

Pak police club merchants

Protest against govt plan to collect more taxes

MULTAN, Pakistan, July 2: Pakistani police beat merchants with clubs Sunday to disperse a crowd protesting against a plan to collect more taxes from businesses, police and witnesses said. At least 50 protesters were arrested, says AP.

Shouting slogans against the government's attempts to document business transactions, several hundred merchants marched through the dusty streets in the central city of Multan, located about 500 kilometres (300 miles) south of the capital, Islamabad.

At least six people were injured in the scuffle with the police, doctors said. Several others sustained minor injuries, witnesses said.

Protesters blocked roads and were burning tires. Streets were

littered with bricks and shrouded in a black smoke.

While some in the crowd threw stones at the police, protesters in the central Gold Market shouted: "We won't fill out the survey forms!" and "Down with the military rulers!"

Police in riot gear arrested at least 50 people, fired tear gas and beat protesters with iron-tipped sticks in an effort to disperse the crowd, said Mushatq Bargat, a senior police official.

"Rallies are banned in Multan, and we won't allow them to break the law," he said.

The 9-month-old military-led government, which seized power in a bloodless coup on Oct. 12, is conducting a nationwide tax survey to boost the country's revenues and broaden the tax base.

Thousands of tax officials, accompanied by soldiers, have been going from door-to-door in Pakistan's 13 major cities since May 27 distributing tax survey forms seeking information about businesses and private residential properties.

The move triggered violent protests and a series of countrywide strikes by merchants and store owners earlier this month. The protest ended in most major cities after the government reached an agreement with merchants.

But merchants in Multan have refused to accept the agreement, saying corrupt tax officials would misuse the information collected in the tax survey forms.

In Pakistan, where corruption is endemic, tax officials are often accused of graft and

penalising those who refuse to pay bribes.

The government, trying to ease merchants' concerns, fired more than 1,000 tax officials accused of corruption.

Some merchants, however, say the move is not enough and demand sweeping reforms in tax laws and the tax department.

The government, which has pledged to go ahead with tax survey, says it is vital for reviving the country's ailing economy.

About 1.2 million people are taxpayers in Pakistan, out of a population of 140 million. The government calls the situation "shameful."

Successful government have tried and failed to collect additional taxes from businesses and individual taxpayers.



DCCI President Aftabul Islam visits a stall at the 3-day Philippine Trade Fair-2000, which was held at the embassy premises in Gulshan. The DCCI chief opened the fair while Filipino Ambassador Candidato B. Gutoc presided over the opening ceremony Friday. — Philippines Embassy photo

Gazipur dist power supply save Tongi comes under REB

The power supply system in the entire area of Gazipur district, except Tongi pourasava, has been brought under the Rural Electrification Board (REB), reports UNB.

Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (DESA) has already handed over 482-km transmission lines and 35,000 subscribers of the area to REB, said a press release yesterday.

An agreement to this effect was signed recently between DESA and REB. Under the new arrangement, 25,000 more lines will be provided for the area by the next one year.

New REB chairman takes charge

Mesbah Uddin Ahmed joined as the Chairman of the Rural Electrification Board (REB) on Wednesday, a press release said yesterday, reports BSS.

Mesbah, who was the Additional Secretary in the Ministry of Establishment, took over the charge as the 7th Chairman of REB. He replaced Brig M A Malek.

Prior to joining his new assignment, he served as Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Textiles and was the Chief Electrical advisor of the Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources.

Mesbah obtained his Electrical Engineering degree from the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) in 1969. His release added.

White-dominated S African chamber okays merger with black counterpart

JOHANNESBURG, July 2: The chamber of commerce grouping most of South Africa's black enterprises has approved a merger with its mostly-white counterpart, marking a symbolic step forward in taking race out of the country's business world, says AFP.

The National African Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NAFCOC) meeting in Johannesburg yesterday approved by a large majority the principle of merging with the South African Chamber of Business (SACOB) which had given the go-ahead 10 days earlier.

