

Microsoft replies early, seeks more time for appeal

WASHINGTON, Oct 6: Microsoft Corp accused the US government Thursday of trying to "short-circuit the appellate process" as the company sought more time to appeal a federal judge's order breaking up the software giant, says AP.

Microsoft asked the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit for four months to prepare its case. That is substantially more time than the Justice Department requested.

The Clinton administration early this week pressed for an expedited appeals process, saying there was "a compelling public interest" to wrapping up the antitrust dispute.

Microsoft responded Thursday by saying that in a case of this size, "if there is no threat of irreparable harm - and none has been shown here - the 'compelling public interest' is in a proper disposition of the case, not in one reached in haste."

The company's reply was filed before the Tuesday deadline set by the court. Justice filed its brief two days early.

The company said the 19 issues it plans to appeal and the many technological details of the case warrant a court schedule far longer than a federal appellate guidelines.

The Justice Department's antitrust division proposed that all briefs be submitted by Dec 22, followed by an oral argument to be set for January.

In its initial filing on Monday, Microsoft attacked nearly every part of US District Court Judge Thomas Penfield Jackson's ruling, even citing his comments to a newspaper that almost everything he did would be subject to appeal.

It also objected to the judge's comments and conduct outside the courtroom.

#### Mahathir defends forex regime

LONDON, Oct 6: Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad on Wednesday defended the country's fixed exchange rate regime and said there were no plans to alter the 3.8 one rate at which it is pegged to the dollar, says Reuters.

"We have no plans to change it unless we become uncompetitive with our neighbours," Mahathir told Reuters after speaking at a Malaysian business conference in London.

Analysts and the International Monetary Fund have in the past criticised Malaysia's fixed exchange rate regime, set in September 1998, and some believe the rate is too low.

Central Bank Governor Zeti Akhtar Aziz told the conference that she believed the ringgit was fairly valued and was supported by "underlying fundamentals".

"Our exchange rate is only marginally undervalued and it is not misaligned," she told the business conference.

Mahathir also defended Malaysia's "unorthodox" economic measures, including controls on investments, which have been partly lifted, and the fixing of the exchange rate, saying that without these "much maligned" measures the Malaysian economy would not be growing so quickly.

The economy is becoming significantly more resilient to external shocks," he told the conference.

#### Japan increases rice aid to North Korea

TOKYO, Oct 6: Japan announced on Friday that it would dramatically increase its rice aid to North Korea to help its starving people and to encourage the North's hard-line communist government to continue improving its strained relations with other countries, reports AP.

The 500,000 tons of food promised by Japan would be a fivefold increase in its rice shipments to the North, and Japan's largest-ever aid shipment to Pyongyang.

Japan doesn't have diplomatic relations with North Korea and has made little progress in talks with Pyongyang over the past year. In 1998, Tokyo sharply criticised the North for testing a ballistic missile test over Japan. The country also continues to demand information about 10 Japanese who allegedly were kidnapped by North Korean spies 20 years ago.

As part of its reconciliation effort, South Korea last week agreed to give impoverished North Korea 600,000 tons of food - 100,000 tons in free aid and 500,000 tons on a 30-year loan - by year's end. North Korea has depended on outside aid to feed its 22 million people since 1995.

Most South Koreans support their government's engagement policy with North Korea, but some complain that Seoul is pampering Pyongyang with excessive economic aid.

During a news conference Friday, Japanese government spokesman Hidenao Nakagawa said officials decided to increase the country's aid to North Korea at the request of the UN World Food Program, which has been helping the North recover from natural disasters and a famine that have killed hundreds of thousands of people.

# Asean rejects free trade idea with Australia, NZ

Association agrees on a weaker proposal



Australia Minister for Trade Mark Vaile (L) and New Zealand Minister for Trade Negotiation Jim Sutton listen to a press conference after the 5th Informal Consultations between the ASEAN economic ministers and the ministers from Closer Economic Relation (CER) countries during the ASEAN Economic Ministers meeting (AEM) in Chiang Mai in Thailand yesterday.

-AFP photo

CHIANG MAI, Thailand, Oct 6: The Association of Southeast Asian Nations on Friday rejected a proposal for establishing a \$1 trillion free trade zone with Australia and New Zealand, says AP.

The economic ministers of the 10-member ASEAN, holding an annual meeting, instead agreed on a weaker proposal for a "closer economic partnership," a joint press statement said.

"We can't be over-ambitious. It's not an easy thing to merge the two regions together," Thai Deputy Prime Minister Supachai Panichpakdi told a news conference.

The press statement said the economic partnership between the two regions would be defined further by senior officials who would make recommendations in 2001.

It marks a second setback for ASEAN's ambitions to expand free trade after Malaysia backtracked on a commitment to cut tariffs on its auto industry under the ASEAN Free Trade Area, or AFTA.

ASEAN economic ministers met Friday with their counterparts from the Closer Economic Relations pact, or Australia and New Zealand, to discuss a report by a joint task force that recommended setting up a tariff-free zone "at the earliest possible time."

