

G7 to warn OPEC over prices

Finance ministers meet in Prague next weekend

LONDON, Sept 17: Finance Ministers from the Group of Seven industrial nations will warn the oil exporters' cartel OPEC about the dangers of high oil prices, a British newspaper said today, reports AFP.

The Sunday Times newspaper quoted sources in Britain's Treasury as saying the warning will be issued when G7 leaders meet in the Czech capital, Prague, next weekend.

Chancellor Gordon Brown will push his fellow G7 finance ministers to send a tough message to oil producing nations at the meeting, according to the Sunday Times.

The newspaper added that the warning may also include a threat by the United States to release some of its strategic petroleum reserve onto the market to drive down prices.

The oil price reached a 10-year high of 36 dollars per barrel in New York on Friday.

Surging prices at the petrol pumps have provoked angry

protests across Europe over the past week.

In Britain, hauliers and farmers prevented tankers from leaving oil refineries and depots, causing petrol stations to run dry.

Truckers in Belgium have blocked roads in Brussels, Ghent and Antwerp, while there have been similar protests in Norway, Sweden and Germany.

Protesters want their governments to cut fuel tax, but most finance ministers have stood their ground and instead blamed OPEC for the high prices.

OPEC last week agreed to release an extra 800,000 barrels of crude a day onto the market to calm the oil markets, but this has so far failed to check prices.

Meanwhile Reuters said today it was surprised by the rapid spread of the fuel price protests which paralysed Britain, but noted the impact on its revenue or profits would be minimal.

"It's had a very small impact in

terms of profit, because of course we make a very small proportion of our profit in the UK," Sir John Browne, BP's group chief executive told Reuters at a news conference in Sydney.

"It's had a very big impact in terms of us having to help manage the situation forward, making sure we get deliveries out as fast as possible. I think BP was the first company to reach maximum capacity again after the protesters had disbanded," he said.

BP said yesterday around half its 1,500 petrol stations in Britain were operating after the week-long series of blockades at oil depots and refineries which saw filling stations run dry.

The crisis hit services across Britain. Supermarkets limited food sales, over 130 schools in England shut down and health services were put on red alert as the sick struggled to get to and from hospitals.

"This is to do with emotion and belief, and that's a very much a political issue. It's the leadership of a nation not so much the leadership of a company," Browne said.

BP was talking to the British government about taxes on fuel and securing petrol supplies, said Browne, who noted the strength of the popular protest should be taken into consideration.

"The UN Development Programme (UNDP) has suffered heavy cuts in donor contributions, its seeking broader political support for its new policy objectives," says IPS.

UNDP Administrator Maark Malloch Brown blames the decline in resources primarily on the lack of "real political support" for the work of the organisation over the last few years. He told IPS.

Last week, the UNDP hosted its first ever, one-day ministerial meeting, described as an "interactive discussion" between donors and recipients.

The meeting was held at a time when UNDP's core resources have plummeted from about 1.2 billion dollars in 1992 to a low of 680 million dollars in 2000. The proposed funding for 2000 represents a 120-million-dollar shortfall from the targets set by governments 12 months earlier.

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The shortfall in contributions is also partly blamed on the

strength of the US dollar. Since European donors make pledges in their national currencies, their contributions have declined in terms of the US dollar, the currency used in the UN system.

According to UNDP figures, the organisation lost about 60 million dollars last year as a result of the depreciation of national currencies against the US dollar.

In a new report titled 'Rebuilding Support for UN Development Cooperation,' UNDP points out that in 30 countries, financial constraints have become so severe that project approval authority has been suspended altogether.

"A large number of country offices will not be in a position to finance new initiatives. Lack of resources will make it impossible to translate reform commitments into reality," it says.

As part of a reform process, UNDP's staff at headquarters is being reduced by about 26 per cent, with a reduction in 303 posts in New York. Of these posi-

tions, 106 are being reallocated to the field primarily to strengthen direct policy support to country operations.

According to UNDP, the allocations have been made and the process initiated. The result will be a net cut of 138 posts. Currently, there are about 1,000 staffers at headquarters and about 4,999 in field offices worldwide.

Malloch Brown admits there has been a "lot of pain" resulting from staff cuts. But these cuts are part of the ongoing reform process.

With regard to human resources, measures have been implemented to monitor performance in critical areas. A management scorecard has been designed and is ready to be implemented. Managers are also being held accountable for performance.

