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EU voices hopes of banana row breakthrough

BRUSSELS, Sept 23: European Union officials voiced high hopes yesterday that their latest proposal to settle a long-running trade dispute over bananas will satisfy the United States and get US sanctions lifted, says Reuters.

EU experts are working out the details of a "first come, first served" mechanism to divide up the 15-nation bloc's banana import quotas and bring its system into line with World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules.

The EU's executive commission is due to adopt a report on the proposed system on October 4 and present it to EU foreign ministers on October 9.

Since the WTO ruled against the EU's current banana import rules last year, the EU has been struggling to come up with an alternative that satisfies the United States and Latin American producers who challenged the existing rules as well as producers in EU territories and the Caribbean.

The EU is under pressure to solve the dispute because the United States has imposed \$191 million of sanctions on EU goods in retaliation for the banana spat and is threatening to raise the pressure by rotating EU products hit with sanctions.

US officials said last week that President Bill Clinton had delayed decision on rotating the sanctions after efforts by British Prime Minister Tony Blair to resolve the banana and other trans-Atlantic trade disputes. Britain fears the Scottish cashmere industry will be hit by the revised sanctions.

India to hike fuel prices

NEW DELHI, Sept 23: India will implement an across-the-board hike in the price of petroleum products to offset surging global oil prices. Petroleum Minister Ram Naik said today, reports AFP.

Speaking to reporters after a cabinet meeting, Naik said a precise announcement on the extent and timing of the hikes would be made at a later date.

"We have three options in hand, the floating of oil bonds, a reduction of customs and excise duties and a hike in prices. It will be a mixture of all three," Naik said.

The increase in the prices of kerosene, diesel, cooking gas, petrol and aviation fuel will be one which the people can bear," Naik stressed.

Analysts have predicted a hike of between 10 and 15 per cent.

The increase had become inevitable in the wake of a soaring international crude oil price which has expanded India's already heavy oil import bill.

Petroleum products in India are heavily subsidised by the government and any increase in prices carries a heavy political risk.

Several governments have had their fingers burned by intense public protests that followed attempts to cut subsidies.

India imports more than 70 per cent of its petroleum needs and the weakness of the rupee against the dollar, combined with the rising international oil price has hit government coffers hard.

India's oil import bill topped 10.5 billion dollars for the financial year ending March 2000 and is expected to rise by about seven billion dollars for the year ending March 2001.

Bureau Veritas trains customs officers

Bureau Veritas, a government-appointed PSI agent for Block C, conducted three separate training sessions for the customs officers from September 10 to September 21, says a press release.

Two of these sessions were held at Dhaka Custom House and the third was held at the Customs Training Academy in Chittagong.

The first course was on "Harmonised System classification". The course emphasised the use of computerised data base for correct classification under the harmonised system. The 2nd course was on the customs valuation, using the GATT Value Code. It is notable that Bangladesh customs changed its value regime from Brussels definition of value to the GATT valuation on February 15 this year.

The GATT valuation code is being used by almost all the members of WTO. The method is markedly different from Brussels' definition of value (BDV) - tariff value and emphasises the use of transaction value for customs duty purposes. Pierce Rouane, a customs expert working for the BV group conducted these two sessions.

The course in Chittagong on "Fraud prevention and post clearance audit" was conducted by Garry Murphy, a British customs expert and Andrew Yell, a former British customs official, currently working for Bureau Veritas Group.

Grameen Software launches own IT education franchise

Star Business Report

With a view to developing human resources for the global information technology, Grameen Software Ltd yesterday formally launched its own nationwide IT education franchise -- Grameen Star Education.

Grameen Bank Chairman Professor Muhammad Yunus inaugurated the GSE at the Grameen Bhawan in the city.

The education franchise will spread its operation throughout the country to provide IT education in all divisional and district towns.

The training service providers said that the GSE centres will evaluate the current training standard in the country and work for removing the existing deficiencies and gaps through an integral training method.

Giving an overview of GSE, Major Manzurul Haque (Retd), Chief Operating Officer of Grameen Software Limited (GSL), said that Bangladesh is making rapid progress in the IT industry. A number of IT parks including Grameen IT park are expected to be in operation within a short time. Various local and foreign IT companies will be operating from the IT parks and they would require thousands of IT professionals.

Besides, a large number of IT professionals will be wanted from Bangladesh to meet global demand. He said that GSE will offer courses in three categories through semester system. The

duration of each semester will be four months with three classes per week. Each day, students will take lessons for four hours.

The first course, Grameen Star Education Software Professional (GSCP), will be divided into three semesters, each of 220 hours, designed to make the students competent in analysing, designing, developing, implementing, commissioning and debugging solutions based on Microsoft and Oracle platforms.

The second course, he said,

will be Grameen Star Certified Network Engineer (GCNE), divided into two semesters of 220 hours which will develop the students as experts in Microsoft Windows 2000 networking environment.

The third course, Grameen Star Certified e-Technology Professional (GCEP), will include two semesters of 220 hours each for e-commerce application developers. The students will become SUN and JAVA application developers.

The focus areas will be site

designing, site hosting, application development, security implementation, monitoring and administration of e-commerce sites.

Syed Ahsan Habib, an IT expert who works with the World Bank, said the new technology has brought opportunities for the third world nations to change their economic situation.

He said that many developing countries were failing to tap this opportunity due to lack of human resources.

Habib said Bangladesh also lacks human resources to tap businesses and many private training providers are coming up to create IT professionals. He also urged the IT centres to ensure standards of education.

Atiq-e-Rabbani, General Secretary of Bangladesh Association for Software Information Service (BASIS), said it will take some more time for the country's IT sector to yield results.

BASIS President SM Kamal also stressed the need for trained human resources to compete in the global environment.

President of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) Aftabul Islam was also hopeful about the country's IT future.

He said that 30 per cent of IT professionals working in the USA are from South East Asia.

Tarun Kumar Mintra, Country Operation Head of Aptech, said back-office automation business worth trillion dollars offers a big scope for Bangladeshi IT professionals and mentioned that India and Philippines were already ruling the field.

The Daily Star Editor Mahuz Anam and Deputy Managing Director of Grameen Bank Khaled Shams also spoke on the occasion.

Nepal to move industries out of capital

KATHMANDU, Sept 23: Nepali Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala said Friday that the Nepali government would move all industries out of Kathmandu valley to relieve the valley of heavy pollution, The Kathmandu Post reported today, says Xinhua.

Koirala announced the decision here while addressing a function to mark the 21st Social Service Day.

The project would help reduce the valley's burgeoning population by as much as 50 per cent and will indeed help ease the burden of the valley, said Koirala.

"If everything turns out to be as planned, then Kathmandu will be freed from garbage havoc, water scarcity, pollution and the like."

Kathmandu valley consists of three municipalities, namely Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur.

What makes Koirala's announcement significant is that the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has agreed to assist the Nepali government in the effort.

"I have already talked to the ADB officials and they have agreed to provide infrastructure in a scheme to relocate all the industries, including carpet and garment factories, of the valley," said Koirala.

"Genetic engineering of seeds is failing in industrialised nations. In Europe it is not commercial to sell them. So they are targeting Asia and India. Monsanto will collapse if it does not grab Indian market," she said.

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