

Azerbaijan becomes ADB member

MANILA (Philippines), Feb 7: Azerbaijan has been accepted as the Asian Development Bank's 58th member, the bank said Monday, reports AP.

The Manila-based institution said it will send a mission to the former Soviet republic to come up with a strategy that would provide the framework for initial bank assistance.

That would include terms of possible initial ADB loans to partly finance projects, the bank said.

Azerbaijan, which shares borders with Russia, Armenia, Georgia, Turkey and Iran, has a population of 7.9 million people. Although it has massive oil and gas reserves, its annual per capita income of \$518 is among the lowest in the region.

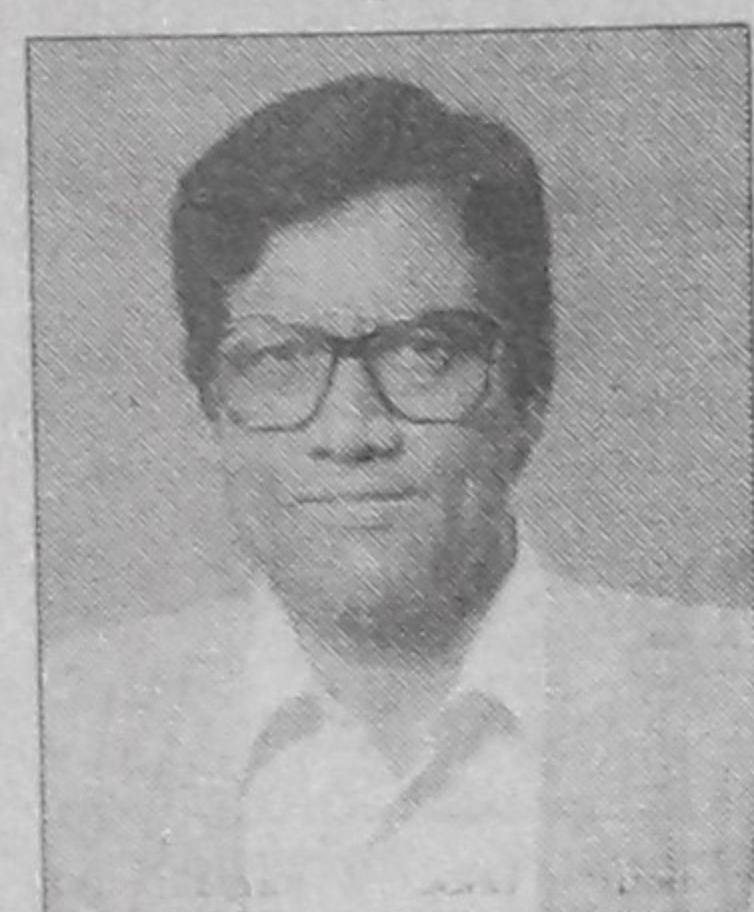
The ADB said government decision-making in Azerbaijan should be improved to ensure potential income from oil and gas production would be used to raise the standard of living and develop non-oil economic sectors.

There is also a need to develop the country's financial sector, the ADB said.

Possible ADB assistance would focus on improving access of the poor to jobs and other income-generating opportunities and basic social services, the ADB said.

The ADB has been funding development projects in the Asia-Pacific since it was established in 1966.

Mizanur Rahman new chairman of Peoples Ins



Mohammed Mizanur Rahman has been elected Chairman of the Board of Directors of Peoples Insurance Company Limited at a meeting of the board held in the city recently, says a press release.

The meeting was presided over by the outgoing Chairman of the Board of Directors of the company, Amir Humayun Mahmud Chowdhury. Directors, past Chairmen and the Managing Director of the company, Syed Zahurul Huq, were present.

Mizanur Rahman is the founder and Chairman of PHP Group. Through his whole business career he proved himself to be an energetic personality with new businesses and industries in the developing economy of Bangladesh.

He established a mega project of cold rolling mills in the country having an annual production capacity of 1,50,000 MT of CR coils with an annual turnover of about Tk 4.50 billion.

Thai students protest UN trade meet

BANGKOK, Feb 7: Thai students converged on United Nations headquarters in Bangkok Monday to condemn a security crackdown ahead of a major global trade summit here, reports AP.

Around 20 students chanted slogans claiming the police operation designed to contain any anti-globalisation protests violated basic freedoms and was an attempt to block demonstrations.