The report said such a free trade area was "not only feasible but advisable" as it would create a market of about 560 million people and bring a benefit of \$48 billion in addi-

tional gross domestic product by 2020.

Hiding his disappointment, Australian Trade Minister Mark Vaile described the agreement to develop closer economic relations as a "significant step forward."

New Zealand and Australia had been pushing for the move, but Malaysia, Indonesia and Philippines had voiced reservations. The other members of ASEAN are Thailand, Singapore, Brunei, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos and Myanmar.

"At this point in time, the environment is just not right as far as Malaysia is concerned. Even within AFTA we are still evolving," Malaysia's International Trade and Industry Minister Rafidah Aziz said.

"We are so preoccupied. We want to make sure the AFTA works," she said. "We are not about being political heroes. We are talking about something that benefits the people."

On Thursday, Rafidah had said that there is already an AFTA-CER linkage and to expand it to a formal organisation needs political decisions.

Indonesian Minister of Industry and Trade Luhut Pandjaitan said Friday that ASEAN has to be pragmatic and realistic.

"We are not ready yet from the Indonesian side to set up a free trade area between AFTA and CER," he said.

It had been originally hoped to begin negotiations between ASEAN and CER early next year and complete them within the year with a view to full integration by 2010.

# SE Asia agrees trade deal but doubts still persist

CHIANG MAI, Thailand, Oct 6: Southeast Asian economies ministers, meeting in Thailand under the shadow of flagging regional markets, yesterday agreed a framework for settling a simmering trade row over tariff barriers, says Reuters.

But the deal will not be formally signed until November, and raises the specter of tit-for-tat protectionist measures if members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) fail to agree on penalties for backtracking on trade pledges.

The dispute began earlier this year when Malaysia withdrew its auto sector from industries slated for tariff reductions under the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA). The move particularly angered Thailand, also keen to promote its auto industry.

The ASEAN meeting in the northern city of Chiang Mai agreed a protocol to deal with countries that renege on trade commitments.

Countries "facing real difficulties" will be allowed to submit an application to delay tariff cuts in certain industries, and will then have 180 days to agree compensation for other affected member states, according to a draft of the protocol.

If no agreement is reached before the deadline, affected countries have the right to retaliate by withdrawing some of their own products from the free trade pact.

Ministers denied the deal was a step backwards for ASEAN.

"Far from it," Malaysian Trade and Industry Minister Rafidah Aziz told a news conference.

"This protocol very clearly reflects ASEAN taking a very pragmatic and realistic approach in evolving AFTA."

creating a united free trade area.

But Malaysia and Indonesia, which have thorny relations with Australia, are less enthusiastic, and Friday's meeting may agree only to more ASEAN studies of the proposal.

Malaysia's Rafidah said the "political environment" must also be conducive before formal talks on the trade zone can proceed, and suggested that further studies needed to be done.

Thai Deputy Prime Minister Supachai Panichpakdi also sounded a note of caution, saying officials still had to do a lot of work studying a report by an ASEAN task force, which recommends pressing on with talks on merging the free trade zones.

The meeting comes at a time of mounting concern for ASEAN, which groups Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

## US congressional negotiators agree food sales to Cuba

WASHINGTON, Oct 6: Congressional negotiators agreed Thursday to allow sales of food to Cuba in what would be a significant crack in the embargo imposed on Fidel Castro's government four decades ago, reports AP.

Such sales are likely to be small, at least initially because of tight financial restrictions imposed at the insistence of anti-Castro Republicans in the House.

The measure, which was inserted into an agricultural spending bill, would bar both the federal government and US banks from financing the sales and also would prevent any easing of restrictions on travel to the island.

trade measure, and it was approved by a House-Senate conference in a series of party-line votes.

"What we are pretending to do is one thing. What we are accomplishing is another," said Rep. Maurice Hinckley, a Democrat.

But Rep. George Nethercutt, the lead Republican on the provision in the House, said "it was an opening. It's a new day for sanctions policy in this country."

The US-Cuba Trade and Economic Council, a business-founded group, estimates the legislation will result in \$28 million to \$45 million in the first year.

## WHO urges EU to redraft tobacco ad ban

GENEVA, Oct 6: World Health Organisation Director General Gro Harlem Brundtland urged EU states to take concerted action to redraft legislation banning tobacco advertising that was overturned by Europe's highest court yesterday, says Reuters.

The ruling by the European Court of Justice dealt a major blow to EU health policy as well as to WHO's efforts to hammer out the world's first global treaty to curb tobacco use and ban its advertising.

Brundtland, a medical doctor and former Norwegian Prime Minister who has made the fight against tobacco a policy priority at the UN health body, expressed serious concern at the ruling.

Tobacco addiction is a communicated disease, communicated through advertising, sports, marketing and sponsorship. Tobacco advertising bans protect people, especially the young," she said in a statement, adding that almost 100,000 children and adolescents were taking tobacco every day.

Representatives of more than 150 governments will gather in Geneva on October 16 to try to draft a legally binding treaty to curb tobacco use worldwide.

