

Russia cuts import duties on a quarter of products

Preparation for WTO entry

MOSCOW, Jan 1: Russian customs authorities announced Sunday that import duties on about a quarter of all products would be cut from January 1, as part of Moscow's bid to join the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Interfax reported, says AFP.

Russia is introducing new customs duties on 3,500 types of commodities, or 30 per cent of all imports, and 88 per cent of these changes will involve a

cut in duties, a spokesman for the state customs committee told the news agency. The import duties on almost all goods, currently levied at the maximum 30 per cent and 25 per cent rates, would be reduced to 20 per cent, the spokesman added.

The maximum import tariffs would be preserved only for those imports that were particularly sensitive for the Russian economy, such as cars,

white sugar, alcohol and tobacco products, the customs committee said. In November, the Russian government announced it would raise the import tariff on white sugar from 25 per cent to 30 per cent, starting January 1.

However, the import duties on vegetables, onions, carrots and other vegetables would be lowered, Interfax reported. Russia has been a candidate

for WTO membership since 1993, when it applied to the WTO's predecessor the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

Informal talks with representatives of the 140-member global trade body are due to start in February, with the most controversial subject likely to be international calls for Russia to free up trade in agricultural products.

Pakistan to hold talks on debt rescheduling on Jan 22

KARACHI, Jan 1: Pakistan will hold formal talks with the Paris Club of official creditors on January 22 for rescheduling part of external debt, Finance Minister Shaukat Aziz said, reports Reuters.

Paris Club meeting is scheduled to be held on January 22 for debt negotiations and rescheduling of about \$1.5 billion is expected, the official AFP news agency quoted Aziz as telling reporters on Sunday evening.

The two sides will first hold technical discussions before formally meet in Paris on January 22, Aziz said.

Pakistan ended a 30-month debt rescheduling period on its \$32.73 billion external debt in December, which was sought after international sanctions following Islamabad's nuclear weapons tests imposed in 1998 caused a balance of payment crisis.

Aziz was also quoted as saying that all conditions agreed with the International Monetary Fund to qualify for a one-year standby loan programme will be met.

The IMF approved a \$506 million standby loan for Pakistan last month with key conditions such as a rise in a petroleum prices, a reduction in net debt assets and fulfillment of tax revenue targets set in the budget.

Pakistan linked domestic petroleum prices on Saturday.



Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori (L) chats with Toyota Motor Corp. Chairman Hiroshi Okuda shortly after he delivered a special message to greet the 21st century by Internet at the countdown event across the two centuries at the prime minister's official residence in Tokyo yesterday. Earlier in the day, the government opened an online exposition that it hopes will boost interest in the Internet as part of a high-profile campaign to make Japan a global leader in information technology (IT).

Investors look to Fed to revive US stock market

NEW YORK, Jan 1: Investors in the US stock market, battered by a flagging US economy and dismal corporate results, are now pinning their hopes on lower interest rates from the Federal Reserve to revive market momentum in 2001, reports AFP.

After an acutely disappointing year, during which all major stock indices weakened substantially, US corporate and investment circles await a meeting January 30-31 of the Fed's policymaking Open Market Committee.

Investors are looking for less stringent credit conditions to make it easier for businesses to grow and consumers to spend, in an economy that is fast running out of steam.

If that happens, they say, there is a reasonable chance that markets could recover in 2001.

From its heady 5.6 per cent in the second quarter, US gross domestic product expanded at an annual rate of just 2.2 per cent in the third.

"The latest indications suggest that growth has slipped into a one to two per cent range and could languish at a similarly sluggish pace in the first

half of the new year," warned Robert DiClemente, an economist at Salomon Smith Barney.

The slowdown, powered by a retrenchment in consumer spending and higher energy prices, cut deeply into company results and share prices.

On Wall Street, the once high-flying Nasdaq electronic exchange, dominated by "new economy" high-tech and Internet issues, plunged from a peak of 5,048.62 points to 2,558 at the close of trade on Thursday, representing a 38 per cent fall on the year.

Faring somewhat better were traditional "old economy" companies listed on the Dow Jones Industrial Average index, which had declined 5.6 per cent in the year to Thursday, and the Standard and Poor's 500, down 9.6 per cent.

Just ahead, according to analysts at Barclays Capital, is the prospect of a further contraction in the growth of consumer spending, which slowed to an annualized three per cent in the fourth quarter, after averaging more than five per cent in the last two years.

Three per cent is not all that bad, said Barclays analyst

Henry Willmore.

"The problem is that an additional deceleration is likely in the months ahead as the full effect of this year's stock market decline is felt."