Thai police have said they will not allow large-scale demonstrations at the venue of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD X) which starts here Saturday.

"We and other Thai people must protest because the Thai government cannot represent people suffering from liberalisation and unfair development," said the students in a statement.

Japan business sentiment erodes

TOKYO, Feb 7: Business sentiment worsened slightly in the October-December quarter on concern over Y2K computer glitches, according to a survey by Japan's Economic Planning Agency, says AP.

The diffusion index for business sentiment — defined as the percentage of companies saying conditions have improved from the previous quarter minus the percentage saying they have worsened — was plus 6 for the October-December quarter, down from the plus 10 recorded during the July-September period.

The agency forecast the diffusion index will slip to plus 5 in the January-March quarter but then rebound to plus 22 in the April-June survey period.

Bangladesh remains a hot spot for piracy

23 incidents took place at Bay last year, says In't Maritime Bureau

By Inam Ahmed

Bangladesh remains a hot spot for piracy on ships in South and Southeast Asia with 23 incidents reported last year, according to the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) which recorded a total of 285 incidents in 1999.

India trails behind Bangladesh in South Asia with 14 attacks reported. But the overall piracy in Southeast Asia contributed to a 40 per cent surge in worldwide attacks last year.

"There has been a surge in pirate attacks on ships at the outer anchorage," said the operation manager of a leading shipping company based in Chittagong. "Pirates armed with lethal weapons including the most modern automatic guns raid ships under the cover of the darkness of night and loot booties."

The recent victims of the sea pirates were two ships named Carrea Santaosa and Jing Yi, both deserted after a court order to arrest them. These ships had

been virtually ripped apart by pirates leaving only the superstructure, according to shipping sources.

Shipping operators now feel that the government must gear up patrolling at the outer anchorage to stop this worrisome trend.

"But land pirates are more frightening now a days," said another shipping lines operator. "We are increasingly facing incidents in which land pirates break open containers at night and take out imported boots. The shipping lines are sure to face losses due to such incidents."

In Asia, strife-torn Indonesia topped the list of the piracy-prone countries with 113 incidents recorded, which is more than one third of the global total and nearly double the 60 incidents reported in 1998.

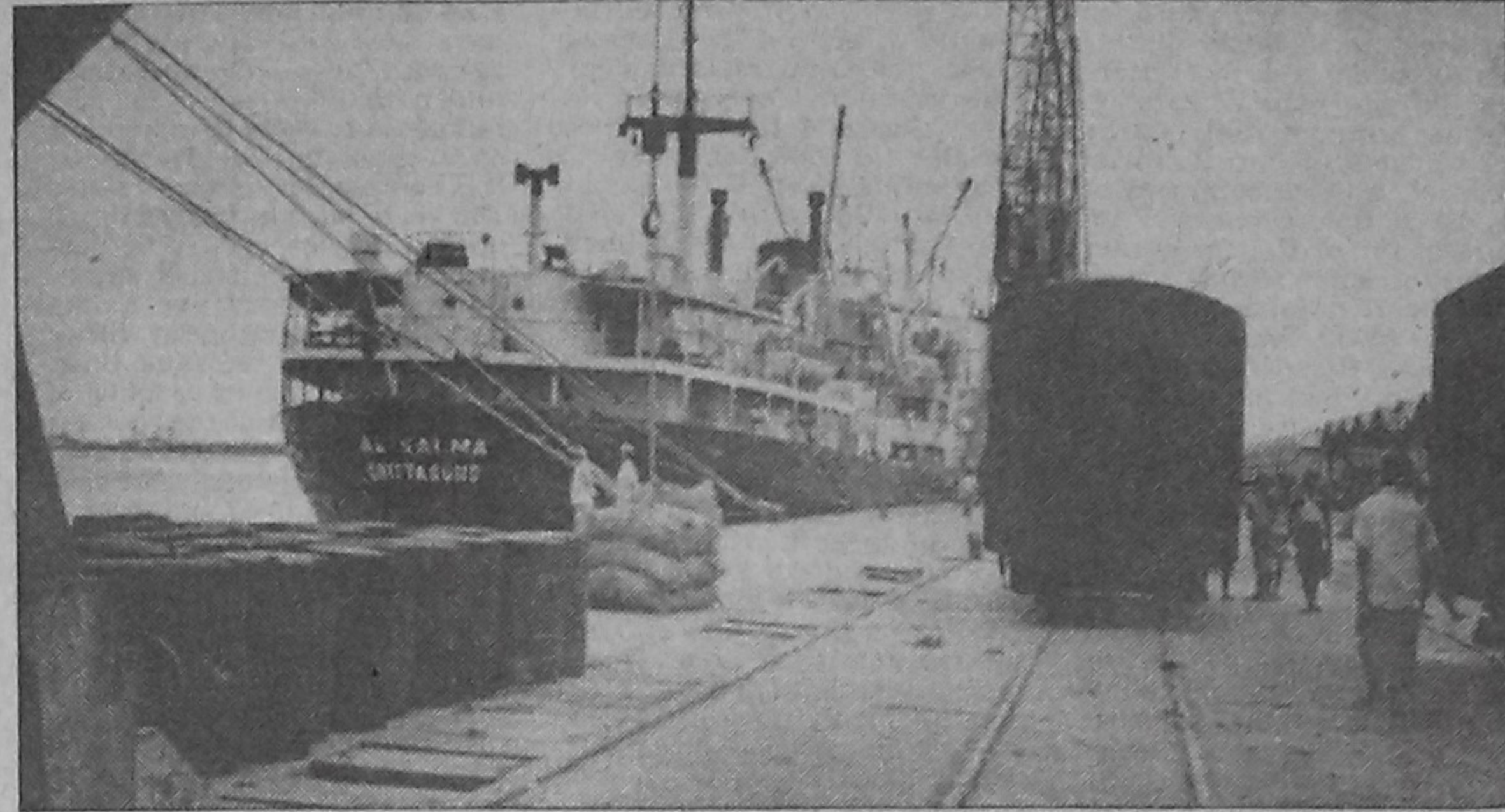
The IMB guesses that the economic recession and political instability in Indonesia led to high number of pirate attacks there. The organisation,

