

The Daily Star BUSINESS

West balks at specific trade concessions at UNCTAD

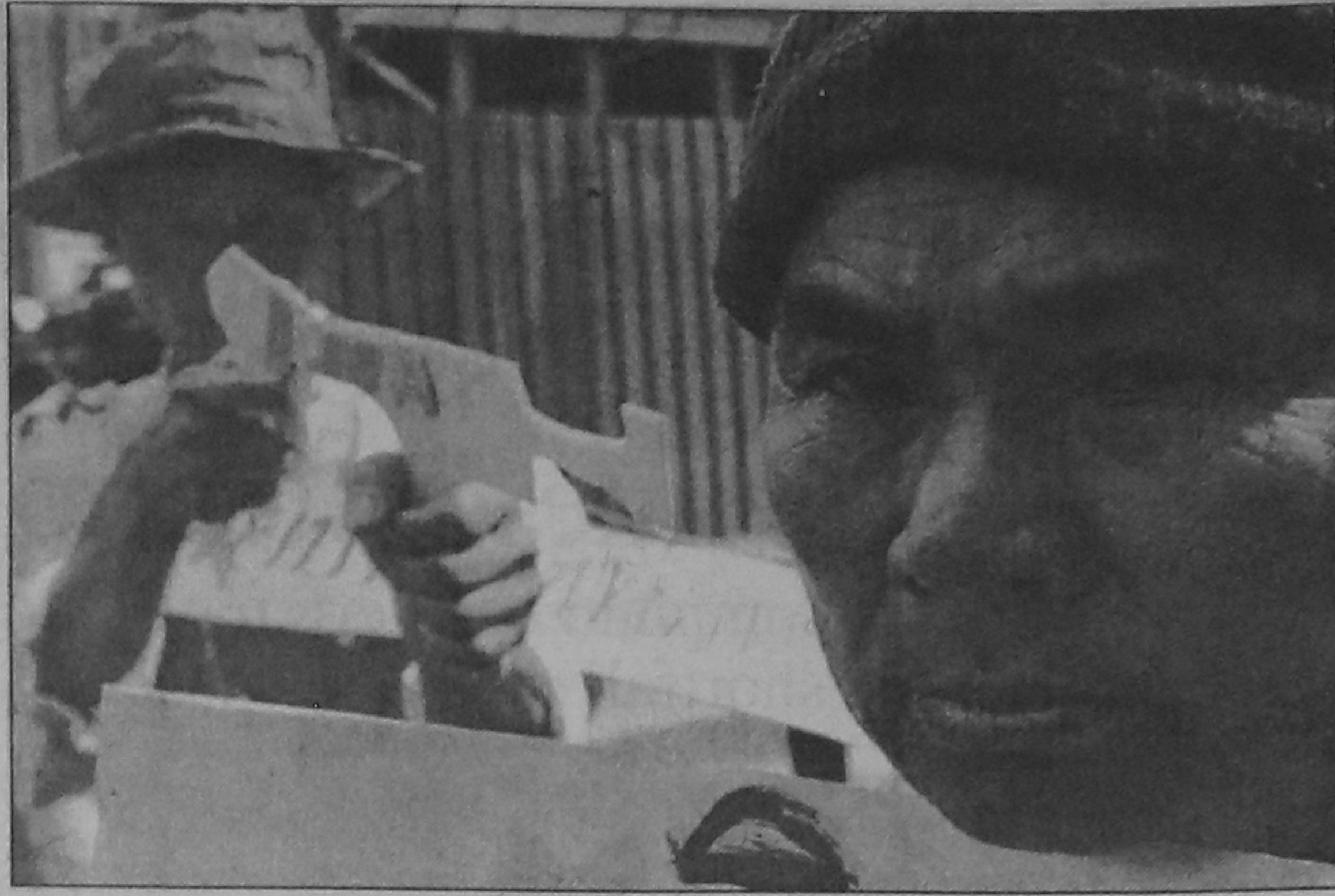
Negotiators see hope for deal at confce

BANGKOK, Feb 17: Western countries, keen to protect negotiating positions in WTO talks, are balking at offering significant concessions to developing states at a major UN conference...

