

Clinton's proposed 2001 budget forecasts slower US growth

WASHINGTON, Feb 7: President Bill Clinton's proposed budget for fiscal year 2001 forecasts US economic growth of about 2.6 per cent in 2001, down from 4.0 per cent in 1999, White House officials said, reports Reuters.

Growth would moderate further to 2.5 per cent for the following couple of years, Joe Minarik, associate director of economic policy at the budget office, told reporters.

Economic growth would then revive to about 3.0 per cent per year until baby boomers begin to retire later this decade and the growth rate slows, Minarik said.

He projected a consumer price inflation rate of 2.5 per cent in 2001, edging up to 2.6 per cent in 2002.

The Consumer Price Index, the nation's main gauge of price pressures at the consumer level, was up 2.7 per cent overall in 1999, boosted by higher oil price and energy costs. That was the highest rise since 1996.

Clinton's 2001 budget projects the unemployment rate will grow from a 30-year low of 4.0 per cent in January to 4.5 per cent in 2001, five per cent in 2002 and 5.2 per cent after that.

Sylvia Mathews, deputy director of the White House Office

of Management and Budget, said the budget is based on economic assumptions that are "slightly more conservative" than the consensus of top economists.

The budget envisions a \$184 billion surplus, another record.

The surplus projection includes \$160 billion from the Social Security retirement system, which would go toward paying off the federal debt by 2013, said Sylvia Mathews, deputy director of the White House Office of Management and Budget.

The budget request includes numerous new spending programmes, including a prescription-drug insurance plan for Medicare patients, subsidies for retirement savings and rent subsidies for low-income families.

The programmes set an ambitious agenda for Democratic candidates in this year's elections and would give Clinton a policy legacy extending far beyond the expiration of his term next January.

Republicans in control of Congress have offered cooperation on proposals including Medicare and paying down the \$3.6 trillion debt by 2013. But they have pledged to cast a wary

eye on other spending initiatives and to battle for greater tax cuts than the \$256 billion net reductions proposed by Clinton.

The White House portrayed the budget as responsible in an era of surpluses that it projects at \$2.9 trillion over 10 years.

The \$167 billion surplus it projects today for fiscal 2000, which ends September 30, would be the third consecutive annual surplus.

"Everyone believes that debt reduction is real, and that surpluses are real. And I think now we face the challenge of how do we maintain fiscal discipline and a balanced approach to the things the government does in an era of surpluses," Mathews told reporters in a telephone conference call.

Clinton's 2001 request is four per cent higher than the \$1.765 trillion he sought last year. It forecasts revenues of \$2.019 trillion.

Government spending as a share of the economy would fall to 18.3 per cent in 2001, which is down from 18.7 per cent in 2000 and the lowest figure since 1966, Mathews said.

Clinton's budget projects the Social Security system will generate \$2.2 trillion in sur-

pluses over the next 10 years, and the rest of the budget will generate \$746 billion in surpluses. His plan would use the entire Social Security surplus and half of the remaining surplus to repay the federal debt.

Although Clinton dropped his goal from last year of overhauling Social Security policies and finances, the budget proposes extending the financial solvency of the system by 16 years to 2050. It would do this by funneling interest savings from the debt into it beginning in 2011. Over the first five years \$690 billion would be placed into the system.

Clinton resubmits a proposal that fell flat last year — investing a share of the Social Security trust fund in equities — but he revises it by delaying the start of the programme until 2011. The equities — investment plan aims to extend the solvency of the system another four years, to 2054.

The non-partisan Congressional Budget Office has estimated that the non-Social Security surplus could reach \$1.9 trillion over 10 years if spending were frozen — thus giving Republicans more room for tax cuts than Clinton sees. But the White House has said a spending freeze is unrealistic.

Filipino inflation rate lowest in 13 years

MANILA, Feb 7: Philippine annual inflation in January came in well below expectations at 2.6 per cent, and economists said that should help keep local interest rates stable, reports Reuters.

It was the mildest year-on-year increase since a 2.0 per cent rise in May 1987.

A Reuters poll of 10 economists last week forecast a rise of 3.88 per cent, compared with 4.3 per cent in December and 11.5 per cent in January 1999.