launched in 1991, has also advised the mariners to take extra caution and maintain anti-piracy watches when transiting the Indonesian waters.

The other hot piracy spots were: Malaysia with 18, Somalia with 11 and Nigeria with 11 incidents.

The busy Singapore Straits saw a dramatic rise in the number of attacks to 13 last year, compared to just one in 1998. However, the good news for the mariners is that despite the increased number of incidents, cases of extreme violence declined, with only three reported deaths in 1999 compared to 78 the year before.

"The potential for violence, however, continues to be a worrying factor," the IMB report warned. "During 1999, the number of incidents where pirates boarded with guns increased as compared with 1998. Similarly, incidents where pirates were armed with knives doubled as compared to 1998."



How safe is it? Ships moored at the Chittagong Port always risk pirate attacks.

—Star photo

Astronomical price quotations at DSE enrage regulators

Monkey business or maket misguiding move?

By M Shamsur Rahman

Stock markets round the globe are one of the most sensitive places for brokers. Here, every deal is closely monitored by them as they quote prices at the most competitive rates. But what do you make of a situation where brokers are quoting prices of scrips at rates 20,000 per cent higher than the prevailing market price?

The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) has recently detected that some Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) brokers are almost whimsically quoting prices of scrips. It has also directed the bourse to probe the "whimsical play" by certain dealers.

"Most of these offers are quoted whenever some companies make disclosures about dividend offers or announce annual general meetings (AGMs)," one DSE source said.

It's still a mystery why they are making such astronomical offers. No one can tell for sure whether it is a prank played by some traders or a serious effort to undermine the market.

But the SEC has observed

that "at the prevalence of such atmosphere in the stock market, the investors are affected and misguided which should have been taken due care of by the DSE in the interest of all concerned."

"We also observed that the

DSE has failed to take appropriate measures in this respect as per the regulations," the SEC said in a letter to DSE.