Nations which attach the highest importance to the issue of agricultural subsidies will not like to have a language that could be misconstrued once they start negotiations within the WTO...

Although there has been a reasonable degree of progress in the discussions, industrialised nations are pushing for a 'loose formulation' using the term 'essentially all products' which would tend to limit the number of products to be covered by the declaration...

Britain and Denmark have said at the conference they also favour full market access. Non-government groups attending the UNCTAD meeting said the United States is fighting to remove any reference to 'quota-free' market access from the draft plan of action...



Anti-globalisation protesters act out a scene showing Thai farmers being killed by capitalists paid by international institutions to take over their land yesterday in front of the venue of the 10th UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

Thailand wants Gulf states at ASEAN meet as observer

BANGKOK, Feb 17: Thailand will invite Gulf States to attend a Southeast Asian foreign ministers' meeting to promote business and trade. Thailand's foreign ministry spokesman said Thursday, says AP.

Moody's likely to downgrade Japan gov't bonds

TOKYO, Feb 17: Moody's Investors Service Inc. said Thursday it may downgrade Japan's yen-denominated government bond rating, on concern that growing debt could harm the nation's economic recovery...

US energy secy to reason with OPEC over prices

Oil holds firm near 9-yr high

WASHINGTON, Feb 17: US Energy Secretary Bill Richardson said yesterday he would try to 'reason' with leading oil-producing countries in the next few days in hopes they would bring down oil prices...

Oil output by more than 2.1 million barrels a day and maintain that level of production at least until March 31, 2000. Tightening supply sent oil prices up after they had hit a slump that bottomed at 10 dollars a barrel in December 1998.

Oil prices were supported by a surprise 379 million barrel decline in gasoline inventories revealed in weekly figures from the American Petroleum Institute. President Bill Clinton said Wednesday he would immediately release some \$125 million in funds to help poor families pay their heating oil bills...

Fault for Asian crisis lies with countries: UN

BANGKOK, Feb 17: After nearly three years of looking for the causes of the Asian crisis, an important verdict came in Thursday - the countries themselves are fundamentally to blame, says AP.

Once your regulatory system falters, there is no limit to the damage that international finance can play on the economy. The task unfortunately falls on the countries themselves, to regulate risk and control international capital flows, he said.

Financial crises during the 1990s have erupted on average about twice a year, Akyuz said, including troubles in the United States during the savings-and-loan crisis, as well as problems in Mexico, Sweden, Brazil and Russia.

The review is prompted by structural problems in Japan's economy that have resulted in a level of public sector debt that will soon be the highest, relative to GDP, among the advanced industrial economies, Moody's said.

Richardson said he would talk to the oil-producing nations about the importance of having more supply of oil on the market, of not getting into a situation where markets are affected by individual actions.

Richardson's appeal may fall on receptive ears in Mexico, which is concerned by the current level of oil prices and may consider raising its production to alleviate the price crunch, according to diplomats and industry analysts.

Stable oil prices were needed to help keep the US economy strong, Clinton said, adding that he would not rule out tapping the nation's emergency stockpile toward that end.

But the most dramatic downturn was the one that struck the world's fastest-growing region, East Asia, in mid-1997 when Thailand was forced to devalue its currency, the baht, after draining its foreign reserves in a futile attempt to stop speculators who were selling it to cash in after the price fell further.

The move strangled banks, finance companies and corporate borrowers who had taken on billions of US dollars in short-term, offshore loans - now much more expensive to repay - to feed speculative investments that had crashed.

Lack of adequate regulation over financial institutions, reckless lending by foreign banks who believed governments would bail out bad debts, corruption and inefficient investment all played a part in Asia's collapse.

UK unemployment falls to 20-yr low in January

LONDON, Feb 17: Unemployment fell last month to a 20-year low, the British government announced Wednesday, says AP.