This obviously is intended to close the gap between the very rich and very poor (two nations in one South Africa), NAFCOC acting president Simon Mathysen told journalists referring to a speech by president Thabo Mbeki who deplored the coexistence of two nations, one black and poor, the other white and rich.

In his May speech Mbeki had admonished the black business world for being unable to form itself into a strong organisation. NAFCOC and SACOB stressed that they had government backing for their initiative.

When SACOB approved the principle of a merger on June 20 its president Mervyn King said it would be "historic as it breaks the divide between ethnic differences in South Africa and decentralises business relationships."

The unification of SACOB and NAFCOC amalgamates the two largest chamber federations in South Africa, representing vast business interests," he said, calling for smaller federations to join in.

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Filipino central bank tightens forex rules

MANILA, July 2: The Philippine central bank has issued a new circular tightening rules on US dollar trading by bank's foreign exchange subsidiaries and affiliates, says Reuters.

The circular, dated June 20 and obtained by Reuters on Thursday, said banks with foreign operations will have to make available on a daily basis details of all their foreign exchange transactions.

The transactions to be listed will cover all those starting from May 2, 2000, it said.

US, Vietnam resume trade talks amid cautious optimism today

HANOI, July 2: Vietnam and the United States resume trade talks tomorrow amid cautious optimism from both sides that a landmark deal could finally be signed, reports Reuters.

But after years of haggling between the former foes on the market-opening pact, nobody will be staking their life savings on the outcome, least of all those in the business community.

"I am moderately optimistic," Le Dang Doanh, director of Vietnam's Central Institute for Economic Management, a state think-tank, and an adviser to premier Phan Van Khai, told Reuters.

"It could lead to a signing of a trade agreement if both sides are flexible. I am more optimistic than ever before."

Doanh said he understood Vietnam's Trade Minister Vu Khoan had been given "carte blanche" to sign an agreement in Washington with US Trade Representative Shaartene Barshefsky if the talks, due to start at working level on Monday, went well.

One Friday, US Ambassador to Vietnam Pete Peterson said he was "somewhat optimistic" the pact could be completed. But he added: "I am no longer predicting outcomes from these talks because we've had a number of disappointments in the past."

Vietnam and the United States reached agreement in principle on the comprehensive trade pact last year but Hanoi

subsequently backed away from signing the deal, arguing that provisions were unfair.

Analysts also believe the pact fell victim to fears among Vietnam's communist leadership that too much exposure to world markets could undermine party control.

Both sides have declined to detail sticking points, although Vietnam is known to have objected to a provision requiring annual renegotiation of its normal trade Relations (NTR) status.

The United States has made clear it is not willing to "negotiate," only to "clarify" points of the agreement in principle. One well-informed foreign observer said Washington was willing to take up issues not in the initial pact.

The source said Barshefsky had eased some of Hanoi's upset over NTR by saying in a May letter inviting Vu Khoan to Washington that the United States would be supportive of Hanoi's bid to join the World Trade Organisation.

Asked to forecast the talks' outcome, the foreign observer said: "If I had to put money on it, I would say it's going to go through, but it's going to be messy — both sides have a tendency to agree things, then be unhappy about the outcome."

Analysts say concluding the trade deal would give a fillip to dwindling foreign investor confidence in Vietnam.

Carl Thayer, a Vietnam expert at the Asia Pacific Centre for Security Studies in Hawaii, said Hanoi was under pressure to complete the agreement with a change of administration coming in Washington and the recent China-US trade pact.

"There is absolutely no room for slippage on Vietnam's part," he said adding that if a pact were delayed further it could mean the deal would have to be completely renegotiated.

Foreign business executives in Vietnam remain pessimistic, not least members of the American Chamber of Commerce (AMCHAM).

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JBIC executive director in city

Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) Executive Director Yoshihiko Kono arrived in Dhaka yesterday on a four-day visit to Bangladesh, says a press release.

