Riyadh opens telecom sector to foreigners, state monopoly goes

AFP, *Riyadh*

The Saudi government approved a bill Sunday to end the state monopoly on telecommunications and to open up to foreign capital, the SPA agency reported.

According to the agency, the supreme economic council, chaired by Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz, "gave its agreement to the telecommunications bill" during a meeting headed by the crown prince.

On May 14, the Saudi consultative council adopted the measure which permits the establishment of shareholding telecommunications companies, without ruling out foreign investors from holding capital.

A member of the consultative council, Abdul Aziz al-Suwayegh, told the economic paper al-Iqtissadiya at the time that "the bill aims firstly to break the monopoly over the telecom service," which is controlled by the Saudi Telecommunications Co. (STC).

The Saudi government has also been considering plans to privatise the giant firm which also controls the Internet and mobile services. The kingdom has more than three million land lines and almost two million mobile users.

Four foreign companies -- Ericsson of Sweden, Finland's Nokia, and Motorola and Lucent Technologies of the United States -- are bidding to expand the GSM network by one million, according to the Middle East Economic Digest.

Oil-rich Saudi Arabia also has just under 200,000 Internet subscribers and an estimated 600,000 users, figures which IT experts term modest for a population of more than 20 million.

They say introducing competition to the vast Saudi market would upgrade the service and cut its existing high rates.

An international e-commerce conference in Riyadh earlier this month, among a list of recommendations, called on Saudi Arabia to cut telecom rates and promote electronic trade in the kingdom.

EU, S Korea begin shipbuilding talks

Bid to avert WTO showdown

AFP, *Seoul*

European Union and South Korean negotiators began talks here on Monday aimed at averting a World Trade Organization showdown over shipbuilding, officials said.

"The two sides will try to avoid resorting to the extreme means through consultation," a South Korean Commerce, Industry and Energy Ministry official said after the three days of negotiations started.

The EU has threatened to take WTO action against South Korean shipyards unless an agreement is reached by June 30.

Officials kept the detailed agenda for the talks secret, but the European Union has made public accusations that South Korean shipyards have unfairly bid for contracts at below cost prices.

European shipbuilders have accused South Korea of giving unfair subsidies to shipyards, notably Daewoo Shipbuilding and Marine-Engineering Co., by bailing it out with a debt rescheduling program.

Creditor banks seized control of the country's second largest shipyard after the Daewoo Group collapsed in August 1999.

South Korean officials have said the bailout was part of nationwide efforts to restructure ailing industries.

South Korea took more than 40 percent of global orders for new shipping last year, helped by the weak local currency.

Lee Gam-Yeol, director general of the ministry's capital goods industry bureau, is leading Seoul's team while Karl Falkenberg, a director for trade at the European Commission, heads the EU group.

PHOTO: NCCBL

Nurul Islam, Chairman of the Board of Directors of National Credit and Commerce Bank Ltd, delivers his speech at the 16th Annual General Meeting of the bank at a city hotel yesterday. K Z Mahmud, Vice Chairman, all directors, managing director and secretary are also seen in the picture.

NCCBL declares 20pc dividend

National Credit and Commerce Bank Limited has declared a 20 per cent dividend for its shareholders for the year 2000.

Of this dividend, 10 per cent will be paid in cash and the remaining 10 per cent as bonus shares, says a press release.

The dividend was declared at the 16th Annual General Meeting of the board of directors of the bank at a city hotel on Monday.

The meeting was presided over by Nurul Islam, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the bank.

All directors of the bank, Anwar Ahmed, Managing Director, sponsors and shareholders of the bank were present.

The Directors Report and Audited Accounts of bank for the year were approved at the meeting.

Speaking on the occasion, the chairman of the bank dwelt on the activities of the bank during the year.

He said the bank will introduce online operation in some selected branches and ATM, credit card etc. very soon. Computerisation of all the branches is also underway, he added.

He informed that the bank made an operating profit of Tk. 42.92 crore in 2000, which was Tk. 29.11 crore in 1999.

The bank handled export and import business to the tune of Tk. 1794.50 crore in 2000, which is Tk. 575.60 crore than that of 1999.

In the AGM, out of three directors from public shareholder group, one Director Md. Harunur Rashid retired and was re-elected.

China slows down interest rate reform

AFP, *Beijing*

China's central bank Monday put out a none-too-subtle hint that it had slowed down liberalization of interest rates, considered a key element in the reform of the country's banking sector.

