

US lawmakers predict lifting of sanctions against Cuba

WASHINGTON, May 17: US lawmakers pushing to lift 40-year-old food and medicine sanctions against Cuba yesterday predicted success for the measure amid growing support from food trade groups and agribusiness, reports Reuters.

The legislation, which has already passed at the committee level in both the Senate and the House of Representatives, is popular among farm-state lawmakers because it would open up one of the last big untapped markets for American agricultural exports. It could go before the full Senate in a few days, and before the full House later in the month.

Cuba buys an estimated \$700

million worth of food annually, mostly from Canada, Europe and Latin America.

"We're finally going to break the back of these sanctions on food and medicine," Sen. Byron Dorgan, a North Dakota Democrat, told reporters. "There are times in the Senate and the House when a fundamental shift occurs, and I think that's what has occurred with this issue."

The legislation is bitterly opposed by Cuban-American groups, which have successfully defeated it in the past by countering any easing of US sanctions would benefit only President Fidel Castro. But some experts have said the recent high-

profile custody battle over Elian Gonzales, the young Cuban shipwreck survivor, may have shifted the political momentum.

In that case, the US government forcibly removed the 6-year-old boy from the home of distant relatives in Miami after they refused to comply with a court order directing the child to be reunited with his Cuban father.

The amendment would eliminate a 40-year-old ban on US sales of food and medicine to the communist-ruled nation, and bar any future American president from reimposing them except with the consent of Congress.

The measure would also apply to North Korea.

Some 38 powerful food groups and companies — ranging from the American Farm Bureau to Archer Daniels Midland Co ADM N and ConAgra Inc CAG N — said they backed the legislation.

The sanctions have done little to foster democracy in Cuba, and have deprived US growers of badly-needed sales at a time when grain and meat prices have fallen.

The Clinton administration, which eased sanctions against Iran, Libya and Sudan in recent months, has not endorsed the measure.

Indian lower house okays IT bill

Big leap towards emerging as software superpower

NEW DELHI, May 17: India's lower house of parliament passed a long-awaited information technology bill yesterday, marking a major step for the nation to build a legal framework to enable electronic commerce, reports Reuters.

It was passed one day after the government rejected a controversial proposal for a change in the bill which called for a policing of cybercafes, their visitors and the sites they visited.

Industry officials cheered the bill which is seen by India as a key step in its ambitions to become a software superpower on the strength of its army of professionals. But some saw loopholes and feared police would misuse the law.

The bill is aimed at helping digital signatures, electronic governance and trading, and

sets punishments for pornographic Internet publishing and hackers. It would allow government offices to accept electronic records and digital signatures.

"It is noteworthy that India joins the 12 select countries in the world who have cyberlaws," Devang Mehta, president of the National Association of Software and Service Companies, said in a statement.

Consultants Earnst and Young said in an analysis on the bill that its positive features included digital signatures and legal recognition of electronic records but said the bill had not considered taxation issues or credit card frauds.

The Information Technology Minister Pramod Mahajan told parliament that India aimed to have around 35 per cent of its

one billion citizens — or more people than the entire population of the United States — covered by Internet access in about three years.

India currently has less than one million Internet connections, but each subscriber is said to cover four users.

International Data Corp estimates India will have 7.5 million subscribers by 2003. Cable TV networks are estimated to aid a fast expansion of the Internet to homes.

India's software industry estimates e-commerce transactions in the country, aided by the new law, will zoom to 25 billion rupees (\$568 million) in the current 2000/01 (April-March) year from 4.5 billion rupees a year earlier.

The bill, which also changes rules related to evidence and

banking to help e-commerce, must now be passed by the upper house, but no hurdles are foreseen. It then needs a stamp of approval from the president.

In passing the bill, the lower house put behind worries linked to privacy and police harassment of Internet surfers and Web site firms.

However, concerns lingered among some deputies that the police may misuse powers given to them by the bill to search any public place and arrest without warrant anyone suspected of having committed a "cyber-crime."

"The underlying principle of Internet and e-commerce is openness," Vinod Mehta, director of the Manufacturers Association of Information Technology, said in a statement.

China aims 7.5pc GDP growth in 2000

BRASILIA, May 17: Chinese Finance Minister Xiang Huacheng pegged growth for the developing world's largest economy yesterday at 7.5 per cent of gross domestic product in 2000, compared with an expansion of 7.1 per cent last year, reports Reuters.

"It was estimated in the year 2000 GDP will be somewhere around 7.5 per cent," Xiang told the news agency through the aide of a translator during a visit to Brazil.

