

ILO adopts sanctions against Myanmar over forced labour

GENEVA, Nov 17: The International Labour Organisation (ILO) called on its members here Thursday to review their ties with Myanmar because of the country's use of forced labour, a spokesman for the ILO said, reports AFP.

The ILO's governing body rejected a last-minute attempt by Malaysia to put off the sanctions and against Myanmar which will take effect from November 30, spokesman John Doohan said.

The move, adopted without a vote late Thursday, is the first of its kind in the Geneva-based ILO's history.

It recommends ILO members -- workers and employers' groups, and countries -- review their relations with Myanmar and take steps to ensure their ties do not help continue or extend forced labour.

Myanmar's Ambassador to the United Nations U Myathin

told the meeting earlier Thursday that if the measures were adopted it would represent a "tragic and deplorable episode" in the ILO's history.

They were "highly undesirable and objectionable" if adopted, he added.

The ILO wants Myanmar to comply with recommendations made by a 1998 committee of inquiry which found use of forced labour to be "widespread and systematic".

The sanctions were adopted by the International Labour Conference in June but put on hold until the end of this month to give Myanmar's military junta time to adopt concrete action.

A report by experts who carried out a six-day mission to the country at the end of October found made progress in changing its laws to end the use of forced labour, but far less in putting

legislative changes into practice.

Just after their return, Francis Maupin of France who led the technical team told a news briefing here "the late stage" of the overall measures taken by Myanmar meant it was difficult to know how effective they would be.

Representatives from both workers' and employers' groups -- making up half of the total number of 56 votes in the ILO's governing body -- told the session on Thursday that measures taken by Myanmar were "too little too late".

France, speaking on behalf of the European Union, and the US, also said they supported sanctions, while a number of Asian countries were opposed, including Japan, India, Pakistan and China, highlighting the steps Myanmar had taken.

The Myanmar government said recently it had issued a

directive banning forced labour.

Myanmar's Deputy Foreign Minister Khin Maung Win said last week: "This order has been circulated right down to the village level and posted in every police station."

"It states that all responsible persons including the armed forces, police and local authorities should not requisition forced labour," he said.

Nearly one million people are currently subjected to forced labour in Myanmar, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) said on Wednesday basing its estimate on 580 cases of forced labour and more than 2,000 cases of

restitution.

The Brussels-based organisation said it had also examined more than 400 labour requisition orders issued by members of the army and several dozen witness statements since June.

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German foreign trade with Russia rises sharply

WIESBADEN, Germany, Nov 17: German trade with Russia rose up sharply in the first six months of this year, data published by the federal statistics office on Friday showed, reports AFP.

Germany exported goods worth a total 2.78 billion euros (2.4 billion dollars) in the period from January to June, 34.9 per cent more than in the corresponding period of 1999.

The biggest increase was seen in the exports of German-made motor vehicles, which rose by 93.8 per cent. Exports of electrical and electronic goods grew by 52.0 per cent.

But the value of goods which Germany imported from Russia rose even more sharply in the January-June period. That was because oil and gas accounted for most of the imports and the price of both oil and gas has risen sharply on a 12-month basis.

Germany imported goods worth a total 6.5 billion euros in the first half of the current year, 86.7 per cent more than in the corresponding period of 1999.

Imports of crude oil soared 160 per cent to 2.76 billion euros and imports of fuel and gas jumped 65.3 per cent to 1.99 billion euros, the statistics office said.

Mazda posts \$88.2m loss in 6 months

TOKYO, Nov 17: Mazda Motor Corp on Friday said a slowed exports and a stronger yen combined to cause a 9.59 billion yen (\$88.2 million) group net loss for the six months to Sept 30, reports AP.

The earnings skid compare to a 13.2 billion yen (\$121.4 million) profit for the same period last year.

First-half group sales fell 7.5 per cent to 1,006 trillion yen (\$9.24 billion) from 1,088 trillion yen (\$10 billion), as exports to North America and Europe declined, the company said.

Mazda is 34 per cent owned by Ford, and has a few overseas manufacturing facilities. The company didn't say where in Europe it planned to build its cars.

