

Cheney tried to help Enron secure payment on \$64m debt from India

AFP, Washington

The White House acknowledged Friday that Vice President Dick Cheney tried to help energy titan Enron secure payment on a 64 million-dollar debt from a large Indian gas project.

White House spokesman Ari Fleischer, insisting that the intervention was made with "national interest" in mind, said Cheney's decision to broach the subject with Indian opposition leader Sonia Gandhi in a June 27 meeting was a perfectly legitimate way to help protect US jobs and taxpayers' money.

"The president views the job of the United States government and its central function as to help protect American jobs, whether those are a result of investments overseas that help create jobs at home or jobs domestically," he said.

Fleischer said protecting American workers' jobs is "a central function" of the government, and that Cheney had merely inquired about the gas project in Dabhol, India, in which Enron had invested 2.9 billion dollars and in which the taxpayer-backed Overseas Private Investment Corporation was also involved.

The project, Dabhol Power Company, was Enron's biggest overseas investment.

"What he did was, he asked about the status of the project," Fleischer said.

"It is an important project to create jobs in America, and there's also a taxpayer exposure as a result of the work that's being done through the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, which is a government agency."

The Dabhol power plant shut down in May 2001 after the state utility that was its only customer failed to pay its bills.

StanChart takes initiative to evaluate service

Standard Chartered in Bangladesh launched a unique service quality initiative in all branches of Standard Chartered Bank and Standard Chartered Grindlays Bank in Dhaka, Chittagong, Sylhet, Khulna, Bogra and Narayanganj yesterday, says a press release.

The service was inaugurated by Masuma Khatun, a customer, in the banking hall of the main branch in Hadi Mansion.

SAA Masrur, Acting Chief Executive Officer of Bangladesh and head of Corporate & Institutions, and AEA Muhaimin, Head of Consumer Banking, of Standard Chartered Group were also present on the occasion.

Standard Chartered strongly believes that the opinion of its customers counts a lot and the new service quality initiative is designed to empower them when they visit its branches for banking transactions.

Each frontline service personnel including tellers and personal Financial Consultants will be identified with a coloured chip, and customers will be requested to rate his or her service at the end of the transaction by dropping the chip in one of the three boxes marked poor, average and good.

The chips will be counted at the end of the day to prepare a score card for each service individual so that the bank can track the level of customer satisfaction and service standards in every branch.

The underlying theme of this initiative is to treat customers as guests and ensure their satisfaction through prompt and friendly services.

IBBL branch managers' confce ends

A two-day branch managers' conference of Islami Bank Bangladesh Limited (IBBL) concluded on Friday in the city, says a press release.

Mir Quasem Ali, Vice Chairman of the bank, was present in the closing ceremony as chief guest and Mohammad Younus, Chairman of Executive Committee, was present as special guest.

Presided over by Abdur Raquib, Executive President of the bank, the programme was addressed, among others, by Director A N M A Zaher, Senior Vice President, Md Habibur Rahman, Foreign Exchange Branch, Dhaka and Md Amiruzzaman, of Biswanath Branch, Sylhet.

Six branch managers were awarded 'Best Manager for the year 2000' in the closing ceremony.



Visitors walk past stalls at the Chittagong international trade fair yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Judge okays plan to revive Enron's trading operations

AP, New York

A plan to revive Enron Corp's flagship energy trading operation, under the control of a Swiss investment bank, was approved by a federal bankruptcy judge.

UBS Warburg, a division of Switzerland's UBS AG, won't pay anything for the Enron division or assume any debt, but Enron and its creditors will get a third of the new operation's pretax profits.

Judge Arthur Gonzalez told a courtroom packed with lawyers on Friday that the sale would be in the "best interest" of the company. He called it "the only mechanism to maintain value for the wholesale trading business."

"The terms and conditions of the agreement are fair and reasonable," he said.

Under the deal with UBS Warburg, Enron and its creditors could get more than \$2 billion in royalties and other payments if

UBS Warburg eventually exercises a buyout option. Restructuring expert Steven Zelin said earlier that the trading operation's value, if liquidated, would be "substantially less" than \$50 million.

"We're pleased by the court's decision and we look forward to re-establishing the business," said David Walker, a spokesman for UBS Warburg.

He said executives hoped to get the business running as soon as possible, but could not immediately provide a timeframe. Lawyers for Enron had predicted earlier that the new division could be operating within two months.

No decision has been made on a new name for the division, but Walker said the Enron name would disappear and the new name would most likely include "UBS".

Enron spokesman Mark Palmer called the judge's approval of the plan "great news."

"It is a key step in our reorgani-

sation of the company so that we can begin to make our creditors whole, pay our employees and hopefully one day soon come out of bankruptcy," Palmer said.