Malloch Brown thinks that there has been a very positive response from donors to the reforms he has already initiated.

China to develop helicopter industry

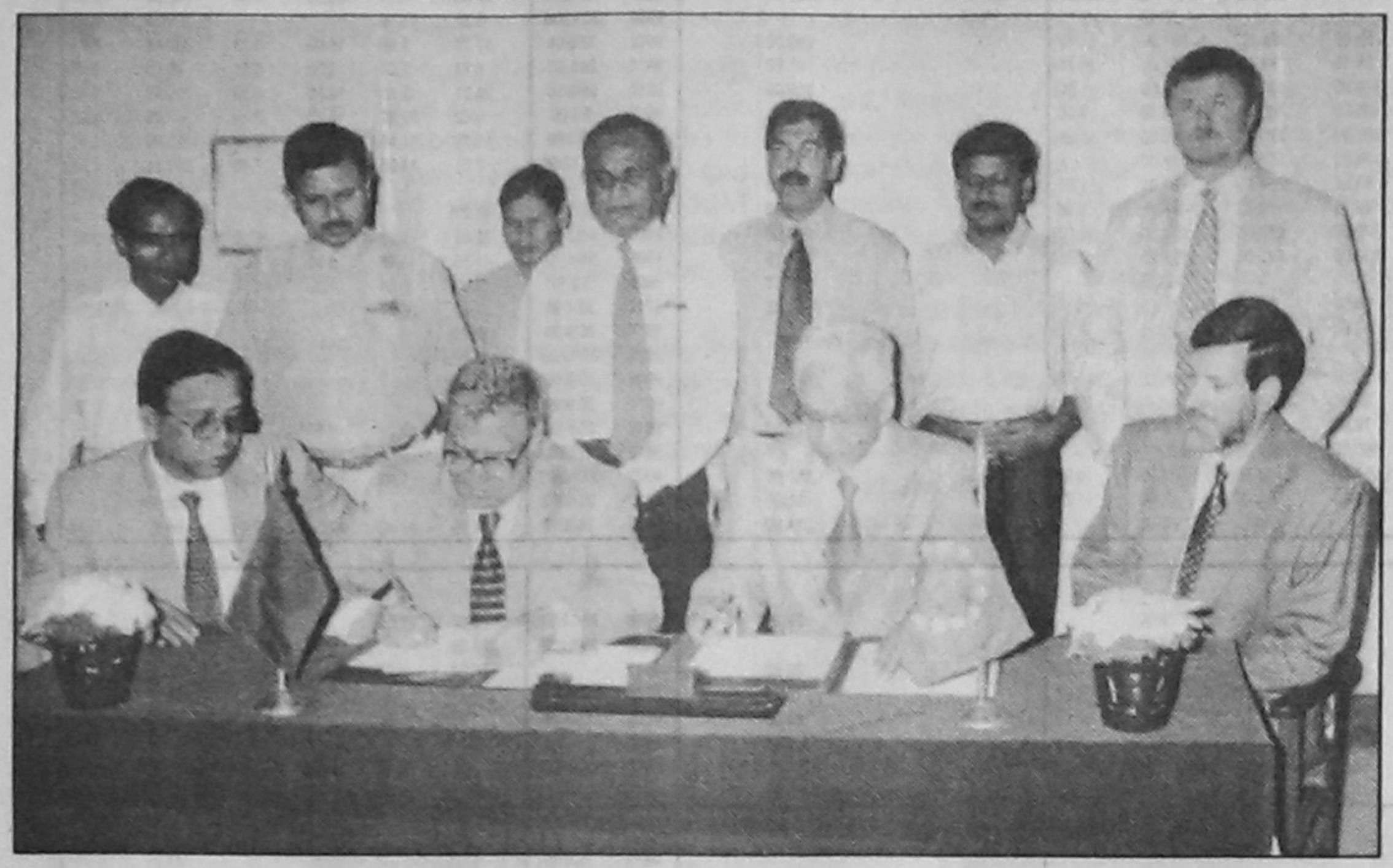
BEIJING, Sept 17: China has set a goal to turn itself into one of the world's major general-use helicopter producers by 2030, according to today's China Daily Business Weekly, says Xinhua.

Liang Zhenhe, deputy general manager of the China Aviation Industry Corporation II, said that China's general aviation market was almost closed to the use of helicopters, and China needs to map out a long-term and stable plan for the development of the country's helicopter industry.