The court has annulled the directive on the grounds that EU lawmakers had no competence for introducing it on the basis of internal market legislation, the court said in a statement.

But the EU move opens a potentially gaping hole in WHO's efforts to draft a meaningful anti-tobacco treaty.

"WHO strongly recommends European Union member states to strengthen their tobacco control legislation and urges them to redraft a tobacco advertising ban in accordance with the European Court's indications," Brundtland said.

The court decision is a victory for the world's tobacco multinationals, whose representatives are due to attend WHO's first public hearings on tobacco in Geneva next week.

"More than ever now, we need quick and decisive action by countries. Delays mean more deaths," Brundtland said.

The EU adopted laws in July 1998 to gradually phase out almost all tobacco advertising and sponsorship by 2006.

The ban was introduced as a single market measure which did not require unanimous backing from all member states, but the court said this was illegal.

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## Blair calls for swift EU enlargement

WARSAW, Oct 6: British Prime Minister Tony Blair brought a strong message of encouragement to eastern Europe's would-be EU members today as he visited Poland to deliver a speech calling for swift EU enlargement, says AFP.

On a trip designed to style Britain as the champion of a wider European Union, Blair was to unveil his vision of a European future in which Poland and five other countries would be EU members by 2004.

"I want Britain to be a champion of enlargement," Blair told Polish television shortly after his arrival here, adding that widening the European Union was a "vital part" of the EU's future.

The British prime minister urged other EU leaders to accelerate sputtering talks on welcoming in new members, and said he hoped a breakthrough would be achieved by Sweden's presidency of the Union which follows France in January.

And in a second initiative, he also intended to call for a clear delineation of the remit of EU bodies and national governments.

One way of monitoring this would be to set up a new chamber in or alongside the European Parliament to oversee the division of powers, a Blair spokesman said.

The British prime minister has chosen to deliver his vision for Europe in Poland, as the

east European country is in the vanguard of EU hopefuls, along with Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary and Slovenia.

Blair is believed to be positioning himself as a counterweight to leaders in Paris and Berlin who have called recently for the EU elite to accelerate their own integration before admitting new members.

Britain is broadly sceptical of closer EU integration, and Blair warned in Warsaw that there was no point in certain countries forming a elite club within the EU 15 and admitting new candidates as "second-class" members.

Blair's Polish counterpart Jerzy Buzek echoed that view, saying Warsaw did not want its tough accession process to end up with Poland languishing outside the "hard core" of closely knit EU elite.

Would-be EU members have become disenchanted at the apparent lack of political will within EU members states to champion their cause, particularly after the "deeper, not wider" noises emerging from Paris and Berlin.

There is growing frustration on the part of the citizens of applicant states that negotiations are going too slowly and concerns on the part of member states that people may be distracted from what is Europe's main project," said a Blair spokesman.

## Invitation for Tender

Tender Enquiry No-Pur-135/2000 Dated 24/8/2000

**Sub: Extension of Time for Bid Submission for Supply of "33KV 3-Phase Auto Circuit Recloser for Distribution Division, Comilla & Noakhali.**

The date of submission bids for supply of 33KV 3-Phase Auto Circuit Recloser for Distribution Division, Comilla & Noakhali has been re-fixed on 16/10/2000 instead of 05/10/2000. The tender will be received up to 11:00 AM and opened at 11:15 AM on the same day.

All other terms & conditions will remain unchanged.

Biddit/Jana-689(4)/2000-2001 Director of Purchase

GD-933 BPDB, Dhaka.

## Trading Corporation of Bangladesh Principal Office

TCB Bhaban, Kawran Bazar, Dhaka

## Tender Notice

Tender for Import of 1200 Pcs of Fire Arms and 2,50,000 Pcs of Cartridges

Tender No: TCB/IMP-18/2000 Date: 05-10-2000

Trading Corporation of Bangladesh invites sealed tender in the prescribed form obtainable from Sonali Bank, Kawran Bazar Branch, TCB Bhaban, Dhaka on payment of Tk. 500/- (Taka five hundred) only per set (non-refundable) for import of 1200 Pcs of Fire Arms and 2,50,000 Pcs Cartridges (Europe/USA/South Africa/China/Singapore origin only) under cash. Offers are to be made on C&F/C (Chittagong Liner term basis showing FOB price and freight separately along with 1.00% (one per cent) earnest money. Shipment of entire quantity of Fire Arms and Cartridges is to be made by 15-01-2001. Other terms and conditions are available in the tender form.

Tenders to be dropped in the tender box kept in the Import Division of the Corporation at TCB Bhaban, Kawran Bazar, Dhaka up to 11:00 AM on 06-11-2000 and opened at 11:15 AM on the same day. Tenderers may remain present at the opening of the tender. The successful bidder is to submit 3% (three per cent) Performance Guarantee in foreign currency before signing of contract with TCB.

The Corporation reserves the right to accept or reject any or all the tenders without assigning any reason whatsoever and to purchase quantities more or less than those tendered for. No tender document will be sold on the day of opening of the tender.