In stark contrast with previous official comments suggesting interest rate liberalization was around the corner, the People's Bank of China now says it could take a decade to free up rates completely.

"Five to 10 years are needed in order to allow deposit rates to move in accordance with market principles," the China Securities newspaper reported, citing unnamed central bank officials.

This is in stark contrast to pledges made by the central bank last year to free up interest rates over a much shorter period to speed up globalization of the world's largest developing economy.

"We expect most of this work will be completed within three years' time," central bank governor Dai Xianglong said at a press conference in July. "I give this timetable without any reserve."

Although China has taken steps to free up some foreign-currency rates, no progress has happened since Dai's remarks in the more sensitive area of local currency loans and deposits.

In fact, interest rate liberalization has been put on hold since the fourth quarter of last year, according to Hong Kong bankers close to Chinese financial regulators.

"The main reason is the leadership is right now occupied by just one thing - stability," said Chi Lo, regional head of research at Standard Chartered Bank in Hong Kong.

"The leadership change is coming up next year, and no one wants to be seen as doing anything that might upset the system."

It is generally believed that Jiang Zemin will resign from his positions as communist party leader next year and president in 2003, to be followed into retirement by others, including Premier Zhu Rongji.

Taiwan declares support for China's trade ties with US

AFP, *Taipei*

Taiwan President Chen Shui-bian has held out a new olive branch to rival China in declaring support for the communist giant enjoying normal trading relations with the United States.

During a visit to Guatemala, Chen also told Taiwanese reporters that China should not regard the biggest US arms package to Taiwan in nearly a decade as a shift to a more aggressive US policy over the island.

"We would be pleased to see the US plans, either from the legislative or executive branch, of giving the Chinese communists PNTR (permanent normal trade relations) status," Chen was quoted as saying Monday.

Taiwan would "support" China's PNTR bid, the president said in Guatemala City, according to Taiwanese television.

China was granted PNTR last October but there is grumbling in Congress over China's alleged failure to grant recripocal market access to US companies.

The multi-million-dollar arms package agreed by President George W. Bush in April was strictly in accordance with existing US policy on Taiwan, Chen added.

"The US arms sale was made in accordance with the Taiwan Relations Act and Taiwan's needs," he said.

Washington, which switched its diplomatic recognition of China from Taipei to Beijing in 1979, is required to supply Taipei with sufficient arms to defend itself.

Beijing strongly opposed the arms deal to Taiwan, which it regards as part of its territory.

"We are a country enjoying sovereignty but not a vassal state" of the United States, the Taiwan president added.

China has been further angered by the decision to grant Chen a transit visa through the United States on his way to a five-nation tour of Latin America.

"Even though there was a breakthrough in the US arms sale to Taiwan and in the transit issue, we do not mistakenly think that this represents a significant shift in Washington's policy towards Taiwan and China," Chen said.

Thai GDP growth seen up 2.5-3pc

REUTERS, *Bangkok*

Thai Commerce Minister Adisai Bodharamik said yesterday that year-on-year economic growth in the first-quarter was in a range of 2.5 to nearly 3.0 per cent, based on an estimate made by the Bank of Thailand.

PHOTO: ESQUIRE ELECTRONICS

Thakral Information Systems Private Limited (Bangladesh) opened its new office of BSRS Bhaban recently. Picture shows Mofazzal Hossain, Managing Director of the company, inaugurating the office.

CURRENCY

Following are yesterday's **Standard Chartered Bank** foreign exchange rates (indicative) against the Taka to clients.

Selling			Buying		
TT/OD	BC	Currency	TT Clean	OD Sight Doc	OD Transfer
57.5800	57.6100	USD	56.4700	56.3014	56.2329
49.9363	50.0232	EUR	48.2451	48.0617	47.9851
82.3584	82.4004	GBP	79.8666	79.6001	79.5455
30.3621	30.3866	AUD	28.9160	28.8236	28.7434
0.4813	0.4814	JPY	0.4637	0.4635	0.4625
32.5525	32.5770	CHF	31.6536	31.5591	31.4746
5.4946	5.4998	SEK	5.3439	5.3262	5.3103
37.3821	37.4066	CAD	36.3740	36.2804	36.1972
7.3868	7.3881	HKD	7.2384	7.2207	7.2033
31.889	31.9107	SGD	31.0911	31.0473	30.9326
15.8060	15.8236	AED	15.2413	15.2194	15.2009
15.4761	15.4945	SAR	14.9433	14.9066	14.8884