China at present has less than 80 general-use helicopters in operation, which means every one million people owns about 0.06 helicopters, far less than the worldwide figure of 3.9, said Liang.

Industry experts noted that development of a helicopter industry is an important measure to increase the production capacity of China's military products, and will help create a new growth factor for the economy.

Experts predicted that China would need about 1,800 helicopters worth some 4.9 billion US dollars by 2030.



Dr Mashirul Rahman, Secretary of the Economic Relations Division, and Ambassador Antonio de Souza Menezes, Head of the delegation of European Commission, sign official letters on food aid programme in Bangladesh in the city yesterday. Abdur Razzaq, Joint Secretary of ERD, Robert Hindrick, EU Food Security Coordinator, and Bjorn Carlsson, Senior Economist of EU Food Security Unit in Dhaka, were present.

Dhaka to receive 50,000 tons of wheat, 17m euros from EU

The European Union has allocated 50,000 tons of wheat and 17 million euros (about Tk 82 crore) as part of its food aid programme in Bangladesh, a press release of the European Commission said here yesterday, reports BSS.

Secretary of the Economic Relations Division Dr Mashirul Rahman and Head of the delegation of European Commission in Bangladesh Ambassador Antonio de Souza Menezes exchanged documents.

Senior officials of the ERD and European Commission were also present on the occasion.

The food aid will be distributed to assetless women through the VGD programme in the districts of Lalmonirhat, Kurigram, Panchagarh, Dinajpur, Naogaon and Rajshahi.

The financial support will be used for development of the same VGD programme, employment generation programme and NGO programmes.

E-commerce poses new challenge to Chinese family firms

BANGKOK, Sept 17: Globalisation and e-commerce pose new challenges to Chinese family businesses which traditionally thrived on the basis that "who you know" was more important than "what you know," says AFP.

With its free-flow of information, lack of hierarchy and direct relationship between retailer and customer, the Internet revolution strikes at the very foundations on which many Chinese family firms which dominate Asian economies were built, says a report by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) titled "Beyond the bamboo network."

"Many of the CFBs operating in this region represent some of the most aggressive and agile businesses that have managed to thrive over the last decade," says Andersen Consulting partner Joseph Lobbato who helped research the report.

"However, the Asian crisis has rocked the foundation on which these organisations were built and many are soon realising that

familiar marketplaces are becoming increasingly complex.

Business operated by ethnic Chinese control Asian economic activity to a degree totally out of proportion to their numbers.

Ethnic Chinese account for less than four per cent of Indonesia's population yet control a massive 73 per cent share of the economy. In Thailand, the 14 per cent ethnic Chinese population control 81 per cent of the economy while in the Philippines the respective figures are two per cent and 50-60 per cent. Malaysia's 30 per cent ethnic Chinese population controls 69 per cent of the economy.

Chinese family businesses (CFBs) traditionally exploited family and ethnic ties across the region to build trading empires. When these traders diversified into manufacturing, finance, property and other sectors they continued to rely on these networks of personal ties, the report says.

While CFBs built success on a tight network of relationships with other key players, "guanxi," e-commerce has a global reach which breaks traditional relationships between retailer and customer the very middleman niche and share trading.

Where the typical Chinese company is closed, hierarchical and rigid, successful e-commerce requires structures that are open, non-hierarchical and flexible," the report says.

E-commerce is often at odds with the way CFBs typically go about their business.

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However, for most CFBs, Internet-related businesses are far removed from their core businesses, the EIU report says.

"In short, they are moving into areas in which they are not competent and lack know-how," it says.

CFBs can have the flexibility and rapid decision-making vital to e-business, as demonstrated by Hong Kong's Richard Li and his Pacific Century CyberWorks, it says. However, the lack of global branding will hinder other online business ventures in a market dominated by strong names.

In Hong Kong Li Ka-shing's Cheung Kong raised 100 million US floating its tom com startup on claims it would be a China Internet portal.

Thailand's Charoen Pokphand, Indonesia's Soeryadaya family and Taiwan's Koo Group/China Trust Commercial Bank have also jumped on the Internet bandwagon with ventures ranging from high-speed Internet services to online banking and share trading.

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Whether these firms can parlay their domination of the old Asian

economy into success in a new one remains their greatest challenge.

Overall, CFBs in Asia will need to discard rigid, traditional ways and learn to live with the idea of developing more flexible and agile organisations in order to cope with the challenges brought about by the new economy," Lobbato says.

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