Economists attributed the tame inflation to abundant food supply and the effect of last year's high base level.

"A big factor that contributed to that spectacular new year's surprise is base effect," said Helen Alvarez, research director of All Asia Capital and Trust Corp.

Emilio Neri, economist at Abacus Securities Corp, said low demand was also a factor.

"I see the primary reason (for this) is that demand is still very selective. People are not as imprudent in their expenditure patterns, primarily because of

the weaker peso, and also employment in the urban areas is not as much available as before," Neri said.

Despite the good inflation numbers, a drop in local interest rates would be limited by concerns over the budget deficit, the weak peso, and possible further increases in US rates.

Asked if interest rates should be substantially lowered in light of the January inflation number, Alvarez said: "They should not because we still have the fiscal position we should keep a tab on."

The government overshot its 1999 target with a budget deficit of 111.66 billion pesos (\$2.76 billion). It has pledged to prune the deficit to 62.5 billion pesos this year.

"I don't think there will be any change in interest rates, especially downward,"

Neri said he expects no change in rates but that the central bank was more likely to rise them if anything, though he added that the Bureau of Treasury was preventing the central bank from doing so.

S Africa's labour laws killing small businesses: Mbeki

JOHANNESBURG, Feb 7: "Unreasonable" aspects of South Africa's labour laws are strangling small businesses and have to be amended, President Thabo Mbeki said in an interview published Sunday, reports AFP.

Expanding on comments he made in a state-of-the-nation address to parliament on Friday, Mbeki told the Johannesburg Sunday Times the laws, aimed at overhauling exploitative apartheid-era labour legislation, had had "unexpected consequences."

"The burdens placed on small businessmen to comply with some of these provisions are quite unreasonable," Mbeki acknowledged. "I'm told of instances where they would produce paralysis."

He said many small companies and non-governmental organisations did not have enough money to advise them of

the requirements of the laws. "Some people might have all their revenue for six months swallowed up by hiring a lawyer — they'll die. And yet the law says that if they don't behave correctly, they'll be in violation of the law. It's things such as this that need to be attended to."

Clauses which big business claims have forced enterprises to cut their labour force and resort to mechanisation include those relating to probationary employment, notice periods, pay for overtime work and work on Sundays, and procedures around unfair dismissals.

A concession that businesses are employing fewer than 10 workers are entitled to pay a lower overtime rate has not resolved the problem.

Labour Minister Mcebisi Mdlalana said at the weekend he expected amendments to certain provisions of the

Labour Relations Act, the Basic Conditions of Employment Act and the Insolvency Act to be completed by August this year.

Business has blamed the legislation for not providing the proper environment to create jobs and for leading to higher labour costs.

Unemployment is currently running at around 30 per cent and business has warned it will rise should the restrictions of the laws not be eased.

Mbeki said in the interview he had begun a new and intensive interaction with trade unions through a presidential working group to bring labour on board on a range of contentious economic policies aimed at attracting investment. These include the setting of inflation targets, the lifting of exchange controls, the right-sizing of the public service and an increased pace of privatisation.

StanChart Sylhet branch opens

Standard Chartered Bank soft-launched its Sylhet branch recently (January 29, 2000) in the presence of a host of bank officials, customers and the elite of Sylhet, says a press release.

The branch, which is located in East Dargagata, is the sixth branch of the bank in Bangladesh. It introduces 24-hour banking in Sylhet for the first time through the first Monetylink ATM and Phonelink phone banking services in the city.

The ATM offers both deposit and withdrawal facilities to the customers. The branch is also going to offer Priority Banking services to its high net-worth customers in the district town.

Keith Vaz MP, British Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Office, visited the branch on January 31, 2000, during his short visit to Sylhet. Dr David Carter, British High Commissioner in Bangladesh, Habibur Rahman, Divisional Commissioner of Sylhet, and Sethu Venkateswaran, Chief Executive Bangladesh of Standard Chartered Bank, accompanied him.

The formal launching of the branch will be held soon.



Keith Vaz MP, British Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Office, is seen entering the Sylhet Branch of Standard Chartered Bank which was launched recently. British High Commissioner in Bangladesh Dr David Carter and Sethu Venkateswaran, Chief Executive Bangladesh, are also seen in the picture. — StanChart photo.

