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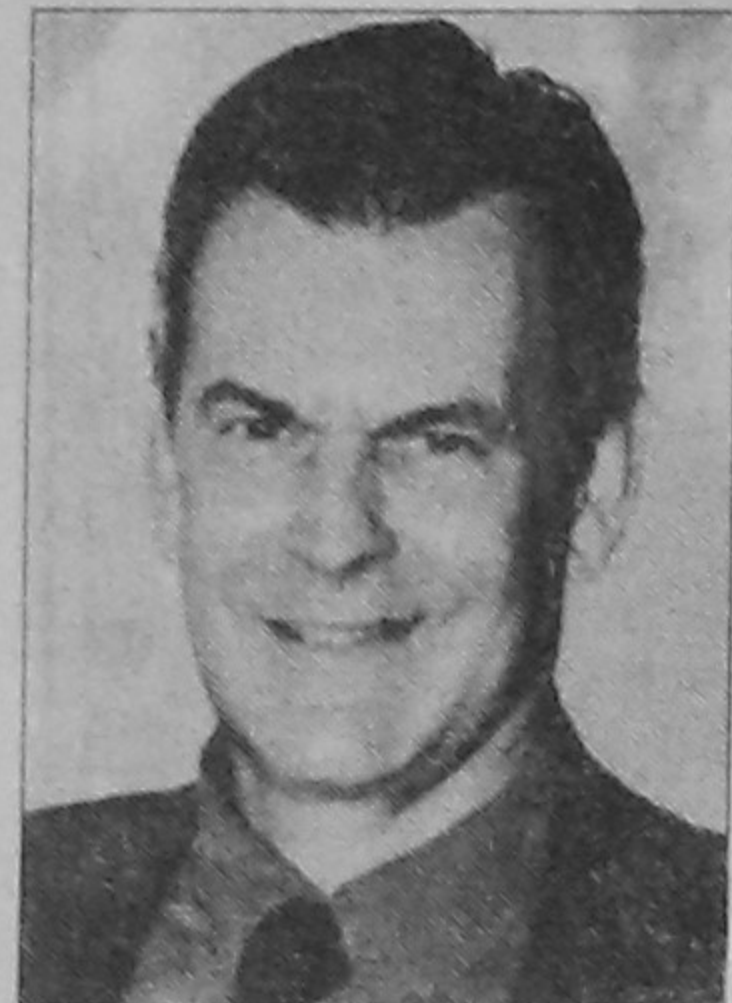
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Nestlé executive vice-president due today



MVO Garrett, Executive Vice President and Head of Asia, Oceania and Africa Zone of Nestlé SA, is due to arrive in the city today on a two-day official visit to Bangladesh.

Carlo M Donati, Head of South Asia Region, will accompany him, says a press release.

During his stay, Garrett will meet Nestlé Bangladesh officials and personalities of the local business community to review the business progress and future plans of the company.

Nestlé Bangladesh is a fully-owned subsidiary of Nestlé SA, Switzerland, the world's largest food company.

Since 1992, Nestlé has invested Tk 110 crore in the business in Bangladesh.

Veriprise Wireless forms alliance with NIIT

Veriprise Wireless corporation, the premier USA-based wireless platform and solutions provider, announced its alliance with NIIT, a global IT solutions corporation, with operations in 37 countries, says a press release.

NIIT and Veriprise have joined hands to offer mobile solutions. This alliance is designed to leverage industry expertise and state-of-the-art technology for leading-edge wireless business solutions.

This relationship will provide organisations access to a wide variety of prepackaged solutions, support services and application-specific expertise.

"We want to maximize the value of wireless solutions delivered to our customers, and NIIT can help us do that," said Chirag Patel, Vice President of Wireless Solutions and Services and co-founder of Veriprise Wireless. "We are excited to be able to combine NIIT's innovative strategies and global focus with our wireless technology to offer our joint customers a high-quality, comprehensive wireless solutions."

The Veriprise Wireless Platform (VWP) product extends corporate data and business applications to any wireless device - from WAP-enabled smart phones to two-way pagers to Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs).