Earlier, Enron lawyer Martin Beinenstock had said the deal would save jobs and "literally create billions of dollars for this estate and its creditors." He downplayed claims by some creditors that Enron traders who will work for the new operation will use their knowledge of the company's existing trading positions for their benefit.

About 800 people work in the division. Many will be part of the new operation, but Walker would not give a precise figure.

Enron collapsed late last year amid revelations of complex partnerships used to keep billions of dollars in debt off its books and mask financial problems so it could continue to get cash and credit to run the trading business.

Ctg int'l fair may be extended

NURUL ALAM, Chittagong

The on-going Chittagong international trade fair scheduled to conclude today may see an extension for a few more days.

Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) President Farid Ahmed Chowdhury while talking to this correspondent said requests were pouring in from different quarters for extension of the fair. The CCCI is the organiser of the event, dubbed as the Millennium Fair.

Ahmed, however, did not specify the extension period. The Prime Minister inaugurated the 25-day fair on December 27 last year.

The fair, being held in Polo Ground Maidan in the port city, houses 30 pavilions and over 250 stalls.

Entrepreneurs from seven foreign countries India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Iran, Thailand, South Korea and USA have taken part in the fair here.

"Some dignitaries including ministers had visited the fair raising its importance," the CCCI President said. "We invited the leaders of other trade bodies of the country to visit it in a bid to raise its attraction. With the increase of visitors the sale in the stalls also picked up."

"I hope this trade fair will have a positive impact on the country's economy -- both in the fields of trade and investments," the chamber president observed.

However, the stall owners were cautious while commenting on the sale. Saiful Islam, who sells fabrics in the fair, said the sale was not up to expectation. He said due to Eid festival pockets of most of the people ran short.

Bakul Das, handloom products seller, said, "We are getting more crowd now but they are very careful this time possibly due to their poor budget after Eid-ul-Fitr festival and Eid-ul-Azha is going to be celebrated in the next month. So the situation has forced them to be very cautious while shopping."

Others in different stalls also echoed the sentiment.

CCCI Senior Vice President SM Nurul Huq said sale picked up from last week. CCCI Vice President M A Latif said all efforts had been made to make the fair attractive.

An amphitheater for presenting fashion and cultural shows and an amusement park for children featured this year's fair.

The goods put on display include computers, handicrafts, jewellery, garments, leather and handloom products, electric cables, electronics, ceramics, aluminum goods, carpets, silk, jute, industrial products, plastic items, toiletries and automobiles.

Butterfly sales confce held in Bangkok

A five-day marketing conference of Butterfly Marketing Limited, an organisation engaged in marketing electronic equipment on installment basis, ended Friday, says a press release.

Held at a hotel in the Thai capital, the conference was presided over by Chairman and Managing Director of the company MA Mannan and attended by about 80 delegates including members of the Managing Board of the company, showroom managers from all over the country, senior officials and representatives of the company's designated advertising agency.

In his speech, MA Mannan said Butterfly is playing an important role in making electronic apparatus available to the low income group people in easy installments.

He urged the officials and branch managers of the company to work with dedication and provide improved services to the customers. He also distributed prizes to the branch manager and other officers for their success.

Fourth R to start operation in Bangladesh

Fourth R Inc, the US-based computer-training centre, is going to start its operation in Bangladesh soon, says a press release.

GP Tech Solutions (BD) Ltd will look after the operational activities of the centre in Bangladesh.

Tazin Alam, Managing Director of GP Tech Solutions (BD) Ltd, Thursday announced this at a press briefing in the city. Robert McCauley, President of Fourth R Inc, was also present on the occasion.

National Life's training course in Kushtia Jan 21-22

National Life Insurance Co (NLIC) Ltd will hold a 2-day training course on 'Life Insurance & Sales Techniques' at Kushtia Zonal Office of the company beginning tomorrow, says a press release.

Dr Ibrahim Mukul, Senior Vice President, NLIC Ltd, will inaugurate the course.

EU seeks retaliation against US in two trade rows

AFP, Geneva

The European Union on Friday asked the WTO to rule on the level of retaliation it was entitled to take against the United States over a US anti-dumping law and a copy-right act, trade sources said.

Four days after the EU won a major victory over the US in another trade row concerning US export tax breaks for US companies, the EU was given the green light here for WTO arbitrators to judge how much damage it is suffering from the two US laws.

But in both cases, the arbitration process was put on hold, the sources said.

The EU is joined by Japan in its complaint that a 1916 US Anti-Dumping Act violates WTO rules, a judgement upheld on two occasions by WTO experts but to which the US has yet to comply.

Suspending the arbitrators' work is designed to give the US Congress time to act and repeal the offending law, the EU representative was reported to have told the meeting.