"Corporate earnings will be disappointing, but the Fed appears to be willing to ease up enough to prevent too sharp a slowdown in consumption."

Barclays is predicting that in the first half of 2001, the Federal Reserve will lower its benchmark federal funds rate -- a target used by commercial banks making overnight loans among themselves -- by three quarters of a percentage point.

After six increases authorized by the Fed in the 12 months to last May, the rate today stands at 6.5 per cent.

Investors took heart after Fed policymakers at their December meeting acknowledged that slower growth, rather than inflation, posed the greater threat to the country. As a result, most analysts are now predicting actual rate cuts in the new year.

The likelihood that credit will be easier to come by is behind expectations that 2001 could see a modest recovery in stock prices.

ROK injects \$3.44b into 6 troubled banks

SEOUL, Jan 1: South Korea injected 4.13 trillion won (\$3.44 billion) in public funds into six troubled banks as part of restructuring efforts, newspapers reported Monday, says AFP.

State-run Korea Deposit Insurance Corp. injected the funds into the banks late Sunday after securing agreements from labour unions to cooperate with restructuring efforts, they said.

Officials were not immediately available for confirmation on Monday, New Year's Day.

Labour unions of Seoul Bank, Peace Bank, Kwangju Bank, Kyongnam Bank and Cheju Bank withdrew their membership with a militant umbrella group -- the Korea Financial Industry Union -- before submitting their agreements on restructuring plans that could include layoffs, they said.

The labour union of Hanvit Bank also promised to cooperate with restructuring efforts.

The government earlier said it would provide a total of 7.1 trillion won (\$5.92 billion) in public funds to the six banks, which were declared nonviable in November, on condition that they first secure promises from labour unions to cooperate with restructuring plans.

Toyota, GM, Exxon plan to develop fuel-cell cars

TOKYO, Jan 1: Japan's Toyota Motor Corp. General Motors Corp. of the United States and the oil major Exxon Mobil Corp. plan to jointly develop environmentally-friendly cars powered by fuel cells, a report said today, says AFP.

The three firms are in the final phase of talks on plans to start marketing their fuel-cell cars in 2003 at the earliest, the major Japanese daily Yomiuri Shinbun said.

Fuel cells, which produce electricity by combining hydrogen and oxygen, are seen by some as likely to replace the internal combustion engine in the 21st century.

The new fuel-cell cars will be powered by gasoline-derived hydrogen which is subsequently used to generate electricity, the newspaper said.

There are no international standards for fuel-cell cars, and the three-way alliance aims to take the lead in the field, Yomiuri said.

DaimlerChrysler AG is developing fuel cells with a methanol method that uses natural gas, the report said.

Toyota and General Motors account for about 30 per cent of the global car market and they hope to win the lion's share of the fuel-cell vehicle market, the report said.

Exchange Rates

Following are yesterday's Standard Chartered Bank foreign exchange rates (indicative) against Taka to major currencies. Central bank buying and selling band of USD: BDT 53.85/BDT 54.15					
Selling		Currency	Buying		
TT/OD	BC		TT Clean	OD Sight	OD Transfer
54.2500	54.2800	USD	53.8150	53.6464	53.5779
51.5165	51.6034	EUR	50.3167	50.1333	50.0567
81.6117	81.6537	GBP	80.1129	79.8464	79.7918
30.7305	30.7550	AUD	29.6608	29.5743	29.4942
0.4785	0.4786	JPY	0.4661	0.4659	0.4649
33.8325	33.8570	CHF	33.2603	33.1658	33.0813
5.7936	5.7987	SEK	5.6964	5.6788	5.6628
36.3363	36.3608	CAD	35.7564	35.6628	35.5796
6.9598	6.9611	HKD	6.8984	6.8807	6.8633
31.393	31.4145	SGD	30.9547	30.9109	30.7963
14.8919	14.9095	AED	14.5023	14.5242	14.4838
14.5784	14.5968	SAR	14.2399	14.2032	14.1850
Usance Export Bills					
TT Doc	30 Days	60 Days	90 Days	120 Days	180 Days
53.7041	53.7277	52.9304	52.4217	51.8688	50.6303
Exchange rates of some Asian currencies against US Dollar					
Indian Rupee	Pak Rupee	Thai Baht	Lankan Rupee	Indo Rupiah	NZ Dollar
46.67/46.69	57.80/57.90	43.35/43.45	82.72/82.81	9625/9725	0.4430/444

The local foreign exchange market was quiet on the first working day of the year. Demand for US dollar was low. Call money market was stable. Call money rate ranged between 7.25 and 8 per cent.