Russian govt to borrow from central bank in March

MOSCOW, Feb 7: The Russian government will be forced to borrow from the Russian central bank in March to cover its budget deficit, deputy prime minister Mikhail Kasyanov was quoted as saying by Interfax agency on Monday, reports AFP.

Russia faces a financing shortfall due to the suspension of lending by the International Monetary Fund, which froze loans in September on concerns over the slow pace of economic reforms in Russia.

The principle behind the central bank loan lay on the basis of an agreement in principle approved by the International Monetary Fund. "The amount will be decided at a later date based on the concrete parameters of the budget," which will be set around March.

The government had hoped to avoid borrowing from the central bank, which is potentially inflationary, and was looking to international financing. But an IMF official visit ended on Friday amid deep disagreements, seen as signalling that an IMF loan was not to be expected in the first quarter.

"The (IMF) mission considers that progress in structural reforms has been limited," and the IMF's demands have not been met within the agreed programme, the IMF said in a statement.

An agreement had been reached with the government on basic elements of fiscal and monetary policy for the first half, it said.

But analysts said no figures had been decided.

"No figures have been published and we think there has been no firm agreement on the macro-economic indices," investment company UFG said on Monday. The next IMF visit is due in Moscow in April, after the first round of the presidential election which is due to be held on March 26.

The IMF visit ended amid disagreement and little prospect of a resumption of IMF lending before May, a source close to the talks said on Friday.

The business newspaper Vedomosti reported on Friday that the talks had lasted late into Thursday night with Russian government officials.

One of the major differences lay in agreeing macro-economic estimates for 2000.

The IMF considers the gross domestic product forecasts are under-estimated, as are those for the trade balance. IMF officials believe the average rate forecast for the rouble of 32 roubles per dollar is not sufficiently rigorous and that the central bank should set a tougher target for the Russian currency.



Charge d'Affaires of Morocco in Bangladesh Abdell Illah Marci called on President of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) Aftab ul Islam at the DCCI office on Sunday. They discussed issues relating to bilateral trade promotion and economic co-operation between Bangladesh and Morocco. Past DCCI President R Maksud Khan and Sr Vice-President A M Mubash-Shar were also present. —DCCI photo

Kofi Annan to visit Thailand for UN meet

BANGKOK, Feb 7: United Nations secretary general Kofi Annan will arrive in Thailand this week for a four-day visit to attend the start of a global trade and development meeting, a statement said Monday, reports AFP.

The UN chief will fly in late Wednesday night and stay until February 13, when he leaves for Singapore, the foreign ministry said.

Thailand is hosting the 10th United Nations Conference on Trade and Development from February 12-19.

Annan will hold talks with Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai and Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan during his stay.

UK minimum wage going well

Move causes no job losses, gives no headache for employers

LONDON, Feb 7: The introduction of the national minimum wage in Britain last year has not led to job losses or caused any big headache for employers, a report from pay specialists IDS said today, reports Reuters.

In what it calls the first detailed assessment of the controversial legislation, IDS says: "The introduction of the NMW has been relatively orderly and many of the earlier worries about job loss, the disruption of pay structures and the impact on differentials have been found to have been groundless."

The minimum wage was introduced by the Labour government in April last year and marked the keeping of one of its key election pledges.

After much tortuous negotiation between government, unions and employers, it was set at 3.60 pounds (\$ 5.73) an hour for adults, but at 3.20 pounds for 18-21 year olds.

The government is now under pressure from trades unions to raise the level, which they argue does little to boost the incomes of the lowest paid. They want it to be raised above four pounds and would ideally like five pounds.

The IDS said one of the main fears associated with the introduction of the minimum wage — that it would push up average earnings growth and pile on inflationary pressure — had not occurred.

It said there had been little impact on "differentials", meaning that any pay rise for those at the bottom of the in-

come scale to get them to the minimum wage had not also been handed out to those further up pay scales. And the predicted job losses had not materialised. "In fact there were major job gains in the services sector as a result of broader economic conditions," it said.

Compliance with the new directive had been "relatively straightforward" for most employers, much more so than the so-called working time directive.