The forecast comes on the heels of positive GDP data for the first quarter, showing 8.1 per cent growth in the Chinese economy compared with the same period in 1999.

Xiang said earlier this month that China would spend its way to rapid growth in 2000 by pouring a record 120.5 billion yuan (\$14.56 billion) into the military and by funding massive infrastructure projects to develop its poverty-stricken interior.

But the growth will again come in part through deficit spending. Xiang's budget presented earlier in May calls for a deficit of 229.9 billion yuan (\$28 billion) compared with a shortfall of 179.7 billion yuan last year.

Xiang also said that he expected China to soon win entry into the World Trade Organisation, which he added would force Chinese companies to lower costs and diversify product lines to compete with a wave of fierce competition from abroad.

"In my personal analysis, it won't be too long for China to have entry into the WTO," he said.

European Union officials worked on Tuesday to iron out the fine print of deal that would seal its approval for China's entry to the WTO.

IMF erred in Asia but did things mostly right

First deputy MD says at seminar

WASHINGTON, May 17: The International Monetary Fund made mistakes in the world financial crisis of 1997-99, but has mostly done the right thing, a senior official said yesterday, reports Reuters.

IMF first Deputy Managing Director Stanley Fischer, speaking a week after his borrower Thailand passed its final IMF test, said the fund had adapted to the challenges posed by the crisis.

"The advice that the IMF has offered has not always been right in all of the details — fiscal policy should not have been tightened at the start of the Asian crisis — but mostly we have been on the side of the angels," Fischer told a seminar in Washington.

"We adapt and reform. We are engaged in a reform exercise now which will be given added impulse by the arrival of the new managing director."

The IMF, which loaned countries tens of billions of dollars as the crisis spread around the globe, initially urged countries to curb spending to win market confidence. But it changed tack, recommending that countries spend more to ease deep and painful recessions plaguing Asia and other regions.

The problems started in Thailand in June 1997 and spread rapidly across Asia and beyond. By 1999 five major emerging markets — Thailand, Indonesia, South Korea, Russia and Brazil — were in the IMF's intensive care unit.

But most of the patients got better almost as quickly as they got sick and the IMF last week completed its final review of Thailand's economic pro-

gramme, praising the outlook for low inflation and a stable currency.

"The authorities have begun to put in place an ambitious reform agenda that is necessary

to underpin continued strong economic performance over the medium term," Fischer said at the time. The authorities should be congratulated on this record of overall success."



Yukiko Okamoto, employee of Japan's Canon Inc., shows off the world's smallest and lightest digital still camera "IXY DIGITAL" at a Tokyo hotel on Wednesday. The company will put the new product on market from May 26 with a price of 74,800 yen (690 dollars). — AFP photo

Aid to Afghanistan may dry up if heavy fighting breaks out

Donors warn warring factions

ISLAMABAD, May 17: International donors to Afghanistan warned the warring factions that aid could dry up if heavy fighting breaks out, the United Nations office here announced Wednesday, reports AP.

The warning was issued in a letter sent Tuesday to both the Taliban, who rule 90 per cent of Afghanistan, and the opposition, who control the remaining 10 per cent.

"The resumption of large scale hostilities by the warring parties will jeopardize efforts to generate additional aid for Afghanistan, as well as the prospects of future rehabilitation and development assistance," the letter to the warring factions said.

The UN has found it increasingly difficult to generate international aid for Afghanistan. In the last two

years the UN has failed to get even 50 per cent of the money it requested.

In their letter, the donors say there are reports that both sides in the conflict are preparing for all-out war.

But fighting increases every year in Afghanistan as the weather warms, and the snow-clogged mountain passes open up.

This year is not expected to be an exception.

The UN recently warned the Taliban against launching fresh offensives, a warning the religious militia in neighbouring Afghanistan took exception to.

Last week Abdul Hakim Mujahid, the Taliban's representative to the United Nations, said the Taliban would not fire the first shot. He said the Taliban were ready for peace with their opponents, but they wanted a

cease fire to allow talks inside the country to begin.

According to the letter from the international donors an outbreak of fighting could threaten assistance to drought-devastated parts of southern and southwestern Afghanistan.

Two weeks ago the UN sought \$1.8 million emergency aid to cope with the devastating effects of the drought, which has killed thousands of heads of cattle and forced entire villages to relocate. The hardest hit people, say the UN, are Afghanistan's nomads or Koochis.

The Taliban authorities have been ferrying water by helicopter to some of the worst hit areas and sending trucks and helicopters to relocate people to areas where there is water.

Yet international donors were critical of money going to the war effort rather than the drought.