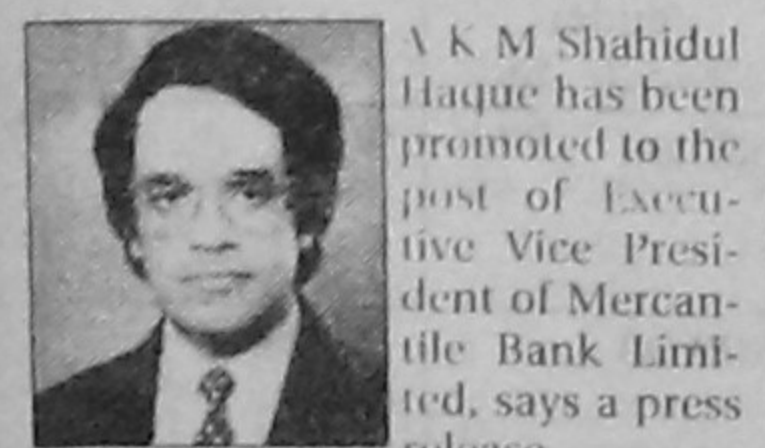
The VWP is based on a scalable, distributed architecture that provides a solid and secure foundation for both developing and managing wireless business applications.

"More and more of today's workers are moving towards full mobility. Delivering applications and data over wireless devices allows mobile workers an unprecedented level of information and productivity," said Vijay K Thadani, NIIT's Chief Executive Officer.

Anticipating it to be the technology of the future, NIIT is laying specific emphasis on wireless technologies and is currently engaged in developing key applications for many organisations using wireless protocols like iMode.

The Bangalore-based Centre of Competence in M-commerce is driving NIIT technology strategy.

New executive vice-president of Mercantile Bank



A K M Shahidul Haque has been promoted to the post of Executive Vice President of Mercantile Bank Limited, says a press release.

Prior to this promotion, he was senior vice-president of the bank. Haque joined Rupali Bank as Probationary Officer and subsequently worked in National Bank Limited and Prime Bank Limited in different important capacities.

He is Secretary to the Board of Directors of Mercantile Bank and simultaneously holding the charge of Human Resources Division. He attended a number of training programmes at home and abroad.

Harkin vows legislation to outlaw US import of Myanmar textiles

'Workers being abused by brutal military regime'

AFP, Washington

A leading US Senator charged Thursday US lawmakers failed to halt a surge in apparel and textile imports from Myanmar, where he said workers are being abused by a "brutal military regime."

Senator Thomas Harkin also vowed to introduce legislation to ban all apparel and textile imports from Myanmar - also known as Burma - and called for immediate congressional hearings into US-Myanmar commercial ties.

The Iowa senator cited a cable sent last July from the US Embassy in Myanmar to the State Department revealing such brand-name US companies as FILA, Jordache and Arrow Gulf are increasingly

turning to Myanmar for manufacturing, where workers typically earn seven cents an hour and factories stay open 24 hours a day.

"It is outrageous that 403 million dollars from American apparel imports last year alone went straight into the coffers of Burma's brutal military regime," Harkin said.

"I will introduce legislation soon to ban all apparel and textile imports from Myanmar."

Harkin said he had requested a copy of the cable from the State Department in November and then had to wait nearly four months to obtain what his office described as "very damaging information."

The cable revealed strong evi-

dence that our sanctions policy in Burma has been far more apparent than real," his office said in a statement, adding Washington had, in effect, allowed the military regime easy access to the US apparel market.

The United States banned new US investment in Myanmar in 1997. Since then, according to Harkin, US apparel imports from the country have increased 372 per cent.

"Since our diplomats in Rangoon blew the whistle last July," the statement said, "US policymakers in the State Department and elsewhere in Washington have done nothing to bring our policy in line with our rhetoric."

The cable said garment manu-

facturers in Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan subcontract orders that cannot be filled under their own US quota restrictions to factories in Myanmar.

"US quotas on Burmese garment imports are high enough that they have never been reached," the cable said.

Simon Billenness, a Myanmar analyst with Trillium Asset Management in Boston, asserted foreign firms doing business in the country are directly financing "the military's purchase of weapons used to deny its citizens basic rights."