The report will bring relief for the government and unions alike. The unions had been unhappy with the decision to impose a minimum 3.20 pound minimum rate for 18-21 year olds but IDS said that in practice most major organisations were paying the full rate from age 18.

The legislation was given a boost by opposition Conservative shadow finance minister Michael Portillo on Thursday when he unexpectedly reversed his party's previous opposition to it, admitting it had not caused the expected job losses.

The IDS said, however, the minimum wage had not all been plain sailing as a minority of firms had reported problems. For example, charity and volunteer bodies had had trouble defining who was an employee and who a volunteer.

The issue of tips in restaurants had not been easy and there was anecdotal evidence that parts of the unofficial economy, notably in the garment business, were failing to comply with the legislation.

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									
TT/OD	BC	Currency	TT Clean	OD Sight	OD Transfer				
51.2300	51.2700	USD	60.8200	50.6616	50.5631				
0.4901	0.4904	JPY	0.4594	0.4579	0.4571				
31.6939	31.7186	CHF	80.7553	30.6533	30.5443				
31.6332	31.6579	SGD	29.6240	29.5558	29.4743				
36.6242	36.6528	CAD	34.3425	34.12287	34.0998				
5.9650	5.9897	SEK	5.8753	5.8659	5.8436				
33.7913	33.8177	AUD	30.9545	30.8519	30.8463				
13.6254	13.6380	MYR	13.2340	13.1902	13.1569				
6.8356	6.8408	HKD	6.4809	6.4594	6.4457				
13.7719	13.7826	SAR	13.4430	13.3985	13.3645				
14.0634	14.0743	KWD	13.7210	13.6756	13.6406				
0.0456	0.0458	AWD	0.0448	0.0446	0.0445				
82.4188	82.4832	GBP	80.1940	79.9382	79.8369				
50.9175	50.9573	EUR	48.9651	48.8028	48.7176				

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	Mal Ringit	Indo Rupiah	Sing. Dollar				
43.60/43.65	51.88/51.90	37.45/37.50	3.7999/01	7465/7495	1.6895/1.6905				

On Monday, the local interbank market was back to operation in full swing after a three-day break. The demand for dollar escalated a little bit. The demand for call money went up and the call rate ranged between 6 to 7 per cent.

In the international market, dollar nudged higher carrying over recent bullish sentiment and stoked by strong US data late last week in on otherwise quiet condition. Some traders also said the dollar drew slight support from a relatively lacklustre performance in the benchmark Nikkei stock average, which scored modest gains but remained well below the closely-watched 20,000 point-level breached briefly on Friday. Dollar buying by foreign and Japanese trust banks was detected after the US currency held above 107 yen in an early test of downside. But this did not establish a clear direction for the dollar, traders said expressing doubt that it would climb substantially higher, specially with the market trimmed by a holiday in Singapore and Hong Kong for the Lunar New Year.

Euro hovered in a narrow range against dollar with the downside drawing modest support from comments by Bundesbank president Westlake on Sunday that euro's current weakness was only a psychological concern, while the upside was limited due to weaker than expected German industrial orders data. On Friday, US jobs data for January showed that 387,000 new jobs were created outside the firm sector while the unemployment rate fell to 4.0 per cent, its lowest level in 3 years. Early on Monday dollar came under pressure as market participants, who took long positions during last week's rally, lightened their expectations the US-currency gain had run their course for the near term. News that the German industrial orders posted a seasonally-adjusted, month-on-month drop of 1.9 per cent in December, undermined the confidence in euro. On the crosses, euro was higher against yen, quoted at 105.64/77 yen, which helped dollar against yen. At 1600 hours local time, dollar traded at 108.40/43 against JPY, euro at 0.9803/08 against USD and GBP at 1.5960/65 against USD.