Usance export bills

TT Doc	30 Days	60 Days	90 Days	120 Days	180 Days
56.3536	56.0059	55.5417	55.0080	54.4278	53.1282

Exchange rates of some Asian currencies against US dollar

Indian Rupee	Pak Rupee	Thai Baht	Lankan Rupee	Indo Rupiah	NZ Dollar
46.92/47.02	62.30/62,60	45.54/45.57	90.60/90.95	11440/11470	0.4239/ 0.4246

US dollar			LIBOR					
	Buying	Selling	Months	1	3	6	9	12
Cash notes	56.2329	57.5800	USD	4.06375%	4.03000%	4.01125%	4.12000%	4.25250%
TC	56.2329	57.5800	GBP	5.19063%	5.22094%	5.23875%	5.29281%	5.34438%

USD			GBP		
	NFCD	RFCD		NFCD	RFCD
1M	3.14%	3.04%	1M	3.98%	3.73%
3M	3.10%	3.00%	3M	3.94%	3.69%
6M	3.10%	3.00%	6M	3.90%	3.65%
12M	3.29%	3.19%	12M	3.90%	3.65%

SHIPPING

Chittagong port

Berth position and performance of vessels as on 28.5.2001

Berth No	Name of vessels	Cargo	L port call	Local agent	Date of arrival	Leaving
J/1	A.A. Venture	GI(St.Mat)	Viza	CLA	21/5	28/5
J/3	Bright Star	Wheat(P)	Momb	MSA	20/4	29/5
J/4	Chopol-2	Sugar	Bank	Seacom	9/5	30/5
J/5	Eltanin	GI(Log)	Yang	SMSL	9/5	30/5
J/6	Annans	L.Scrap	Tilb	Uniship	25/5	7/6
J/7	Jin Cheng	GI	Susa	BDShip	24/5	30/5
J/8	Ban Ann	C Clink	Sing	RML	14/5	3/6
J/9	Sittweie	Rice(P)	Yang	MTA	30/4	4/6
J/10	L Karavelov	GI(MSBIL)	BABB	Kaptai	8/5	28/5
J/11	Sea Bright	Cont	Sing	Pil(BD)	23/5	30/5
J/12	Kota Cahaya	Cont	Sing	Pil (BD)	23/5	30/5
J/13	Acturia	Cont	P Kel	QCSL	18/5	28/5
CCT/1	Xpress Renown	Cont	Sing	RSL	22/5	28/5
CCT/2	Xpress Nuptse	Cont	Col	Everbest	23/5	28/5
CCT/3	Banglar Biraj	Cont	P Kel	BSC	23/5	31/5
CCJ	Agios Fanourios	C Clink	Pada	Seacom	23/5	30/6
GSJ	Nongkhainavee	SodaFeld	Sing	Mutual	14/5	30/5
TSP	Thank God	R Phos	Hamr	Seacoast	12/4	28/5
RM/6	Sylvan Arrow	SKO/HSD	Sing	MSTPL	25/5	27/5
DOJ	Banglar Shourabh	C Oil	-	BSC	R/A	27/5
RM/9	Banglar Moni	Repair	Mong	BSC	11/5	30/5
CUFLJ	Mary Nour	Cement	Bang	BSL	26/5	-
Kafco(U)	Alam Tallag	Urea	Brav	MBL	5/5	29/5