ASEAN touts region as good place for doing business

NEW YORK, May 17: Having recently emerged from a crushing recession, Southeast Asia is trying to convince US businesses that there has never been a better time to invest in the region, reports AP.

On Tuesday, officials from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations briefed US business representatives in New York on Asia's economic progress since the 1997-98 financial crisis.

By doing so, the 10-nation association hopes to woo US companies with assurances that reforms forced on them by the Asian financial meltdown have helped turned the region around.

"Southeast Asian societies are very open to the world," said George Yeo, Singapore's trade and industry minister. "Singapore is committed to making it as hassle-free as possible for businesses to set up shop."

Among the reforms that the

association, known as ASEAN, is touting: More countries are allowing foreign ownership of businesses.

For example, Brunei has begun to allow 100 per cent foreign ownership in high-tech manufacturing and export-oriented industries. In the Philippines, retailing is no longer the exclusive domain of businesses owned by Filipinos. A new law allows large foreign retailers to open stores.

The biggest regional step is the establishment of a free-trade area that will reduce tariffs to a maximum of 5 per cent for most products by 2002 in six nations, said Rodolfo Severino, ASEAN's secretary-general.

The ultimate goal is to make the region a zero-tariff trade area by 2010 for other six founding members — Brunei, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines and Singapore, he said. The remaining members — Laos, Vietnam,

Myanmar and Cambodia — would join by 2015.

Despite progress in regional cooperation, it remains to be seen whether ASEAN can create an economic force resembling the European Union.

Unlike European stock markets, Asian bourses have no immediate plans to link up. But there have been discussions about creating a common currency like the euro, which is used by 11 European nations.

Graft maintains its grip on Vietnam

HANOI, May 17: A major anti-graft campaign in Vietnam has borne little fruit at the halfway mark, and is unlikely to have much lasting impact in a country where the ruling Communist Party is accountable only to itself, reports Reuters.

Analysts said that midway through the two-year effort, corrupt officials remained a dark stain on Vietnam's economic prospects and a possible trigger for social unrest.

Despite being regularly tagged one of Asia's most corrupt nations, no senior government official or party cadre has been publicly accused of graft, charged or stripped of Communist Party membership under the campaign, diplomats said.

Several senior officials have been sacked from their posts or rebuked for "mismanagement," although one quickly bounced back. Former deputy Prime Minister Ngo Xuan Loc, dismissed late last year, now advises the premier on key state projects.

One political analyst said key obstacles to stamping out graft were party control over the press and the judiciary, along with the importance placed on collegial personal ties among top leaders that hindered anyone going for the jugular.

"I would not simply dismiss the campaign because at least it shows many leaders are concerned about the problems posed by graft and that they understand its implications for good governance," the Hanoi-based analyst said.

"At the same time, the approach has been into exhort (for less corruption) and give out mild rebukes. That begs the question of how effective it really can be where the only rule is that of the party."

Notice Inviting Tender of RHD

Sealed tender in Bangladesh Form No. 2911 hereby invited.

1. Tender notice no : 21-EE/LRD/1999-2000.
2. Name of work : Construction of 1st floor (part) of Sarak Bhaban, Lalmonirhat under Road Division, Lalmonirhat during the year 1999-2000.
3. Estimated cost : Tk. 9,95,000/-.
4. Earnest money : Tk. 19,900/-.
5. Time allowed for completion of work : 45 (forty-five) days.
6. Name of offices : 1) Executive Engineer (RHD), Road Division, Rangpur/Bogra/Kurigram/Gaibandha/Lalmonirhat/Joypurhat/Planning Division-1, (P&D), Sarak Bhaban, Ramna, Dhaka.
2) Sub-Divisional Engineer (RHD), Road Sub-Division, Lalmonirhat.
7. Name of offices : 1) Additional Chief Engineer (RHD), Rangpur Zone.
2) Superintending Engineer (RHD), Rangpur Road Circle, Rangpur.
3) Superintending Engineer (RHD), Procurement & Monitoring Circle, Sarak Bhaban, Ramna, Dhaka.
4) Executive Engineer (RHD), Road Division, Rangpur/Bogra/Kurigram/Gaibandha/Lalmonirhat/Joypurhat.
8. Last date & time : Up to 24-05-2000 Eng/10-12-1407 Beng. (within office hours).
9. Date & time of receiving tenders : Up to 25-05-2000 Eng/11-02-1407 Beng. (at 12.30 PM).
10. Date & time for opening of tender box (tenders in sealed cover) : At 12.45 PM on 25-05-2000 Eng/11-02-1407 Beng.
11. Date & time of opening of all tenders by this office : At 12-00 Noon on 30-05-2000 Eng/16-02-1407 Beng.
12. Date & time for : At 1-00 PM on 31-05-2000 Eng/17-02-1407 Beng.
13. Eligibility of : "A to C" class general category of RHD and "D" general class of Rangpur Road Circle.
14. Head of accounts : 168 RBF.

