already swept the more open US and European markets, leading to some of the biggest corporate takeovers in history — including MCI Worldcom's 115 billion acquisition of Sprint and the current 172 billion hostile takeover battle involving Britain's Vodafone Airtouch PLC and Germany's Mannesmann AG.

But such deals won't happen around Asia unless governments carry out radical reforms in the rules.

The big Japanese market, dominated by Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corp, the world's No 2 telecommunications company after AT-and-T Corp, has been opening under pressure from Washington.

Last year, Britain's Cable and Wireless PLC, the majority owner of the Hong Kong phone company, bought 97.69 per cent of Japanese phone carrier International Digital Communications Inc, in the first move by a foreign buyer to take a controlling stake in a Japanese phone company.

And AT-and-T and British Telecommunications PLC agreed to take a combined 30 per cent stake in Japan Telecom Co, Japan's third-largest long-distance and international carrier.

US trade negotiators gripe that Japan's market is still mired in red tape. But in many other Asian markets, telephone companies are even more protected by law or bureaucracy.

For example, Vietnamese callers have no choice but to deal with the local monopoly, paying $3.00 per minute for overseas calls, though that is a reduction from about $3.80 per minute they paid last year.

Thailand has no competition, with all services operated under concessions from the state.

Things are about the same in India, where land phone services are mostly run by a government monopoly although a few areas have opened to private companies.

The newcomers don't find the going easy as they contend with a myriad of bureaucratic hurdles. Any private phone operators in India must gain dozens of permits from local authorities before laying new lines — headache the state company doesn't even worry about.

In the Philippines, the market has been opening but service can be questionable, with some people reporting it has taken years or even decades to get new phones installed.

Aussie economy may be tricky to read this yr

SYDNEY, Feb 3: The reserve Bank of Australia acknowledged today that the economy will be tricky to read this year because of a multitude of special factors, including tax reform and the Sydney Olympics in September, reports Reuters.

That will make the job of policymakers particularly delicate, and the central bank has already come under fire from business groups for the aggressive size of its interest rate rise on Wednesday of half a percentage point, double expectations.

"There are a few things happening this year that will make the data more bouncy and harder to read," RBA assistant governor Glenn Stevens told a conference in Melbourne.

Keys to the outlook for policy are whether fast economic growth will slow at all, and whether inflation picks up.

But the 10 per cent goods and services tax (GST) is already distorting many spending decisions and that effect will become more pronounced in the lead-up to its July introduction. A pull-forward of spending for consumer goods will boost economic growth in the second quarter, followed by a slowdown in spending afterwards. Housing is already enjoying a mini-boom.

And the Olympics in September will see a surge in economic activity including temporary employment, but could be followed by a moderate slowing afterwards.

The challenge for policymakers is to discern the underlying strength of the economy through all these special events.

"The first six months of the year will look very strong, with strong exports, consumer spending, and housing activity rising. We could be looking at closer to five per cent GDP growth than four," said CSFB chief economist Peter Horn.

"Those sort of numbers coming out are going to make it pretty tricky for the RBA.

"And Stevens on Thursday appeared to signal the bank is already "looking through" GST demand-related distortions, saying that construction industry wage demands may not be a big concern.

Surging demand in the housing sector as building is brought forward to beat the GST has fuelled higher prices and wages.

Fresh evidence of that strength came with building approvals figures showing a 2.1 per cent rise in December fuelled by a 10.5 per cent increase in private house approvals to an 11-year high.

Shipping Intelligence

Chittagong port

Berth position and performance of vessels as on 1.2.2000

Berth No	Name of vessels	Cargo	L Port call	Local agent	Date of arrival	Leaving
J/1	Huang Yun	TSP(P)	Sing	Unique	27/1	2/2
J/2	Lord-P	Wheat(G)	Sing	SSST	3/1	5/2
J/4	Ocean Credit(24)	GI(St S)	Yang	SSL	30/1	2/2
J/5	Med Hope	Wheat(G)	Mong	Benam	15/1	6/2
J/7	Tierra Azlu(48)	GI(St C)	Sing	Everett	27/1	2/2
J/8	Handy Rainbow	GI	Sing	Prog	21/1	4/2
J/9	Ocean Grace	Wheat(G)	Mong	Benam	6/1	4/2
J/10	Yasmina	Urea(G)	RUWA	SMSL	11/1	1/2
J/11	Med Viareggio	Wheat(P)	Odesa	Total	31/12	4/2
J/12	Unity	Wheat(G)	-	SSST	R/A	4/2
J/13	Achiever	Cont	P KEL	RSL	26/1	3/2
CCT/1	Banglar Shikha	Cont	Sing	BSC	28/1	3/2
CCT/2	Jurong Balsam	Cont	Sing	Nol	29/1	4/2
CCT/3	Banglar Moni	Cont	Sing	BSC	29/1	3/2
RM/14	Lissom Leader	C Clink	Kant	Sentrans	26/1	13/2
GSJ	Banglar Urmi	Wheat(G)	-	Ancient	R/A	4/2
TSP	Fair Spirit	R Phos	Sing	Atlantic	27/1	10/2
RM/4	Cocord	HSD/MS	Sing	Atlantic	29/1	4/2
RM/6	Ocean Cougar	LBO	Sing	ECSL	29/1	3/2
DOJ	Banglar Shourabh	C Oil	-	BSC	R/A	2/2
DDJ/1	Banglar Kakoli	GI(Repair0	Male	BSC	31/12	8/2
RM/8	Chalothorn Naree	Urea(G)	Suha	Sing	Litmond	6/1
RM/9	Banglar Kallol	Onion	-	BSC	R/A	7/2
KAFCO(A)	Tug Ena Fortune	-	Sing	MBL	15/1	15/2