Vessels due at outer anchorage

Name of vessels	Date of arrival	L port call	Local agent	Cargo	Loading port
Banglar Shikha (Cont) 2/5	29/5	Sing	BSC	Cont	Sing
Oil Osprey	28/5	Sing	Arafeen	P Equip	-
Gemini-I	29/5	Sing	Litmond	Wheat(P)	-
Jaami (Cont) 20/5	29/5	Sing	Cross	Cont	Sing
Arabella (Cont) 20/5	29/5	-	QCSL	Cont	Sing
Kota Berjaya (Cont) 20/5	29/5	Sing	Pil (BD)	Cont	Sing
Golden-D	29/5	-	PSAL	C Clink	-
OSG Alpha (Cont) 20/5	30/5	-	RSL	Cont	Sing
Abuja (Cont) 23/5	30/5	-	Everebest	Cont	Col
Brave Eagle	30/5	Hal	UMTL	Demolition	-
Bright Hope (Liner)	30/5	-	Prog	GI(ST/Paper)	-
QC Teal (Cont) 10/5	31/5	P Kel	QCSL	Cont	Sing
APL Colombo (Cont) 24/5	31/5	-	NOL	Cont	Sing
Joy World (72) 10/5	31/5	-	SSLL	GI(ST.C)	-
Cosmic Master (72) 20/5	31/5	Mong	Everett	GI (STC)	-
Tropical Star	1/6	Sing	OTBL	-	-
Ocean Conquest	1/6	Sing	OTBL	-	-
Pioneer Breeze	1/6	-	JF	-	-
Andhika Adikarya (72)27/5	1/6	-	Asa	GI(ST.c)	-
Tug Sm-88	2/6	-	Karana	-	-
BangaLanka(Cont)22/5	2/6	-	Baridhi	Cont	Col
Banga Birol (Cont) 21/5	2/6	-	BD Ship	Cotn	Sing
Kuo Hsiung (Cont) 21/5	2/6	-	Oil	GI (St.Coil)	-
Prima (72) 21/5	3/6	-	Oil	GI (ST.Coil)	-
QC Lark (Cont) 24/5	4/5	-	QCSL	Cont	Sing
Xpress Makalu (Cont) 24/5	4/6	-	RSL	Cont	Sing
Kota Singa (Cont) 27/5	4/6	Sing	Pil(BD)	Cont	Sing
Keng Tung (72) 23/5	5/6	-	Everett	GI (St.C)	-
Banga Bonik(Cont)27/5	5/6	-	Baridhi	Cont	Col
Banga Bijoy(Cont)27/5	5/6	-	Bdship	Cont	Sing
QC Pintail (Cont) 21/6	6/6	-	QCSL	Cont	Sing
Asian Century (Roro/24)27/5	6/6	Sing	JF	Vehi	-

Tanker due

Bitumen Glory	28/5	Sing	H&H	Bitu in Bulk	-
Princess of Rotterdam	28/5	Bintu	Seacom	CP Olen/RBD	-
Eagle Aries	31/5	Sing	MSTPL	HSD/JP-1	-

Vessels at Kutubdia

Name of vessels	Cargo	Last port call	Local agent	Date of arrival
Energy Explorer-IV	-	-	B BAL	5/4
Ismaya	-	-	Arafeen	17/8
Dea Conqueror	-	-	Arafeen	R/A(14/5)
Dea Champion	-	-	Arafeen	R/A (16/5)
Seabulk Command	-	-	IBS	R/A(4/5)
Danat Qatar	C.Oil	Rast	USS	22/5
Banglar Jyoti	C.Oil	-	BSC	R/A

Vessels at outer anchorage

Ready on

Yuan Zhi	WT(P)Y>PE	Sing	Mutual	14/5
Artemis (Cont)	Cont	P Kel	TTL	23/5
Jasmine	M/Wheat	Viza	SMSL	14/5
Silver Fish	C Clink	B ABB	BSL	21/5
Orient Independence (Cont)	Cont	P Kel	TTL	26/5
Jaya Mars (Cont)	Cont	P kel	RSL	26/5
Kota Naga (Cont)	Cont	Sing	Pil(BD)	26/5
Da Fa (Cont)	Cont	HDia	Everbest	26/5
Huai Yang	Sugar(TCB)	Bang	CCNL	23/5

Vessels awaiting instruction

Banglar Urmi	-	-	BSC	R/A(15/5)
Al Bauraq	Ballast	Mong	RML	5/5
Chembulk Trader	-	-	Uniship	27/5

Vessels not entering

Win Star	C Clink	Krab	SBS	23/5
Rindang	Cement	Tuba	SSTL	6/5
Capt. Antonis	GTSP(P)	Safi	PSL	R/A (15/5)
Sentosa	C.Clink	Thai	ANCL	16/5
Merblue	C Clink	Thai	OLM	16/5
Handy Mariner	C Clink	Koshi	SBS	17/5
Caravaggio	C Clink	Cochi	BSL	26/5
Ariston	GI(DPe)	Sing	Rainbow	25/5
Rahi	Scraping	Grec	ARL	14/5
Lassia	Scraping	Beilu	Simni	7/5
Achilles	Scraping	Durb	Simni	23/5
Sonali	-	-	RML	R/A(25/5)
Taraman Bibi	Ballast	Damm	Eastwest	8/5

The above are shipping position and performance of vessels of Chittagong Port as per berthing sheet of CPA supplied by **HRC Group**, Dhaka.