International markets are closed for the weekends.

Money-crazed HK makes economic recovery a top new year wish

HONG KONG, Jan 1: Economic recovery is the top New Year's wish for most of Hong Kong's people, who hope 2001 will bring work for everyone and wage hikes, a survey showed on Monday, says AFP.

The Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies of the Chinese University here found that 37.8 per cent of 843 respondents made economic recovery a leading wish for the new year, against 22.6 per cent last year.

It was followed by 13.6 per cent wishing for employment for all the three-million-strong workforce in Hong Kong and 6.3 per cent putting a wage hike at the top of their list, said the poll, commissioned by Hong Kong's leading Chinese-language newspaper Apple Daily.

Just 4.7 per cent of respondents agreed with Beijing's demand that security is the top concern.

Another 4.6 per cent listed health among their 10 top wishes in the poll and 4.2 per cent a happy life.

A wish for world peace ac-

ROK meets US\$12b trade surplus target

SEOUL, Jan 1: South Korea recorded a 12.1 billion dollar trade surplus last year, authorities said Monday, down from 26 billion dollars in 1999, but just meeting a government target in the face of new economic troubles, reports AFP.

The Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Energy said South Korea exported 172.6 billion dollars of goods and imported 160.4 billion dollars, up 20.1 per cent and 34 per cent increase from a year earlier respectively.

The ministry highlighted the role of higher oil prices which added an estimated 15.1 billion dollars to the growing import bill.

This is the third straight annual surplus since the 1997 Asian financial crisis caused a major recession. But the ministry had predicted a surplus of about 12 billion dollars at the start of 2000.

Semiconductors led the export rankings, accounting for

26.2 billion dollars of trade, up 29.3 per cent on 1999. But officials fear falling chip prices could damage trade figures in 2001.

Computers accounted for 14.8 billion dollars, up 43.5 per cent and textiles 18.6 billion dollars, up 8.8 per cent.

Ministry officials predicted that poor exports of semiconductors, petrochemical products, steel and computers since last November will continue early this year.

Oil imports reached 24.4 billion dollars, surpassing the import bill for semiconductors (19.6 billion dollars).

The ministry predicted a 2001 trade surplus of 10 billion dollars with 191 billion dollars in export and 181 billion dollars of imports.

But officials said this would only be possible if the international oil price stays below 25 dollars per barrel and energy consumption is cut.