"Virtually all foreign companies must enter into joint ventures with the military government's state-owned enterprises."



Denis Winstead, Economic Officer of the Commercial Section, US Trade Centre, US Embassy, Dhaka, inaugurates the 11th Exclusive Sales & Display Centre of Jordana Colour Cosmetics at Eastern Plaza, Hatirpool, Dhaka, recently. A Gafur, Executive Director, American Chamber of Commerce in Bangladesh, and Towheed Chowdhury, Managing Director of T-Mart Group, sole agent Jordana Colour Cosmetics in Bangladesh, are also seen.

Pakistan, Asean agree to narrow trade gap

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan and the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) said Thursday they had agreed to reduce Islamabad's adverse trade imbalance with the ASEAN countries.

A joint statement issued after a two-day meeting of an ASEAN-Pakistan Joint Sectoral Cooperation Committee said the meeting "agreed to the necessity of increasing trade between ASEAN and Pakistan."

"It also agreed that the trade imbalance be reduced by greater private sector interaction and exchange of information through workshops and business council meetings," it said.

The two sides did not give figures of trade between them, but ASEAN secretary-general Rodolfo Severino, who led an ASEAN delegation to the Islamabad meeting, told a news conference that the trade magnitude between the two sides was small.

"So we feel that much has to be done to increase the magnitude of trade and decrease the imbalance in trade," he said.

He said his delegation was impressed by steps taken by Pakistan to encourage foreign investment and added, "Some ASEAN countries may consider Pakistan as a good destination for investment."

He said ASEAN also looked forward to cooperating with the seven nation South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) of which Pakistan and India are the major members.

Dnata Airport services first to win new ISO 9001 accreditation

Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum, Chairman of Dnata, was presented with the certificate of Dnata Airport Services' compliance with ISO 9001 standards at a special luncheon for Dnata's airline customers, says a press release.

First in the industry to gain ISO 9001 year 2001 version, Dnata Airport Services faced the challenge of implementing the standards across a large organisation with 4,000 staff and a wide range of passenger care, ground handling and technical support functions.

After the presentation, Sheikh Ahmed said: "Dubai International Airport is recognised as the major transportation hub for the Middle East and West Asia region. We must now maintain that lead in the same way that we have built it - through vision, planning and hard work. The drive for quality is part of the process. I am sure that ISO 9001 certification marks the start of a new era in Dnata's services to its customers."

The certificate was presented to Sheikh Ahmed by Tony Mouawad, Regional Chief Executive, Bureau Veritas Quality International (BVQI).

Ismail Ali Al Banna, Director Dnata Airport Services said that the 18-month process of implementing ISO 9001 was a huge undertaking. It included creating awareness, mapping processes and procedures, training of volunteers in internal quality audits, setting targets and objectives and training all 4,000 staff in quality concepts and the new standard operating procedures.

NEC denies sale of domestic plants to foreign firms

AFP, Tokyo

Japan's second biggest semiconductor maker NEC Corp. denied Monday that the company was ready to sell off up to four domestic factories, a spokesman said.

"At this moment we have no concrete plan to sell any of the domestic production facilities," NEC spokesman Daniel Mathieso told AFP.

He rejected a report in the Financial Times that the company was prepared to sell as many as four Japanese plants to overseas electronics manufacturing services (EMS) groups, including the US maker Jabil Circuit and Selectron.

But outsourcing of part of its parts processing operations remained a possibility, Mathieso said.

"Outsourcing parts processing may be a future possibility at this moment, namely in telecommunication and PC production," he said.

JB micro-credit creates jobs for 4 lakh rural families

BSS, Dhaka

The micro-credit programme financed by Janata Bank has so far created employment opportunities for nearly 4 lakh families throughout Bangladesh with most of the projects promoting savings for development of equity and capital of the beneficiaries.

This is a part of the government's countryside poverty alleviation programme through various innovative projects as well as the Annual Development Plan to improve the life of the rural poor.

According to Janata Bank sources, it has already disbursed a total of Tk 321.69 crore as micro-credit among 3,70,049 beneficiaries while Tk 60 crore is being distributed during the current fiscal year for the same purpose.