During his visit, he will hold discussions with various agencies and NGOs including BRAC and Grameen Bank. He will also visit the Jamuna Bridge and see Grameen Bank and rural electrification programme, besides some other ventures with Japanese grant assistance.

The JBIC Executive Director will attend a workshop on improvement of Transportation and Environment in Dhaka. He is expected to leave Bangladesh on July 6.

China's steel industry to lay off 200,000 employees by 2002

BEIJING, July 2: China's steel sector is planning to lay off 200,000 employees by 2002 as part of a move to improve efficiency, state media reported today, says AFP.

The number of employees directly engaged in steel production will be reduced from more than one million to 800,000, the China Daily Business Weekly quoted sources saying in the state administration of metallurgical industry.

"China's imminent accession to the World Trade Organisation is making the task more urgent," Wu Xichun, chairman of the China Iron and Steel Association, told Business Weekly.

The government will reduce tariffs on steel imports by 2.5 per cent and remove other barriers within five years after China joins the world trade body, which is expected to happen late this year or early next year.

The staff cuts are also part of the drift away from a planned to a market economy and of reforms in money-losing state owned firms, which have been overstaffed and burdened with all the welfare needs of workers.

In a selected 69 of China's largest steel producers, employees engaged in steel production have already declined to 890,000 last year from more than 1.13 million in 1996 when the sector began restructuring.

China's largest steel maker, Shanghai-based Baoshan Iron and Steel Corp, cut its staff by 10 per cent to 30,000 in the past 10 years. The companies have seen increased efficiency.

Controlling 93 per cent of the sector's total output, the firms now have a per capita steel output of 122.8 tonnes, compared to less than 40 tonnes before 1996.

The industry plans to expand non-steel businesses to serve as a buffer from volatile steel prices.

Laid-off workers are expected to be transferred to non-steel occupations, such as machine-making, industrial automation, real estate and high-tech industries.

More than 280,000 laid-off workers have taken early retirement or were re-employed in the past three years, but about 100,000 remain jobless.

The steel sector hopes to increase the share of its annual non-steel business in relation to its total business to 30 per cent by 2002, the report quoted sources as saying.

Non-steel sales last year exceeded 50 billion yuan (six billion dollars), more than 18 per cent of the sector's total, while there are six steel enterprises with non-steel sales of more than 30 per cent.

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Japan's EPA chief calls for structural reform

TOKYO, July 2: Japan's Economic Planning Agency director-general Taichi Sakaiya today called on the government to shift its focus in economic policymaking from stimulus measures to structural reforms, says AFP.

"We should put our emphasis on structural reforms rather than on economic measures," Sakaiya said in a television debate on Japan Broadcasting Corp (NHK).

Realising the economy's stronger recovery would continue to be the government's priority, but it was time for it to start moving away from spending measures aimed at boosting demand, he said.

"We have to focus on four areas including the information technology industry, an ageing society, environmental protection and urban development," he said.

"We need to put our weight behind those areas which can strengthen Japan's productivity and competitiveness in the future."

Public works spending, which has been counted on as a conventional stimulus measure, "no longer responds to changes of the times," Sakaiya said, but he did not refer to a specific timing for Japan's fiscal reform.

"The state of the economy has shown strong improvement, but there are still many concerns," he said, citing prospects of the US economy and domestic consumption as main risk factors.

The Japanese economy recovered from two straight years of contraction and grew 0.5 per cent in the fiscal year up to last March and the government is targeting 1.0 per cent growth in the year to March 2001.

Japan's debt has meanwhile mounted close to 120 per cent of annual gross domestic product, but the government has refused to rein in spending and raise taxes for fear of throttling the economic recovery.

Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori said during his election campaign in June the government would tighten fiscal policy after achieving two per cent economic growth in the next fiscal year to March 2002.