Japan's delegate said the arbitration procedure could resume at the request of one of the parties, sources said.

Both the EU and Japan stressed the US must change its law, telling Friday's meeting of the

dispute settlement body that they were seeking arbitration on the level of damage to safeguard their rights under the system.

Anti-dumping is action to stop the selling of goods at an unfairly low price on a foreign market.

The 1916 Anti-Dumping Act has not been implemented, but it is considered by European and Japanese companies as an over-hanging threat, discouraging them from investing on the US market.

Rather than requesting monetary amounts of punitive damages, both the EU and Japan have asked permission to take measures which would be similar in nature to the 1916 Anti-Dumping Act.

Pakistan may give subsidies to boost wheat exports

REUTERS, Karachi

Pakistan, faced with a surplus wheat stockpile of two million tonnes, is likely to provide subsidies ahead of new crop arrivals in April to help exporters compete internationally, a senior official said Friday.

The official from Pakistan's Agriculture and Food Ministry said Islamabad was considering either fixing a rupee-dominated export price or offering rebates on exports by private dealers.

In May, Pakistan deregulated wheat exports to allow private sector participation, but the initia-

tive made little headway because of high domestic wheat prices.

"The decision to provide price cuts for export aims to reduce wheat stocks lying in government warehouses before the arrival of new crop," the official said.

The agriculture ministry official said private exporters had been deterred by Pakistan's uncompetitive wheat prices caused by the high cost of inputs such as fertilisers, irrigation water, electricity and storage.

"We have to fix an export price or give some price subsidy to persuade them to export," he added.

Pakistan's military-led government buys wheat from farmers at 300 rupees (\$5) for 40 kg, which translates into 7,500 rupees a tonne, much higher than rupee-equivalent international prices of 6,743 rupees, traders said.

"The government is also considerate for growers, but at the current price levels no exporter can compete in the international market," the official said.

Pakistan had earlier hoped it would be able to supply significant quantities of wheat to war-torn Afghanistan, but those opportunities seem to have faded.



PHOTO: BUTTERFLY

M A Mannan, Chairman and Managing Director of Butterfly Marketing Limited, addresses the company's annual sales conference held in Bangkok.



PHOTO: JANATA BANK

Managing Director of Janata Bank Murshid Kuli Khan addresses the inauguration of a training programme on foreign remittance, financing of agro-based industries and basic computer at Janata Bank Training Institute in Dhaka yesterday.



PHOTO: STANCHART

Standard Chartered Bank has launched an initiative to evaluate its service standard. Photo shows Masuma Khatun, a customer, dropping a chip giving her assessment of the bank's standard of service at the main branch of the bank in the city yesterday.

CURRENCY

Following is yesterday's forex trading statement by Standard Chartered Bank

Selling		Currency		Buying		
TT/OD	BC		TT Clean	OD Sight Doc	OD Transfer	
58.5500	58.5800	USD	57.4000	57.2314	57.1629	
52.5015	52.5884	EUR	50.0507	49.8673	49.7907	
84.9897	84.0317	GBP	81.8538	81.5873	81.5327	
30.8848	30.9093	AUD	28.8009	28.7084	28.6283	
0.4446	0.4448	JPY	0.4294	0.4292	0.4282	
35.4995	35.5239	CHF	34.2824	34.1878	34.1033	
5.6551	5.6603	SEK	5.4431	5.4255	5.4095	
36.4764	36.5009	CAD	35.3456	35.2520	35.1668	
7.5153	7.5166	HKD	7.3553	7.3376	7.3202	
32.067	32.0881	SGD	31.1516	31.1078	31.9932	
16.0723	16.0899	AED	15.4925	15.4706	15.4521	
15.7373	15.7557	SAR	15.1905	15.1538	15.1356	

Usance export bills						
	TT Doc	30 days	60 days	90 days	120 days	180 days
USD	57.2817	56.9282	56.4564	55.9139	55.3242	54.0032
EUR	49.9553	49.6471	49.2357	48.7625	48.2482	47.0962
GBP	81.6779	81.1739	80.5012	79.7276	78.8867	77.0031

The local interbank foreign exchange market was subdued. Demand for dollar was high. Demand for BDT for overnight borrowing at call was steady and the call rate ranged between 7 and 8 per cent.

On Friday in the international markets, dollar lost ground not supported much by the positive consumer and manufacturing data. With University of Michigan's consumer index rising to an unexpected 94.2 and a sizable increase in the regional manufacturing activity, hopes of US paving the way to global economic recovery is running high.

At New York closing on Friday, euro traded at 0.8841/45 against dollar, pound sterling at 1.43 79/85 and yen traded at 132.55/61 against US dollar.

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