Women constitute at least 60 per cent of the total beneficiaries while the average recovery rate is 85 per cent, officials of the bank said.

They said most of the Self-help

Group (SHG) members, beneficiaries of the bank's micro-credit programme, were now able to meet their credit requirements from own savings since their abil-

ity proved worthy enough to deal effectively with such credit in creating income-oriented jobs.

Successes scored by the beneficiaries include 67 per cent enrolment of children in primary school, 56 per cent contraceptive prevalence rate and an encouraging trend in primary health care.

The officials referring to the experiences of beneficiaries said that accepting group guarantee instead of physical collateral had not posed any problem in implementing micro-credit programmes.

They said formation of strong cohesive groups, group dynamism, group leadership, group decision-making power, participation in group decision, group pressure, monitoring and supervision were viewed more important than collateral.

The bank's micro-credit up to Tk 40,000 is without collateral and the authorities are of the opinion that the poor, especially the women, are good credit users with a high propensity of savings.

Rolls-Royce profits up 18pc

AFP, London

British aerospace giant Rolls-Royce said on Friday that pre-tax profits rose 18 per cent last year to 436 million pounds (682.1 million euros, 638.1 million dollars).

Rolls-Royce announced last August that it expected underlying earnings to be flat in 2001, with earnings growth returning in 2002.

This outlook had not changed, the company said in a statement.

Sales rose 27 per cent to 5.86 billion pounds. Investors welcomed the results, pushing the company to the top of the London leader board, up 8.2 per cent at 207.25 pence.



Activists from workers trade union shout anti-government slogans and march to parliament in New Delhi yesterday to protest against the union budget 2001. Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's government budget proposes allowing industrial establishments employing fewer than 1,000 workers not to require government approval for layoffs and closures, raising the threshold from 100 workers.

Syrian parliament okays free trade zone with Iraq

REUTERS, Damascus

Syria's parliament has approved the establishment of a free trade zone with Iraq and called for greater economic cooperation with Baghdad after two decades of animosity, officials said Thursday.

They said the deal, signed initially in Damascus on January 31 by Iraqi Vice-President Taha Yassin Ramadan and Syrian Prime Minister Mohammed Mustafa Mero, was unanimously approved by the 250-member People's Assembly on Wednesday evening.

Analysts described the accord as the latest phase in the rapprochement between the neighbours, which has included resumption of diplomatic ties and the reopening of land and air transportation links.

Ties between Iraq and Syria,

ruled by rival factions of the Arab Baath Socialist Party, were cut off for the first time after the outbreak of the 1980-1988 Iraq-Iran war, in which Damascus sided with Tehran.

Syria joined a US-led multinational alliance which drove Iraqi occupation troops out of Kuwait in 1991. But it agreed to resume economic and commercial cooperation with Baghdad in 1997, under the oil-for-food programme signed between Iraq and the United Nations that allows Iraq to sell some oil for humanitarian purposes while sanctions are in place.

Approval of the free-trade agreement followed a visit to Damascus on Monday by US Secretary of State Colin Powell, in which he called for preservation of the UN economic sanctions imposed

on Iraq following its invasion of Kuwait in 1990.

Powell said after talks with President Bashar al-Assad that Syria had agreed to put under UN inspection an oil pipeline carrying Iraqi oil to the Mediterranean and Iraqi oil supplies to Syria, estimated at 100,000 barrels per day.

A Syrian official told Reuters on Thursday that while respecting UN resolutions, Syria is calling for an end to the economic sanctions imposed on Baghdad.

"There is no justification for the continuation of these sanctions after all these years, because they are harming the Iraqi people," the official said.

The pipeline, which used to carry oil from the Iraqi Kirkuk oil fields to the Syrian Mediterranean port of Banyas, was reopened late last year after 18 years.



General Manager of Sadharan Bima Corporation, N I Chowdhury, hands over a cheque for Tk 89.82 lakh to Deputy Managing Director of National Bank Ltd, Anwar Imam, against an Export Credit Guarantee claim of Sonali Garments Ltd, in the city recently. Rezaul Karim, Asstt General Manager of ECGD, Mofazzal Hossain, Deputy Manager of SBC, and Ashraf Ali Khan, Asstt Vice-President, Shahjahan of National Bank Ltd, are also seen in the picture.