A trainee receives his certificate from Motinuddin Ahmed, Executive Vice President of Al-Arafah Islami Bank Ltd, at the concluding session of the 7th computer training course at the bank's training institute Thursday. M A Motin, Vice-President and course director, Aminul Islam Bueyan, chief course co-ordinator and Masudul Bari, senior officer were also present on the occasion. — Al Arafah Bank photo

Weekly Currency Roundup Asian units close mixed

HONG KONG, July 2: The yen fell slightly over the week as concerns about Japanese state finances outweighed buying on speculation on zero interest rates could end. Other currencies in the Asia-Pacific region enjoyed mixed fortunes, says AFP.

Japanese yen: The yen drifted lower against the dollar as investors bought the currency on speculation of an end to zero interest rates in Japan, against selling pressures due to fears state finances will worsen, dealers said.

It stood at 105.38 to the dollar late Friday, down from 104.25 to the dollar a week earlier.

But the yen was seen as unlikely to slide further as investors awaited the Bank of Japan's "Tankan" survey of corporate confidence, due out on Tuesday and expected to show an improving mood among businesses, dealers said.

The yen levelled off early in the week after the three-party ruling coalition returned to power following weekend elections, with its majority vastly reduced.

But it lost ground as British credit appraiser Fitch IBCA prepared to announce on Thursday it was downgrading Japan's long-term local currency rating over concerns about the government's soaring levels of borrowing.

The yen stood at 105.66 to the dollar late Wednesday but

sprang back to 104.51 to the dollar a day later as investors speculated on interest rates.

Australian dollar: The Australian dollar was at 59.70 US cents at the close of trading Friday, a marginal change from the figure of 59.66 cents a week before.

Having traded at more than 60 US cents for most of the week it plunged nearly half a cent when the Australian Bureau of Statistics released figures showing a 1.553 billion dollar (916 million US) May deficit, up from 572 million dollars in April.

On the Reserve Bank's trade-weighted index the Australian dollar was at 53.3 points, from 53.0 previously.

New Zealand dollar: The New Zealand dollar closed on Friday worth 46.76 US cents, down from 46.98 US cents the previous week.

Singapore dollar: The Singapore dollar rose to 1.7292 against the US dollar on Friday, from 1.7323 a week ago.

Hong Kong dollar: The Hong Kong dollar was trading at 7.795-7.796 to the greenback Friday, compared to the previous week's 7.7902-7.7912.

Indonesian rupiah: The rupiah continued its downward slide despite government intervention, to close at 8.735 to the dollar Friday compared to last Friday's close of 8.695. Dealers said they expected the currency to stay around the 8,700 level

until August, when President Abdurrahman Wahid reports to the People's Consultative Assembly.

Philippine peso: The peso fell to 45.23 pesos to the dollar on Friday from 42.845 to the greenback on June 23.

South Korean won: The won strengthened to 1,114.90 won per dollar from 1,119.80 won a week ago as trade gains increased.

Dealers said the won would move within a limited range in the coming week.

Taiwan dollar: The Taiwan dollar slipped 0.1 per cent against the greenback over the week to finish at 30.794 Friday, on outflow of foreign funds amid a bearish stock market, dealers said.

The currency stood at 30.797 Monday and rose to 30.790 Tuesday. It then fell to 30.810 Wednesday but climbed slightly to 30.808 Thursday.

Thai baht: The baht fell against the dollar this week, as investors opted to hold dollars amidst political uncertainty in Thailand and weakness in several regional currencies, dealers said.

The strong demand for dollar by large local corporations paying off mid-year dollar-denominated debts also drove the baht down, they said.

The baht closed Friday at 39.20-23, compared to the previous week's close of 39.04-09.

Oil pushing Filipino inflation up

MANILA, July 2: Philippine annual inflation in June was probably slightly higher than in May due to the effects of a petroleum price hike and an uptake in food prices, economists said, reports Reuters.

A Reuters poll of 10 economists indicated annual inflation in June will likely come in at 4.24 per cent, a slight rise from May's 4.1 per cent but lower than the year-ago 5.7 per cent.