Mohd. Jafar Ullah
Executive Engineer (RHD) (C.C.)
Road Division, Lalmonirhat.

DFP-11519-11/5
G-916



BCIC Tender Notice

বিসিআইসি'র পণ্য শিল্পায়নে জাতীয় অগ্রগতির প্রতীক

The Managing Director, Zia Fertilizer Company Limited, Ashuganj, Brahmanbaria invites sealed tender in two envelope system for procurement of M S Plate & Compressor for Air Cooler against Tender No CM/PM/118/2000 & CM/EM/103/2000. Tender schedule may be purchased on payment of Tk 400/- only from (i) ZFCL, Ashuganj, (ii) BCIC, 30-31, Dilkusha C/A, Dhaka and (iii) BCIC Branch Office, 6, Agrabad C/A, Chittagong. The tender should be dropped within 24-5-2000 up to 11:30 AM at ZFCL & BCIC Head Office and will be opened just after closing the tender. No tender document shall be sold on the date of opening.

BCIC-348-8/5/2000
DFP-11718-15/5
G-927

Khairul Anam
General Manager
(Commercial)
for Managing Director.



ইনোকেমেন্ট কর্পোরেশন অব বাংলাদেশ

প্রধান কার্যালয়
৮, বাজউক এ্যাভিনিউ, ঢাকা

দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি

বিষয় : কম্পিউটার কন্ট্রিনিউয়েশন শীট সরবরাহ প্রসঙ্গে

ইনোকেমেন্ট কর্পোরেশন অব বাংলাদেশ-এর জন্যে দরপত্র তফসিলে বর্ণিত ৯.৫ ও ১১ আকারের কম্পিউটার কন্ট্রিনিউয়েশন শীট সরবরাহ করার জন্যে নিম্নোক্ত শর্তাবলীসহ সর্বশ্রেষ্ঠ দরপত্র তফসিলে বর্ণিত শর্তাবলী পালন সাপেক্ষ প্রকৃত সরবরাহকারী প্রতিষ্ঠানের নিকট হতে নিজস্ব লেটারহেড প্যাডে সীলমোহরকৃত দরপত্র আবেদন করা যাবেঃ

শর্তাবলীঃ
(০১) দরপত্র আগামী ২৫ মে, ২০০০ তারিখ বেলা ১১.৩০ ঘটিকার মধ্যে কর্পোরেশনের সংস্থাপন বিভাগে রক্ষিত টেন্ডার বাস্তবায়ন করে হবে এবং এ দিনই বেলা ১১.৪৫ মিনিটে দরদাতাদের সম্মুখে যদি কেহ উপস্থিত থাকেন, দরপত্র খোলা হবে;

(০২) দরপত্রের সাথে উক্ত দরপত্র ৫% পরিমাণ অর্থ আদেষ্টিমান হিসাবে ইনোকেমেন্ট কর্পোরেশন অব বাংলাদেশ-এর অনুকূলে যে কোন তফসিলি ব্যাংকের পেমেন্টের মাধ্যমে জমা দিতে হবে;

(০৩) অফিস চলাকালে কর্পোরেশনের প্রধান কার্যালয়ের সংস্থাপন বিভাগ হতে ২০০.০০ টাকা নগদ পরিশোধপূর্বক (অফিসের মাধ্যমে) দরপত্র তফসিলি ক্রয় করতে হবে। দরপত্র তফসিলি ক্রয় ব্যতীত কোন প্রতিষ্ঠানের দরপত্র গ্রহণ করা হবে না;

(০৪) কোন কারণ প্রদর্শন ব্যতীত কোন বা সকল দরপত্র গ্রহণ বা বাতিল করার ক্ষমতা কর্তৃপক্ষ সার্বক্ষণিক করণ।

তারিখ : ১৫ মে, ২০০০ইং
জিডি-৪৬৩

কফিল উদ্দিন আহমদ চৌধুরী
সহকারী মহাব্যবস্থাপক
সংস্থাপন বিভাগ

OPEC back in spotlight as oil hits heights

LONDON, May 17: Oil prices are on the up again, putting the spotlight back on OPEC in the month before the cartel meets to review output policy, reports Reuters.