The SEC has also pointed out that 18 stock brokers had quoted such inflated prices for selling and purchasing Ashraf

The Buy and Sell offers of certain DSE members:

Member's Name	Buy/Sell	Offered Price (Tk)
All Securities Ltd	sale	1000
Chowdhury Securities	sale	15000,9000,
Feroz Khan & Co	sale	11000
Kazi Feroz Rashid & Co	sale	5000
Hamed A Chowdhury & Co	sale	10,000
Moshior Rahman	sale	9806
Abdur Rahman & Co	sale	4000, 1200, 1500,2990.90, 1100, 1199.90, 9999.90
Capital Roots	sale	50, 50, 50
LRK Securities	sale	1000
Gateway Equity Resources	sale	100
Capital Market Services	sale	50
Adarsha Securities	sale	50000
Dawn International	sale	3000
Arafat Securities	buy	—
Sarwarson & Co	buy	2
AKM Abdur Razzak & Sons	buy	200000, 2900, 1000,1000
Iqbal Hassan Mahmood & Co	buy	5000
NR Islam & Co	buy	40000

Textile shares.

Some 13 DSE stock brokers made sell offers for Ashraf Textile scrips ranging from Tk 50 to Tk 50,000 per share on December 1 and 2, 1999, after the circuit breaker on the company's shares was withdrawn. Five brokers made buying offers ranging from Tk 5,000 to Tk 2 lakh. It may be mentioned here that the scrips of this very company were traded at Tk 10 per share the previous day.

In another case, a DSE member had offered Tk 10 to purchase shares of Eastern Lubricant on January 31, 2000, which was last traded at Tk 153 per share.

Drawing DSE attention to such irregularities, the SEC directed the bourse officials to inform the regulators about what actions they had taken against the offenders.

According to the securities regulations, the DSE must refer the anomalous bids, offers or transactions to a disciplinary committee of the stock exchange.

Pfizer to take over Warner-Lambert

NEW YORK, Feb 7: In a deal to create the world's second-largest drug company, Pfizer Inc. is expected to announce that it is acquiring Warner-Lambert Co for \$84.4 billion in stock, according to people familiar with the negotiations, reports AP.

The combined company will keep Pfizer's name and headquarters in New York, the sources said. Its medicine chest will include both impotence treatment Viagra and the blockbuster cholesterol fighting drug Lipitor.

The deal, expected to be announced Monday, will mark the end of a takeover battle that started in November when Warner-Lambert announced a \$58.3 billion merger with American Home Products Corp. and Pfizer followed with a hostile bid for Warner-Lambert.

To sever the contract between Warner-Lambert and American Home Products, Pfizer will pay American Home Products \$1.8 billion — the largest breakup fee in history. American Home Products decided not to wage a lengthy and expensive court battle to stop Pfizer, according to a person involved in the deal.

American Home Products could use the windfall as a cushion against verdicts or settlements related to its part of the

fen-phen diet drug combination. The company has already set aside \$4.7 billion to pay claims.

Meanwhile, relations between the top executives at Pfizer and Warner-Lambert are anything but friendly.

Warner-Lambert's chairman and chief executive officer, Lodewijk J R De Vink, 54, will leave the company after the deal closes in four to six months, said the sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Pfizer also is expected to cut hundreds of jobs — most of them from Warner-Lambert — from their combined work force of 87,400 as the two companies unite their sales and research teams and consolidate administration jobs.

The job cuts would be part of the company's estimated \$1.6 billion in cost savings by 2002.

Warner-Lambert's headquarters in Morris Plains, New Jersey, will become the base for the consumer products division, which will include household names like Listerine, Roalds, Bain de Soleil and Visine.

Together, the two companies have sales of \$29 billion, profits of \$4.9 billion and a research budget of \$4.7 billion. The new Pfizer will control about 6.3 per cent of the world's medicine market.

UNCTAD meet a 'perfect chance' for narrowing trade rifts

GENEVA, Feb 7: Optimism about what was supposed to be the World Trade Organisation's Millennium Round of trade talks vanished in December when police fired tear gas at protesters on Seattle streets while negotiators squabbled indoors. Another organisation, launching meetings next week, hopes to gallop in and save the day, says AP.

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, starting its quadrennial gathering in Bangkok, Thailand, will bring together many of the same people who were at the Seattle meeting, which disintegrated in recriminations and failed to lay the needed groundwork for the millennium talks.

The Thailand meeting is the perfect opportunity, organisers say, to have another go at solving tricky trade disagreements and reaping the hoped for global benefits.

But rich countries are going out of their way to play down the importance of the UN agency, which was set up to promote trade as a tool for economic growth in developing countries.

"The WTO is an organisation of rules and procedure; UNCTAD is not. UNCTAD is an agency that provides technical assistance to countries that need it," said Rita Hayes, US ambassador to the WTO.