The government has forecast June inflation at 4.2 to 4.3 per cent. June inflation is due to be announced on July 5.

The moderate trend continued. Everyone feels pressure from global oil prices climbing higher but inflation remains under control," said David Cohen, chief macroeconomic forecaster at Standard & Poor's/MMS.

Oil refiners raised pump prices by an average of 40 centavos per litre in early June, a move which economists said had only partially affected overall consumer prices.

"In June and for that matter in July, the increase of fuel prices would continue to another round of increased inflation," said Ronnie Balagot, economist at All Asia Capital Trust Corp.

On Friday, oil companies announced another increase of 55 centavos per litre, or between 3.5 and five per cent, and economists said the two price hikes would affect overall inflation more significantly in July.

Although consumer prices are expected to be benign for the rest of the year, a slight rise is likely because agricultural production has been affected by the upsurge in fighting between government and Islamic rebels in parts of the southern Mindanao region, analysts said.

Grain traders previously said clashes between the military and Moslem rebels in the agriculture-rich Mindanao region have aggravated the shortfalls in the local production of corn and rice, triggering more imports.

The four provinces affected by fighting in Mindanao — Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao, North Cotabato and South Cotabato — account for 10 per cent of the country's total annual rice output and one-third of corn production.

"As a result of this we're really looking at a shortage in supply also, or an increase in prices primarily due to supply shortage," Balagot said.

Exchange Rates

American Express Bank Ltd foreign exchange rates (indicative) against the Taka to major currencies.					
Currency	Selling TT & OD	Selling BC	Buying TT Clean	Buying OD Sight Export Bill	Buying OD Transfer
US Dollar	51.2500	51.2800	50.8500	50.6970	50.6250
Pound Stg	78.2793	78.3251	76.6004	76.3700	76.2515
Deuts mark	25.3862	25.4010	24.9650	24.3216	24.2871
Swiss Franc	31.5793	31.5978	30.9325	30.8395	30.7967
Japanese Yen	0.4884	0.4887	0.4753	0.4739	0.4732
Dutch Guilder	22.5306	22.5438	21.6510	21.5859	21.5552
Danish Krona	6.5934	6.5973	6.4553	6.4358	6.4267
Australian \$	31.1088	31.1270	29.8235	29.7338	29.6915
Belgian franc	1.2008	1.2015	1.1828	1.1792	1.1775
Canadian \$	34.9925	35.0130	33.9997	33.8974	33.8493
French Franc	7.5682	7.5737	7.2737	7.2518	7.2415
Hong Kong \$	6.5870	6.5906	6.5103	6.4907	6.4815
Italian Lira	0.0256	0.0257	0.0246	0.0246	0.0245
Singapore \$	30.0322	30.0498	29.0987	29.0112	28.9700
Euro	49.6510	49.6601	47.7126	47.5690	47.5014
Saudi Riyal	13.7021	13.7101	13.6218	13.4811	13.4819

Bill buying rates					
TT Doc	30 Days	60 Days	90 Days	120 Days	180 Days
50.7512	50.4263	50.0025	49.5788	49.1550	48.3075

US dollar London Interbank Offered Rate (LIBOR)							
Buying (\$)	Selling (\$)	Curren cy	1 Month	3 Months	6 Months	9 Months	12 Months
50.6250	51.2500	USD	6.64188	6.76938	7.000	7.0800	7.18000
76.2615	78.2793	GBP	6.07031	6.22484	6.33750	6.43875	6.54047
Cash/TC	Cash/TC	EURO	4.41938	4.54875	4.78000	4.90000	5.03888

Exchange rates of some Asian currencies against US dollars					
Indian Rupee	Pak Rupee	Thai Baht	Malaysian Ringgit	Indonesian Rupiah	Korean Won
4.655/44.666	52.23/52.25	39.17/39.22	3.7999/3.8001	8745/8775	1114.90/1115.15

Amex notes on Sunday's market

Interbank USD/BDT market was moderately active on Sunday due to weekend in the international market. Demand for US dollar was moderate with steady flow of supply. Average USD/BDT rate mostly ranged between 51.1750 and 51.800 level. Interbank call money market was flooded with surplus liquidity which forced the call rates to range between 5.25 and 5.50 per cent.