Speculators betting that supplies of gasoline this summer in the United States will prove tight have lifted oil again after OPEC successfully engineered a decline in prices by easing export curbs at the end of March.

Meanwhile, demand appears to be climbing again in the industrialised nations that drew down inventories when prices were running at nine-year highs earlier this year.

"The US gasoline market is very robust. Refiners are happy to pay up for crude because profit margins are strong," said Gary Ross of Petroleum Industry Research Associates in New York.

"And we've seen a lot of pent-up demand coming through to fill up primary stocks in the countries that drew down secondary and tertiary stocks earlier this year."

Oil now back at \$30 a barrel in the United States had triggered a renewed bout of diplomatic pressure from Washington on its Middle East and Latin American allies in OPEC.

Already US Energy Secretary Bill Richardson says the cartel needs to consider a further supply increase when it meets in June.

Richardson is keen to dampen price increases at the pump in an election year in a country which consumes 40 per cent of world gasoline supplies, and because of low tax, in used to the lowest retail petrol prices in the West.

Oil ministers look much less likely to buckle under US pressure than in March, when most in OPEC already favoured a relaxation of the export curbs

which had carried US crude to \$34 a barrel.

"This is the opinion of the American energy secretary but the figures and statistics we looked at the last meeting in Mexico of the Mexican and Venezuelan energy ministers showed us that at the current time there is no reason to increase production," said Saudi Oil Minister Ali Naimi on Tuesday.

Naimi left the door ajar for a change of mind if circumstances change.

"Given the consultations I have had, I have not seen an inclination to increase production," said Venezuelan Oil Minister Ali Rodriguez, the current president of OPEC.

Meanwhile, world oil prices rose further yesterday, buoyed by a firm US gasoline market and dwindling prospects of any imminent increase in supplies from the powerful OPEC producers' group.

North Sea benchmark Brent Blend futures for July delivery rallied to an intraday peak of \$28.41 per barrel before settling back at \$28.10, a gain of 21 cents.

Already bullish oil prices received an additional boost in early dealings from Saudi Arabian comments that there was no immediate need to increase supplies to the market.

The kingdom is the world's biggest supplier of crude oil and the most influential member of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

Saudi Oil Minister Ali Naimi said most recent statistics showed there was no need for the cartel to pump more oil.

His comments mirror those of several other OPEC ministers in recent days, although they have been at pains to emphasise no decision will be made until OPEC convenes in Vienna on June 21.

Road Division, Gaibandha Notice Inviting Tender of RHD

Sealed tenders in Bangladesh Form No 2911 are hereby invited.

01. Tender Notice No : 19-EE/GRD/1999-2000.
02. Name of work : Construction of flexible pavement at 2nd (p) & 3rd (p) km of Jumarbari-Sonatala via Melandha Ghat Road under Gaibandha Road Division, during the year 1999-2000.
03. Estimated cost : Tk. 9,99,980/-
04. Earnest money : Tk. 20,000/-
05. Time allowed for completion of work : 35 (thirty-five) days.
06. Eligibility of contractor : "A" to "D" class contractor under general category of RHD.
07. Name of offices where tender documents will be available for sale : 1. Executive Engineer (RHD), Road Division, Rangpur/Bogra/Kurigram/Joypurhat/Lalmonirhat/Gaibandha/Planning Division (P&D), Sarak Bhaban, Ramna, Dhaka.
2. Sub-Divisional Engineer (RHD), Road Sub-Division, Gaibandha/Palashabari.
08. Name of offices where tender will be received : 1. Addl Chief Engineer (RHD), Rangpur Zone, Rangpur.
2. Superintending Engineer (RHD), Rangpur Road Circle, Rangpur/Monitoring & Evaluation Circle, Sarak Bhaban, Ramna, Dhaka.
3. Executive Engineer (RHD), Road Division, Rangpur/Bogra/Kurigram/Joypurhat/Lalmonirhat/Gaibandha.
09. Last date of selling tender : Up to 24.05.2000 during office hours.
10. Last date & time for receiving tender : On 25.05.2000 at 12.30 PM.
11. Date & time for opening of tender box : On 25.05.2000 at 12.45 PM.
12. Date & time of opening of all tender by this office : On 29.05.2000 at 11.30 AM.
13. Date & time for lottery (if required) : On 31.05.2000 at 11.30 AM.
14. Head of A/C : 266 dev.

N.B: 1. The work order will be given subject to the availability of the allocation. 2. The estimated expenditure may be more or less subject to approval of estimate.
DFP-11799-15/5
G-925
Executive Engineer (RHD)
Road Division, Gaibandha