Shipping Intelligence

Chittagong Port						
Berth Position and Performance of Vessels as on 01.01.2001						
Berth No	Name of Vessels	Cargo	L Port Call	Local Agent	Date of Arrival	Leaving
J/1	Southern Queen GI (Cobra)	Sing	Aeka	28/11	-	-
J/2	Bay Fortune	Wheat (P)	Bomb	SMSL	22/12	7/1
J/3	Min Jiang	GI	Yang	BDSHIP	24/12	-
J/4	Ocean-1	GI (Log)	Yang	SMSL	29/12	4/01
J/5	Topaz (Liner)	GI	Osak	Prog	22/12	2/01
J/6	Samara	GI (St C)	Mumb	SMSL	3/12	2/01
J/7	Bright Sea	C Clink	Krab	MBL	17/12	2/01
J/8	Yong Jiang	GI	S Hai	BDSHIP	26/12	4/01
J/9	Banglar Urm	Wheat (G)	-	BSC	R/A	-
J/10	Banglar Lanka	Cont	Col	Baridhi	25/12	4/01
J/11	Kota Berjaya	Cont	Sing	Pil(BD)	19/12	2/01
J/12	Arabella	Cont	P Kel	QCSL	25/12	6/01
J/13	Osg Alpha	Cont	Col	Everbest	25/12	4/01
CCT/1	Banglar Moni	Cont	Sing	BSC	27/12	5/01
CCT/2	Orient Independence	Cont	P Kel	Bdship	20/12	4/01
CCT/3	Jurong Balsam	Cont	Sing	Nol	21/12	4/01
RM/11	Banglar Kallol	C Clink	Sikka	BSC	15/12	8/01
CCJ	Ocean Pride	C Clink	Krab	PSAL	11/12	2/01
GSJ	Paragon	Wheat (G)	P Said	Ancient	24/12	4/01
ISP	Iran Mead	R Phos	Jedd	Seacom	14/12	4/01
DD	Banglar Kakoli	-	-	-	9/12	8/01
RM/8	Banglar Jyoti	Repair	-	BSC	R/A	-
Vessels Due at Outer Anchorage						
Name of Vessels	Date of Arrival	L Port Call	Local Agent	Cargo	Loading	Port
Acturia (Cont/12)	1/1	P Kel	QCSL	Cont	Sing	-
Panya Sukhon	1/1	Rang	OTBL	Cont	Sing	-
Unlon Star	1/1	Indo	OTBL	Scraping	-	-
Tog Britoil-27	1/1	Indo	OTBL	-	-	-
Tip Estela	2/4	Basu	-	Urea	-	-
Caio Di Salerno	2/1	Sing	UMTL	Ballast	-	-
Asia-F	3/1	-	Ancient	Wheat (G)	-	-
Xpress Resolve/Cont/12	3/1	P Kel	RSL	Cont	Sing	-
Sunmi Frontier	3/1	-	SBS	C Clink	-	-
Joy Miracle/21/12	3/1	-	SSLL	GI (St Coil)	-	-
Boxer Capt Cook/Cont/12	4/1	-	BDSHIP	Cont	Sing	-
Elucile/72/26/12	3/1	-	UMTL	GI (St Coil)	-	-
Tug Pojoa-1	2/1	Para	Karna	Empty	-	-
Ava	3/1	Yang	MTA	Rice (P)	-	-
Banga Bijoy/Cont/12	5/1	-	BDSHIP	Cont	-	-
Jon Jin	4/1	Indo	NWSL	C Clink	-	-
Mapleridge/72/31/12	4/1	Sing	ASASL	Coil & Mach	-	-
Da Fai/Cont/12	5/1	-	RSL	Cont	Sing	-
Villarica	5/1	P Kel	BSL	Cont	-	-
Qc Teal/Cont/12	6/1	-	QCSL	Cont	Sing	-
Buxmoon	7/1	P Kel	BSL	Cont	Sing	-
Euros	7/1	Yang	SMSL	GI (Y M)	-	-
Eltanin	10/1	Mumb	SMSL	Cont	Sing	-
Kota Chalya (Cont/31/12)	10/1	Sing	Pil(BD)	Cont	Sing	-
Kota Naga (Cont/12/12)	10/1	Sing	Pil(BD)	Cont	Sing	-
Banga Bonik (Cont/31/12)	11/1	-	BDSHIP	Cont	Sing	-
Name of Vessels	Cargo	Last Port Call	Local Agent	Date of Arrival		
Vessels of Kutubdia						
Energy Explorer-IV	-	-	BBAL	5/4		
Ismaya	-	-	BBAL	17/8		
Dea Champion	-	-	Arafeen	R/A/17/12		
Dea Captain	P Mat	Sing	Arafeen	R/A/18/12		
Seabulk Command	-	-	IBS	R/A/22/12		
Vessels at Outer Anchorage						
Ready On						
Kuohsiung (Cont)	Cont	PTP	QCSL	26/12		
Banga Birol (Cont)	Cont	Sing	BDSHIP	26/12		
Xpress Makatu (Count)	Cont	Sing	RSL	27/12		
Kota Singa (Cont)	Cont	Sing	Pil (BD)	29/12		
Tiger River (Cont)	Cont	Sing	NOL	29/12		
Jaami (Cont)	Cont	Sing	Cross	29/12		
QC Pintail (Cont)	Cont	Sing	QCSL	30/12		
Prandya Dattya	F Oil	Sing	CTPL	31/12		
Hui Yang	TSPIPER	Quiz	Unique	24/12		
St Aubin	C Clink	Krab	Everett	21/12		
Vessels not Ready						
Banglar Mookhi	Wheat (P)	Mong	MSA	24/12		
Erados	Sugar	Sant	Litmond	26/12		
Pavonis	Wheat (P)	Mumb	SMSL	28/12		
Cristal	R Phos	Sing	Total	30/12		
Libra	HSD	Juba	ECSL	31/12		
Oriental Green	C Clink	Pilok	RML	31/12		
Courage Venture	CDSO	Para	Seacom	31/12		
Dima	C Clink	Kant	Uniship	31/12		
Prometheus	Wheat(P)	Kaki	Rainbow	1/1		
Movement of Vessels for 02.01.2001						
Outgoing	Incoming		Shifting			
J/2	Min Jiang	J/5	Erados	J/4 Ocean-1 to J/7		
J/5	Topaz	CCJ	St Aubin			
J/6	Samara	RM/6	Jaladoot			
J/7	B Sea					
J/11	K Berjaya					
CCJ	O Pride					
The above are shipping position and performance of vessels at Chittagong						
(COP) (