Sumitomo, Mitsui Chemicals plan to merge

TOKYO, Nov 17: Japanese chemical companies Sumitomo Chemical Co. Ltd. and Mitsui Chemicals Inc. will complete a merger within two years to become the nation's largest comprehensive chemical manufacturer, the companies said Friday, reports AFP.

Mitsui Chemicals and Sumitomo Chemical have reached a basic agreement to consolidate all their businesses by around October 2003 to become a global leader in the chemical industry of the 21st century, the companies said in a joint statement.

The consolidation will be preceded by the integration of the polyolefins (thermoplastics) businesses of Mitsui and Sumitomo by around 2001, it added.

Japan's second and third largest chemical manufacturers said intensifying global competition had prompted the move.

The business environment is becoming increasingly difficult for Mitsui and Sumitomo, as markets continue to grow borderless and a race against overseas competitors ever intensifies.

"Mitsui and Sumitomo came to realize that enhancing competitiveness through expanded business scale is a must for securing future growth and further enhancing corporate value," the two firms added.



The director of the Ferson-Bio company, Gerard Bardad, grabs a handful of bone-meal in Auch on Thursday. The entire production of the company's bone meal will be destroyed following the mad cow crisis. The French army will make available military facilities for the storage of thousands of tons of animal meal banned this week in a crackdown on mad cow disease, the defence ministry said.

-AFP photo

India keeps ban on foreign equity in print media

NEW DELHI, Nov 17: India said Friday it had decided to retain a 45-year-old ban on foreign investment in the domestic print media, reports AFP.

Following a national debate on the issue, the government has concluded that foreign equity in the print media "will not be a desirable thing," Information and Broadcasting Minister Sushma Swaraj was quoted as saying by the Press Trust of India.

The concerns that led to the ban being imposed in 1955 are "still valid," Swaraj said, citing the influence of the print media

on the political process.

Last month, Swaraj had hinted the government was considering lifting the ban, which extends to the publication of foreign journals in India.

The minister had cited the spread of the Internet as the main reason behind the rethink.

The strictures on foreign-owned newspapers owe their genesis to India's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru, whose opposition to anything American was so strong that in the 1950s he imposed a ban to stop the New York Times from

printing an international edition in India.

A proposal to reverse the protectionist policy first reared its head in 1994 when former finance minister Manmohan Singh said he wanted India to be a regional publishing hub.

The statement was followed by applications for local printing from Time magazine and a raft of papers owned by media baron Rupert Murdoch.

But Indian newspapers complained the move would subvert national sovereignty and lead to slanted reportage and foreign groups buying up local papers.



EU Commission President Romano Prodi speaks at the European Banking Congress in Frankfurt yesterday.

-AFP photo

Long-closed Libya wants foreign investment

TRIPOLI, Nov 17: Libyan leader Moamer Kadhafi issued a rare call for foreign capital, telling a group of investors here that his long-closed country was open to foreigners' money, state media reported Thursday.

He is serious in its desire to encourage foreign investment and the participation of foreign capital in joint projects, not only in our country but also in (the rest of) Africa," Kadhafi told a gathering of some 170 business representatives, including some from Europe.

The Libyan economic system is not opposed to investment, development, foreign capital and foreign participation," the Libyan leader said.

The comments were rare for Kadhafi, who as head of Libya

claims to have built a political system unique to the world. Kadhafi's Jamahiriya, or People's Authority, has a completely pre-planned economy that is heavily dependent on oil revenue but has no foreign debt.

A member of the OPEC oil cartel, Libya has a production quota of 1.431,2000 barrels a day.

In April 1999, the United Nations ended seven years of sanction on Libya imposed for Tripoli's long refusal to turn over Libyans accused of the 1988 bombing of a US airliner over Lockerbie, Scotland, that killed 270 people.

But the vehemently anti-US Kadhafi warned investors that they should oppose those who attack development, investment

and freedom of trade," accusing Washington of "through its attacks having prevented the development of several countries, ranging from African countries to Yugoslavia."

The Libyan leader said economic development needed "peace, cooperation and the abolition of embargoes and threats."

Participants at the Tripoli conference, called "Development and Investment in Libya," noted that Libya needs to assure 35 billion dollars of investment to carry out a five-year development plan due to start next year.

And Libya needs 150 billion dollars in investment over the next 20 years if it to assure at least five per cent annual growth, they said.