The yen trailed the euro and dollar in thin and choppy trade on Friday after stronger than anticipated European and US economic data took the spotlight off Japan's prospects. The euro was the day's biggest winner, hitting 1-1/2 week highs against the US and Japanese currencies amid speculation that local interest rates may need to rise more — just as America's tightening cycle may be nearing its peak. But surprisingly strong regional US manufacturing data showed the US economy still packs a punch, helping the dollar erase its losses against the euro and move sharply higher against the yen.

The Japanese currency, meanwhile, suffered as US traders scrambled to square positions in thin trade ahead of a virtual four-day weekend and next Tuesday's release of the Bank of Japan's "tankan" business sentiment survey. Many US banks said they would have only a few people at work next Monday, a day before the US Independence Day holiday.

Sterling suffered a setback on Friday, undermined by steep losses it suffered against a generally buoyant euro amid expectations the European Central Bank would maintain its tightening monetary stance. While dollar also edged ground to the euro, its losses were outpaced by sterling and the pound fell more than half a cent from three-week peaks.

In New York on Friday, the majors closed against US \$ at 105.94/105.98 JPY, 1.6329/1.6339 CHF, Euro at \$ 0.9533/0.9538 and GBP at \$ 1.5164/1.5174.

Shipping Intelligence

Chittagong Port									
Berth position and performance of vessels as on 2.7.2000									
Berth No	Name of vessels	Cargo	L port call	Local agent	Date of arrival	Lea ving			
J/1	Banglar Doot	Rice(P)	Kara	BSC	8/6	3/7			
J/2	Altax	Rice(P)	Salg	Cindy	10/6	7/7			
J/3	Apex-SS	Sugar(G)	Kous	Litmond	12/6	3/7			
J/4	Bhadratendu/E/L	E/L	Mong	SSLL	29/8	4/7			
J/5	Egaso Fortune	GI (S Asia)	Const	BSL	14/6	2/7			
J/6	Esco Virgo	GI(Copra)	Sing	Prog	8/6	2/7			
J/7	Joynin-L	Wheat(P)	JEDD	OWSL	18/5	14/7			
J/8	Xpress								
J/9	Banglar Maya (Cont)	Cont	Sing	RSL	18/6	4/7			
J/10	Fua Kavenga	GI(Copra)	Sing	Aleas	25/6	2/7			
J/11	OSG Argosy	Cont	Col	Everest	17/6	6/7			
J/12	Norbulk Oak	C Clink	Pada	NWSL	8/6	3/7			
J/13	Banglar Robi	Cont	Sing	BSC	27/6	3/7			
CCT/1	Eagle Sky	Cont	Sing	NOL	18/6	-			
CCT/2	Banga Biraj	Cont	Sing	BD Ship	27/6	4/7			
CCT/3	Da Fu	Cont	Col	RSL	17/6	3/7			
RM/14	Rimbun	C Clink	Sing	PSAL	26/6	4/7			
RM/15	Lestari Utama	Cement	Indo	ANCL	21/6	7/7			
CJ	Al Silams	C Clink	Krabi	RML	28/6	6/7			
RM/3	Patty Ann	CDSO	Haki	Rainbow	R/A	3/7			
RM/4	Hua Yun-4	CPO/BD	Sand	Sealift	29/6	-			
RM/5	Stavenger Pride	HSD/MS	Sing	Atlantic	16/6	3/7			
RM/6	Poti	HSD/P-1	Baha	Atlantic	12/6	-			
DD	Banglar Jyoti	Repair	-	BSC	R/A	8/7			