Vessels due at outer Anchorage

Name of vessels	Date of arrival	L Port call	Local agent	Cargo	Loading port
Chung Jin-2	1/2	B Abb	SBS	GI(Bitumeen)	-
OSG Alpha(Cont)24/1	2/2	Sing	RSL	Cont	Sing
Cormorant	2/2	Sing	SBS	Cement	-
Pelcas-K	3/2	-	PSAL	Cement	-
Ever Brisk(Cont)24/1	3/2	Sing	QCSL	Cont	Sing
Xpress Resolve(Cont)24/1	4/2	Sing	RSL	Cont	Sing
Sunderland(24)24/1	4/2	Bomb	Litmond	GI	-
Kota Singa(Cont)25/1	4/2	Sing	PIL(Bd)	Cont	Sing
Ocean Pride	3/2	-	PSAL	Urea	-
Mary Nour	3/2	Lank	Multimode	Cement(Scan)	-
Feng Kan Shan	3/2	-	Bdship	GI	-
Xpress Makalu(Cont)23/1	5/2	-	Baridhi	Cont	Sing
Sheng Yang(48)26/1	5/2	Sing	RML	GI(St Coil)	-
Banga Birol(Cont)23/1	5/2	-	Bdship	Cont	Sing
Qc Teal(Cont?27/1	6/2	-	QCSL	Cont	Sing
Da Cheng(24)30/1	6/2	-	Bdship	GI	-
Kota Berjaya(Cont?30/1	7/2	Sing	PIL(Bd)	Cont	Sing
Osg Argosy(Cont?30/1	7/2	-	Baridhi	Cont	Sing
QC Pintail(Cont)31/1	7/2	-	QCSL	Cont	Sing
Kota Naga(Cont)31/1	10/2	Sing	Pil(Bd)	Cont	Sing

Tanker due

Name of vessels	Date of arrival	L Port call	Local agent	Cargo	Loading port
Ervilia	1/2	Sing	ECSL	HSD	-
Temasek	5/2	Sing	ECSL	HSD	-

Vessels at Kutubdia

Name of vessels	Cargo	Last Port call	Local agent	Date of arrival
Energy Explorer-IV	-	-	BBAL	5/1
Ismaya	-	-	BBAL	17/8
MFB Devi Matha	-	-	BBAL	24/10
MFB Sona	-	-	BBAL	24/10
MFB Lakshmi	-	-	BBAL	24/10
Dea Champion	-	-	BBAL	22/1
Smit Lloyd-74	-	-	BBAL	R/A (28/1)
Seabulk Command	-	-	IBS	R/A (1/2)
Smit Lloyd-27	-	Sing	S Lchy	2/12
Marine-305	P Mat	Sing	S I Chy	2/12
Ostertor	-	Sing	S I Chy	5/1
Pacific Centurion	-	-	S I Chy	14/1
Smit Lloyd-110	D Mat	Sing	S I Chy	29/12

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

Camdessus criticises G7 role in Russia

'IMF tries to help Moscow build a market economy'

WASHINGTON, Feb 3: The International Monetary Fund took on a tough task when it tried to help Russia build a market economy, and rich countries were more generous with directives than with cash, the fund's outgoing managing director said yesterday, reports Reuters.

In comments both defensive of IMF actions and critical of the rich countries which pay the IMF's bills, Michel Camdessus said none of the players involved in the early stages of Russian reform had recognised the scale of the problems.

"What was missed in Russia was a good perception by all actors of the time it would take to change the culture of the country," Camdessus, who leaves the IMF later this month, said at Georgetown University. "The economic culture, the enterprise culture were not there and these take time."

The IMF, occasionally prodded into action by the Group of Seven industrialised countries, loaned Russia more than $20 billion in the seven years after the Soviet Union collapsed, despite a mixed Russian track record on economic reform.

But Camdessus complained that the G7 — Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States — had not stepped in with bilateral loans as Russia struggled to remodel its communist-era economy.

"Very soon we and our friends in the World Bank were left alone to help this country, when normally we should have only a catalytic role," he said.

"The bilateral donors, particularly the G7 countries which were so adamant to (support) the Russians, have not done a lot — to say the least - in extending bilateral support.

IMF deputy head Stanley Fischer, speaking earlier at a congressional commission, admitted member countries had put "political pressure" on Russia, although he said it had not gone so far as to force policy shifts. "The Russia case is very, very complicated," he said.

The chain of IMF loans from 1992 to 1997 turned Russia into the IMF's largest single borrower, although payments from the latest credit have been delayed for months while the IMF waits for Russia to meet structural benchmarks centering on bankruptcy rules and payments for utilities.

Camdessus said early efforts to reform the Russian economy had been complicated by the fact that the destruction of the Communist Party had destroyed the state that went with it.

"We had to help this country rebuild itself with no proper statistics, no proper administration and with a central power which went not very far beyond the walls of the Kremlin," he said, referring to the power vacuum in Russia's early years.

Camdessus, repeating previous IMF comments, said Russia was more than meeting macroeconomic targets agreed in its latest economic programme with the international lender and he raised the prospect of a recovery — within the next 10 years.

Singapore's drug, biotech output may double by 2005

SINGAPORE, Feb 3: Singapore today said it expected the output of pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies in the city state to double to some 12 billion Singapore dollars (7.19 billion US) by the year 2005, says AFP.