What's on today . . .

Foundation laying ceremony: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will lay the foundation stone of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Hall at Jahangirnagar University. Time: 11:30 am.

Reunion: The "Tritiyo Ujjibok Punormilon" of The Hunger Project will be held. Venue: Mahanagar Natya Mancha, Gulistan. Time: 9:00 am.

Seminar: Bangladesh Bird Club will hold a seminar on "People's Role in Saving Bird". Venue: VIP Lounge of National Press Club. Time: 10:00 am.

Reunion: The Reunion 2000 of the Department of Management of Dhaka University will be held. Chief guest: DU VC Prof AK Azad Chowdhury. Venue: Teacher Student Centre (TSC), DU campus. Time: 9:00 am-8:00 pm.

Conference: The first national conference of Bangladesh Museum Council will be held. Venue: Kabi Sufia Kamal auditorium of National Museum, Shahbagh. Time: 10:00 am.

Council: The biennial council of Bangladesh Diploma Nurses Association will be held. Venue: Sheba Institute auditorium. Time: 10:00 am.

Symposium: United Nations Women's Association in cooperation with the Dhaka American Women's Club and British Women's Association will hold a symposium on "Women and Human Rights in Bangladesh: What are the Issues and How They are Addressed". Venue: BRAC auditorium. Time: 2:00 pm.

Meena Bazar: Rifles Family Welfare Association will inaugurate an eight-day long exhibition of handicrafts and Meena Bazar. Venue: Abhayaranya, Pilkhana, BDR. Time: 3:00 pm.

FWWP programme: Women's Federation for World Peace is going to hold "Bangladeshi-Japan Sisterhood Ceremony". Venue: Top of the Park, Hotel Sheraton. Time: 4:00 pm.

Congress: The seventh International Surgical Congress will be inaugurated. Chief guest: Chief Justice Latifur Rahman. Time: Ball Room of Hotel Sonargaon. Time: 9:00 am.

Seminar: Bangladesh Professional Security Association will hold a seminar on "Role of Private Security Services in the Socio-Economic Development of Bangladesh". Venue: Conference Centre, IDB Bhaban, Agargaon. Time: 10:00 am-2:00 pm.

Weather

Dry weather likely

Weather is likely to remain mainly dry with temporary partly cloudy sky over the country in the next 12 hours till 6 pm today, reports UNB.

Met office predicted light to moderate fog may occur over northern to central part and the river basins of the country after midnight. Night temperature may remain nearly unchanged over the country, it added.

The country's highest temperature recorded yesterday was 32.2 degree Celsius at Cox's Bazar and the lowest 15.7 degree at Srimangal.

The sun sets in the capital today at 5:12 pm and rises tomorrow at 6:16 am.

Maximum and minimum temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature		Humidity in percentage
	Max	Min	
Dhaka	29.6	19.7	69
Chittagong	30.5	18.2	80
Rajshahi	30.3	18.5	86
Khulna	31.0	18.8	79
Barisal	30.2	18.0	82
Sylhet	29.4	17.2	63
Cox's Bazar	32.2	20.0	69

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Referring to government's various development programmes, including Asrayan, monthly allowance for the distressed people and some others, he said now Bangladesh is considered a prospective country in the world.

Pakistani rulers and anti-liberation forces could not destroy Awami League because of unity among its leaders and workers, although the killers assassinated father of the nation in 1995," he said at a party workers rally at the training complex of Faridpur Sugar Mills.

The minister said sheer vengeance bound the three defeated forces together in the political arena. "They are hatching conspiracy against Awami League to end their disgrace caused by downfall."

Focusing on the AL government's achievements, he said a massive change took place in the rural areas through construction of schools, colleges, mosques, madrasas, roads, bridge and culverts. "So people want to see Awami League again in power."

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The industries minister planted a sugarcane plant in the demonstration farm of the mill.

The minister, in his inaugural speech, said country's sugar mills had deposited Tk 2185 crore in tax during post-liberation period although these mills incurred loss.

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Witnesses said a group of about 15 gunmen stormed the office at about 12:30 pm and damaged furniture, windows, panes and doors.

An employee of the office said the contractors attacked the office following altercation with some BIWTA officials over the new rules.