The energy secretary said US President Bill Clinton might announce a series of new measures later Wednesday to alleviate the price burden on consumers. But he made clear the Clinton administration was unlikely to release oil from the 572 million barrel Strategic Petroleum Reserve as advocated by some economists.

Dr Mohammed Farashuddin, Bangladesh Bank Governor, distributes Incentive Awards among the bankers of Agrani Bank for their success in recovering and renewing classified loans and advances.

Under the WTO's 136 members, between 30 and 40 he unable to afford a mission in Geneva, where the WTO is based, so they can't participate. Others have only one representative, who cannot attend all meetings, even if invited.

Loan recovery push Successful Agrani Bank officials get incentive awards

Agrani Bank has taken up an extensive programme to achieve the goal of recovering and renewing classified loans, says a press release. The bank has introduced various schemes of rendering incentives and selecting the best banker at the branch and zone levels in addition to the waiver and rebate facilities for the borrowers with a view to inspiring them to pay their debts.

Microsoft lobbies US Congress to avoid split

REDMOND (Washington), Feb 17: A lobbyist for Microsoft Corp. peppered lawmakers on Capitol Hill with e-mails, pushing for a settlement in the company's federal antitrust case and lambasting the US Department of Justice for discussing the possibility of a company breakup, reports AP.

Posner, appointed as mediator by US District Judge Thomas Penfield Jackson, who is presiding over the case. Microsoft President and CEO Steve Ballmer, in an interview with The Associated Press on Wednesday, would not comment on the status of the talks, but said the e-mail was simply the company's way of keeping lawmakers informed.

Inclusion of free-trade critics makes UNCTAD talks more positive

BANGKOK, Feb 17: They battled riot police on the streets of Seattle, contributing to the breakdown of free trade talks in December, says AP. But at this week's meeting of the UN Conference on Trade and Development, free trade critics are attending most meetings and eating at the same restaurants as the official delegates.

credit for their inclusion at UNCTAD to Thai organisers and to UNCTAD Secretary-General Rubens Ricupero, who scheduled a pre-conference caucus of non-governmental organisations to solicit their views. The NGOs have been given a meeting room within the conference building and are allowed to attend most sessions and hold briefings and news conferences.

and Ricupero failed Tuesday to bridge many differences in views, the activists said they were generally pleased. 'We must credit Mr. Ricupero for working hard to include NGOs in this process,' said Walden Bello, a Philippine activist who heads the Thai-based Focus on the Global South. 'It certainly was a sincere process.'

Dr Mohammed Farashuddin, Bangladesh Bank Governor, distributes Incentive Awards among the bankers of Agrani Bank for their success in recovering and renewing classified loans and advances.

Iraq accuses UN of misusing food-for-oil fund

DUBAI, Feb 17: Iraq's trade minister said yesterday that its oil-for-food programme was being used to fund UN operations in Iraq rather than assisting people suffering under international sanctions, says Reuters. Trade Minister Mohammed Mehdi Saleh also said Hans Von Sponeck, the United Nations' top humanitarian official in Iraq, and his predecessor had both resigned in protest over US and British policy against Iraq.

Senior govt economist says China needs reform to revive FDI

BEIJING, Feb 17: China should revamp its regulations on foreign investment to help boost capital inflows as it braces for WTO entry, a senior government economist said, reports Reuters. 'Joining the WTO will certainly be favourable for foreign investment,' said Ma Yu of the Academy of International Trade Economic Cooperation, a think-tank affiliated to the Foreign Trade Ministry.

ease some of the restrictions. 'It will be very difficult if we continue to apply the examining-and-approving system on foreign investment,' he said. 'It's no longer necessary to set equity limitations on foreign investors in manufacturing industries, Ma said.

GIC profits up 24pc in '99

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 17: The Kuwait-based Gulf Investment Corp. (GIC) today announced a net profit of 120.4 million dollars in 1999, up 24 per cent on 1998, says AP. GIC chief executive officer Khalid al-Fayez said the rise came from the 'improvement in performance from all lines of business.'