Shipping Intelligence

Berth position and performance of vessels as on 7.2.2000

Berth position and performance of vessels as on 7.2.2008						
Berth No	Name of vessels	Cargo	L Port call	Local agent	Date of Leasing	Leasing agent
J/1	Sheng Yang (48)	Grain	Sing	RML	5/2	7/2
J/2	Lord-P	Wheat	Sing	SSST	5/1	7/2
J/3	Yong Jiang	G	Sing	Bdship	28/1	8/2
J/4	Chung Jin-2	Gr(BIT)	B Abb	SBS	1/2	11/2
J/5	Med Hope	Wheat	G	Benam	15/1	7/2
J/8	Chalothorn Naree	Urea	G	Limmond	26/1	7/2
J/9	Fengkan Shan	G	S Hal	Bdship	3/2	10/2
J/10	Love Me Tender	Wheat	P	Royal	29/1	12/2
J/11	Phoenix-M	Wheat	G	K.Dia	Benam	R/A 12/2
J/12	Osg Alpha	Cont	Sing	RSL	2/2	8/2
J/13	Tiger River	cont	Sing	NOL	1/2	8/2
CCT/1	Ever Brisk	Cont	Sing	QCSL	3/2	6/2
CCT/2	Xpress Makalu	Cont	Col	Bardish	3/2	8/2
CCT/3	Xpress Nilgir	Cont	P Kel	RSL	31/1	8/2
RM/14	Lissomleader	C Clink	Kant	Centras	26/1	13/2
RM/15	Hutuyuan	Urea	G	BNSC	21/7	1/2
CJ/1	Al Marzan	C Clink	Ruby	Kant	RML	4/2
CJ/2	Sev	Wheat	G	BNSC	27/1	9/2
TSP	Fair Spirit	R Phos	Sing	Atlantic	27/1	9/2
RM/4	pranediya Pratama	F Oil	Sing	CTPL	5/2	8/2
RM/5	Temasek	Hsd	Sing	ECSL	5/2	8/2
DD/1	Banglar Kakoli	Gr (Repal)	Male	BSC	31/12	10/2
RM/8	Salamis	Cdso	Darb	Sealfit	29/1	8/2
RM/9	Banglar kaljol	Onion	BSC	r/a	12/2	
CUFLJ	Marynour	Cement	Lank	Multimod	4/2	16/2

Vessels due at outer anchorage

Name of vessels	Date of arrival	L Port call	Local agent	Cargo	Loading port
QC Teal/Cont/27/1	7/2	P Kel	QCSL	Cont	Sing
QC Pintail/Cont/31/1	8/2	Sing	QCSL	Cont	Sing
Kota Berjaya/Cont/30/1	8/2	Sing	Phil(Bd)	Cont	Sing
Pacific Challenger	9/2	Pada	NWSI	C Clink(Armit)	-
Project Arabia	9/2	Sing	Sunshine	P Mat	-
Ocean Pride	10/2	Sing	PSAL	Urea	-
Sunderland/24/24/1	10/2	Bomb	Limmond	G	-
Kota Naga/Cont/31/1	10/2	Sing	Phil(Bd)	Cont	Sing
Slam Ivory/48/3/2	11/2	-	ASA	[Oil Str Coll]	-
QC Mallard/Cont/1/2	11/2	P Kel	QCSL	Cont	Sing
Bunga Biraj/Cont/3/2	12/2	-	Bdship	Cont	Sing
Achiever/Cont/3/2	12/2	P Kel	RSL	Cont	Sing
Jurong Balsam	13/2	Sing	Nol	Cont	Sing
Jaya Mars	13/2	-	Baridhi	Cont	Co
Banglar Shikha/Cont/3/2	14/2	Sing	BSC	Cont	Sing
State of Orissa/E/13/2	15/2	-	SSLL	E/L	Ant Dundee
Orange Breeze	15/2	-	Everett	Vehi	-
Banglar Moni/Cont/3/2	16/2	Sing	BSC	Cont	Sing
Kota Cahaya	16/2	Sing	Phil(BD)	Cont	Sing
Bunga Mas Lapani/Cont/6/2	16/2	P Kel	EQSL	Cont	Sing
Du Fa/Cont/3/2	20/2	Sing	RSL	Cont	Sing
Tanker due	-	-	-	-	-
Tomis West	7/2	-	Atlantic	SKO	-
Tskha Chkala	7/2	-	TSL	CDJO	-
Aquidneck	8/2	-	Atlantic	HSD/JP-1	-
Dalhing	8/2	-	Atlantic	HSD/JP-1	-