Canadian trade minister Pierre Pettigrew stressed that the Bangkok meeting could

only help the WTO process if developing countries agreed to change some of their positions.

"It is up to them to decide whether UNCTAD can be an engaging organisation, with a constructive attitude," Pettigrew said.

The rich countries aren't holding their breath. Host Thailand was hoping for high-level representatives — presidents, foreign ministers, top trade negotiators — to attend.

Instead, the United States is sending a team led by Harriet C Babbitt, deputy administrator of the Agency for International Development. Accompanying her will be equally junior officials. And that's the highest-level delegation Washington has sent to an UNCTAD meeting

in 17 years.

Thai officials have called the delegation disappointing and said that Washington is missing a chance to make its case for globalisation. Many Asian heads of state and prime ministers are attending.

It's only a 10-minute walk from the headquarters of the WTO on the shores of Lake Geneva to the ninth floor offices of UNCTAD.

WTO Director-General Mike Moore and UNCTAD Secretary-General Rubens Ricupero have similar views. Moore has championed the importance of giving developing countries the help they need to take advantage of globalisation. Ricupero is an enthusiastic promoter of free trade.



Feroz Rahim, Managing Director of Rahimafrooz, inaugurates the company's export office in Ahmedabad, India, recently.

—Rahimafrooz photo

China approves first insurance brokerage firms

BEIJING, Feb 7: China's Insurance Regulatory Commission (CIRC) has given the green light for the formation of the country's first three insurance brokerage firms, the official Xinhua news agency said Sunday, reports AP.

The companies received approval recently and will be located in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. Xinhua said without giving their names.

While China's insurance business has grown 10 fold over the past decade to reach 139 billion yuan (16.8 billion dollars) last year, brokerage firms have so far kept major players out of the insurance market here, Xinhua said.

China's insurance market has remained under the tight grip of four national groups, but under an agreement between China and the United States forged in November, this could change.

The agreement, paving the way for China's eventual entry into the World Trade Organisation, would allow foreign firms to take up to half the capital of Chinese insurance firms and lift all geographical limits on their activities.

Rahimafrooz opens export office in Ahmedabad

Star Business Report

Rahimafrooz has opened its export office in the Indian state of Ahmedabad.

Managing Director of the company, Feroz Rahim, inaugurated the office at a simple ceremony in Ahmedabad recently, says a press release.

Alimul Haque, Deputy High Commissioner of Bangladesh in India, Munawar M Moyn, General Manager and COO of the company, importers, trade partners and local elites were present on the occasion.

Rahimafrooz has been exporting VOLTA brand batteries to India for the last two years. It has an extensive distribution network with more than 350 dealers all over India.

The export office has been specifically set up to cater to the high vehicle population which is mostly concentrated in the western part of India.

In his speech, the managing director of the company expressed his commitment for continuous quest for excellence to sustain and grow in the competitive market.

The Deputy High Commissioner spoke of his profound satisfaction at the export growth of Rahimafrooz in India.

He also appreciated Rahimafrooz's pioneering endeavour to export Bangladeshi products into India.

Rahimafrooz has been in the country's battery business for the last 40 years. Its major export brand is VOLTA, which has technical collaboration with Hawker Batteries, England.

The company exports to about 15 countries including India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, UAE, Kuwait, Lebanon, Georgia and other countries.

Italy, S Arabia vow to boost trade

RIYADH, Feb 7: Italian Foreign Minister Lamberto Dini and Saudi Finance Minister Ibrahim al-Assaf pledged here Monday to boost trade ties particularly through non-oil joint ventures for small and medium-sized firms, reports AP.

"We do expect we will be able to make a quality jump in economic cooperation between our two countries," Dini told the eighth session of the Saudi-Italian Joint Commission for Economic and Industrial Cooperation.

Dini, at the head of a 30-member delegation, noted there was plenty of scope to expand the 3.5 billion dollar annual trade between the two countries.

"We are looking for more joint ventures," agreed Assaf in an open session, noting that 54 joint ventures, nearly half in the construction industry, left room for improvement.

Dini, who arrived in Saudi Arabia on Sunday on a three-day visit, offered Rome's support for Riyadh's bid to join the World Trade Organisation and called for "practical trade between the two nations."