US economy may avoid recession

Analysts say positive signs to help come out of doldrums

AFP, Washington

A series of positive indicators yesterday suggested the US economy remains weak, but is likely to avoid a severe downturn and may come out of the doldrums soon, analysts said.

The government reported that consumer spending, a closely watched measure of US economic health, rose a stronger-than-expected 0.7 per cent in January, while personal income gained 0.6 per cent.

US construction spending meanwhile rose an unexpected 1.5 per cent in January, the strongest performance since March 2000.

And a key indicator of US manufacturing, one of the weakest segments of the economy, suggested that the decline could be over soon.

The index of manufacturing activity by the National Association of Purchasing Management

rose 0.7 points in February to 41.9, the organisation said Thursday.

The figure indicates that manufacturing activity continued to slow in the United States, but at a slower pace than in January, the NAPM said.

Any figure below 50 in the NAPM index indicates slowing manufacturing activity, while a figure above 50 suggests expansion.

NAPM survey director Norbert Ore said the report contained reason for optimism.

"This could be an indication that the manufacturing sector bottomed in January, though we must caution that it takes more than one month's data to make that determination," he said.

A close examination of the data suggested that the US economy remains sluggish.

The NAPM said that based on historical data, its index would

translate into a 0.3 per cent decline in overall US economic activity for the months of January and February.

And Merrill Lynch chief economist Bruce Steinberg noted that the rise in personal income was skewed by a large amount of one-time transfers, and otherwise was up just 0.4 per cent, and most of that was eaten up by inflation.

David Orr of First Union said that while the headline figures for personal income and consumer spending looked encouraging,

"the hit from energy prices depressed the 'real' gains, with income and spending rising only 0.2 per cent after adjusting for inflation."

Orr also cautioned that these figures do not account for the steep declines in stock prices that could dampen the so-called "wealth effect" on consumer spending.

Dick Rippe, chief economist at Prudential Securities, said Thursday's data suggests there is "reason to think the overall economy can do all right and avoid recession, even though the industrial sector is still declining."

"It would be nice if January was the bottom. I think we are certainly very close to the bottom, certainly in terms of the auto sector," said Mike Carey, North American economist at Credit Lyonnais in New York.

Henry Willmore of Barclays Capital said the data suggest a modest inflation-adjusted growth of 2-2.5 per cent in spending for the first quarter, and overall economic growth of 0.5 per cent.

Another government report showed jobless claims for the week ending February 24 rose 39,000 to 372,000 - a sign that the economy is cooling and producing fewer new jobs.

Lok Sabha approves BALCO sell-off move

REUTERS, New Delhi

The Indian government Thursday won a vote in the lower house of parliament on its decision to privatise Bharat Aluminium Company Ltd (BALCO), the first major state-owned company to be privatised.

Officials said 239 deputies of the 545-member lower house voted in favour of the sell-off, while 119 voted against. Three members abstained. The rest were not present in the house when the voting took place.

Last month, the government cleared the sale of 51 per cent of BALCO to domestic copper and aluminium maker Sterlite Industries Ltd (STRLI).

But the sale kicked up a political storm earlier this week with opposition lawmakers saying the government was selling the cash-rich firm too cheaply.

During the course of debate, the government's position was

strengthened by its regional allies - even those which had demanded greater clarity about the sell-off - who said they would vote for the sale of the state-run aluminium firm.

"The opposition is trying to divide the National Democratic Alliance, we will not fall for it," said Anath Geetha, a lawmaker of the Shiv Sena, a regional constituent of the federal coalition, which had earlier criticised the sell-off.

The biggest regional supporter of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's diverse coalition, the Telugu Desam, also threw its weight behind the move to privatise BALCO, saying that it supported divestment of state firms.

Political analysts say that government's victory in the lower house over BALCO would give it the confidence to go ahead with similar divestment of state-owned firms at a quicker pace.