Italian investments in the kingdom worth 2.19 billion dollars (584 million dollars) rank the country third after the United States and Japan.

Dini met with King Fahd late Sunday and was also to see notably Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal and Oil Minister Ali al-Naimi.

Talks were also to cover relations between the Gulf Cooperation Council and the European Union, the situation in the Gulf and the Middle East peace process.

Saudi Arabia, the world's largest oil exporter, has in recent months taken measures to attract private investment, both domestic and foreign, in a bid to diversify the economy and protect it from oil price volatility.

Britons to splurge \$34.99m on Valentine's Day flowers

7m imported roses expected to be given for buying love

LONDON, Feb 7: Money can't buy you love on St Valentine's Day but Britons are still expected to splurge millions of pounds on flowers, cards and Romance online, reports Reuters.

The British Flowers and Plants Association predicts that 22 million pounds (\$34.99 million) will be spent on flowers on February 14 — most of it on roses imported from Israel, Colombia, Kenya and Holland.

"We estimate that seven million red roses will be given on Valentine's Day — that's 400 per cent higher than a normal day," said Austin Clark, a spokesman for Interflora, Britain's biggest florist network.

"About 90 per cent of flowers are purchased by men but young women are increasingly sending men a single red rose," he said the company is run-

ning advertisements in so-called "lads" magazines such as Loaded and FHM to urge young men that buying flowers is no threat to their hard-edged masculinity.

Clark said the number of Internet orders for flowers is increasing steadily, especially among women who find it less embarrassing to type their own intimate messages than dictate them to a florist over the phone.

Traditional card sales are also expected to be high. Last year Britons bought more than 23 million Valentine cards, worth nearly 39 million pounds, according to greetings card company Hallmark, a unit of privately-held Hallmark Cards Inc.

Not all cards are sent by ardent lovers.

"Women who are not expecting a card are likely to send one to themselves or to their dog,"

said Hallmark spokeswoman Izy Foss.

Passionate outpourings
This year, the card industry and newspaper classified sections which normally bulge with passionate outpourings will face new competition from cyber greetings.

Bluemountain.com offers electronic greetings cards to suit every occasion from birthdays and Valentine's Day to Love Your Pet Day and Employee Appreciation Day.

The greetings are free but Bluemountain does get access to the email address of both the sender and the recipient for future marketing efforts.

"These are an increasingly popular way for people to keep in touch," said Lucy Green, marketing director of Internet audience measurement company MMXI Europe.

"In December as many as nine percent of all (global) home Internet users visited the Bluemountain.com website to send online Christmas cards and we expect Valentine's Day to be very popular."

E-commerce sites are also heavily promoting St Valentine's Day gifts ranging from flowers and champagne to lingerie, teddy bears and even cheese and pate.

A US website called The Active Romantic (www.activromantic.com), aiming to keep love alive all year round, is offering a pink marble heart carved with the words "I love you" mounted on an oak plinth for \$28.95.

Valentine's Day was originally a Roman Festival known as the feast of Lupercalia, in honour of Juno, goddess of women and marriage.

WTO members meet to fix agri talks time-table

GENEVA, Feb 7: Members of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) met here on Monday to fix a timetable for the resumption of negotiations on agriculture and services, which are scheduled to take place this year, reports AP.

"We will put the show on the road," Canada's ambassador to the world trade body, Sergio Marchi, said on arriving for the meeting.

In its first formal meeting of the year, the WTO's executive body, the General Council, is also expected to elect Norwegian ambassador Kare Bryn as its president, replacing Tanzanian Ali Mchumo.

It is also expected to give the green light to a proposal by Mchumo to begin negotiations on services on February 21 and on agriculture on March 23 and 24.

Under an agreement at the end of the Uruguay Round of

WTO talks in 1994, members are mandated to hold negotiations on agriculture and services this year.

The two areas represent 80 percent of the world's employment and 65 percent of global output.

In addition, WTO Director-General Mike Moore has put forward several other topics as priorities for discussion.

These include the question of least developed nations and their access to markets, how to increase technical aid to them, the establishment of "practical solutions" to allow developing countries time to adapt to WTO rules, and the reform of the WTO to increase transparency.

Ambassadors representing the world trade body's 135 members met at the end of last year shortly after the collapse of the ministerial conference in Seattle in December, but failed to make any decisions.