

Indian economy picking up

Finance minister pledges soft interest rates policy

AFP, Bombay

Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha said Monday that the Indian economy was moving up a gear after two years of stagnant growth, pledging a "soft" interest rates policy to support the positive trend.

"The economy is showing signs of a pick-up driven by growth in the agriculture sector," Sinha told reporters on the sidelines of a banking summit here organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry. The government last week announced the economy grew 6.3 per cent in the three months to December from a year earlier on the back of a strong agricultural performance.

The growth figure was up from 3.4 per cent in the same period last year.

While the manufacturing industry remained in the doldrums with growth of just 2.8 per cent, the agricultural sector grew 7.1 per cent in the October-December period.

"The interest rates will remain soft in the current fiscal year to March and there are reasons enough for optimism led by other international factors also," Sinha said.

However, he refused to comment on possible rollbacks in tax proposals mentioned in the federal budget for the year to March 2003.

"Changes to the tax proposals, if at all, will be introduced in the parliament. I cannot talk on them outside the parliament," he said.

Sinha said the year to March 2003 would see the government's ongoing economic reforms finally kick in.

"From the look of things, we can expect a better year. The upswing in the agriculture sector will have its impact on other sectors of the economy," he said.

"I am also confident that we have taken economic reforms further from where they were started a decade back."

Sinha also called for sustained reform in the country's banking sector, with the focus on reducing bad loans and consolidation.

India's central bank recently permitted foreign equity participation in private Indian banks of up to 49 per cent.

The finance minister said the government was also working on better foreclosure norms in the banking sector and a stringent legal framework to tackle "willful" defaulters.

"In ládi "a bys 5 5 Meomes to a ank in a Maruti Esteem car for a loan. After a year he returns in a Mercedes to say that he cannot repay the loan. It is this willful defaulter who has to be penalised to control the hefty non-performing assets," Sinha said.

"Regulatory reforms are happening in the banking sector, but structural reforms are not keeping pace," he said, adding that debt restructuring was a key issue ess be all round," he added.

Sinha however did not comment on the issue of privatisation of the state-owned banks as part of key banking sector reforms.

India's central bank holds around 60 per cent stakes in many of the state-owned banks, creating a conflict of interests between its role as a supervisor as well as an owner.



PHOTO: INTERSPEED

Muhammad A (Rume) Ali, Chief Executive Officer-Bangladesh of Standard Chartered Group, hands over a scholarship cheque for Tk 150,000 to Dr Anwar Hossain, Director of the Institute of Business Administration (IBA), Dhaka University, on Sunday to support five BBA and five MBA students of the institute during the academic year 2002. Muhammad Badrul Ahsan, Head of Corporate Affairs of Standard Chartered Group, Bangladesh, and Syed Nadeem Ahmed, Secretary of the IBA, were present.

Swissair becomes 'Swiss'

AFP, Geneva

Nostalgia was mixed with hope as the last ever Swissair flight from New York arrived in Geneva on Sunday before the bankrupt carrier was folded into a new national carrier, named simply Swiss.

There was nostalgia for the company's 71-year history and the golden years when the airline seemed to represent everything that was good about Switzerland -- punctuality and reliability, as well as discreet luxury.

But there was also hope that after the humiliation of last

October's bankruptcy, which left passengers stranded all over the world, a new airline had risen from the wreckage of Swissair on the back of huge state investment.

In a ceremony which evoked the age of the great ocean liners which ended with the dawn of the jet age, the Airbus A330 Swissair plane was sprayed with fire hoses as it docked on the apron of Geneva airport.

Relatively few people were at the airport early on Easter Sunday to see the rainbow which formed over the jet, which already has the new Swiss logo painted on it.

India's state firm to launch cellular phone by August

AFP, New Delhi

India's largest state-run telecom company unveiled plans Monday for the launch of its much-awaited cellular services by August, which is likely to herald a new phase in a savage price war between private and government firms here.

Prithpal Singh, who took over as chairman of Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd (BSNL) on Monday, said the firm was in the process of setting up the service, which is widely expected to give competitors a run for their money.

"We are already at a stage of getting equipment at sites and the infrastructure is getting ready ... We are hoping to start services at some sites in three to four months," Singh told reporters.

Singh said BSNL would try to bring in internationally used GSM-based cellular services along with India's existing limited mobile services.

"In order to cater to all levels of people, BSNL will be working out new strategies to cater to all these categories by starting new (cellular) services," the BSNL chairman said.

Japan manufacturers' index still at minus 38

AFP, Tokyo

The Bank of Japan said Monday its latest Tankan survey showed business confidence was unchanged over the past three months, with the large manufacturers' index remaining at minus 38.

In the March survey, the index of large non-manufacturers' confidence was also the same as the previous Tankan at minus 22, the central bank said.

As a detailed study of Japanese businesses and their plans for the months ahead, the quarterly Tankan survey is the central bank's key source of data for planning.

The indices measure the difference between firms saying economic conditions are favorable and those saying they are unfavorable. A negative figure means a majority of firms believe conditions are unfavorable.

Russian experts leave for US to inspect chicken farms

AFP, Moscow

Russian veterinary experts left for the United States on Monday to inspect poultry producers under a deal to lift Moscow's ban on US chicken imports, the agriculture ministry told AFP.

The US side and the Russians signed a protocol Sunday to lift the poultry ban by April 10 if the United States complied with 13 inspection and certification demands.

Exports to Russia by 14 US meat firms in whose products salmonella -- a bacteria that can cause food poisoning -- was detected, will continue to be banned after April 10 until a full inspection is carried out.

Russia imposed an all-out ban on US poultry imports on March 10 after questioning the use of antibiotics in producing cut-price US chicken legs, dubbed "Bush legs" after they flooded the Russian market in the early 1990s during the presidency of George Bush, the current president's father.



PHOTO: NCC BANK

Anwar Ahmed, Managing Director of National Credit and Commerce Bank Ltd (NCC Bank), addresses the concluding ceremony of a course on financial analysis at the bank's Training Institute recently. Also seen in the picture are (from left to right) Md Omar Choudhury, Director (Training), Md Nurul Amin, Senior Executive Vice President, and Md Tarikul Alam, Secretary to the bank's Board.

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	
51.6177	51.6441	EUR	49.6567	49.5109	49.4516	
83.9783	84.0213	GBP	81.3530	81.1141	81.0170	
31.8102	31.8285	AUD	30.2383	30.1495	30.1134	
0.4424	0.4428	JPY	0.4286	0.4273	0.4268	
34.9866	35.0045	CHF	33.9947	33.8948	33.8542	
5.7036	5.7065	SEK	5.5066	5.4905	5.4839	
36.9005	36.9194	CAD	35.7922	35.6871	35.6444	
7.5143	7.5182	HKD	7.3544	7.3328	7.3241	
31.8587	31.8751	SGD	30.9801	30.8891	30.8522	
16.0724	16.0806	AED	15.5026	15.4571	15.4386	
15.7376	15.7456	SAR	15.1852	15.1406	15.1225	

Exchange Rates of some currencies against US dollar						
Indian Rupee	Pak Rupee	Lankan Rupee	Thai Baht	Nor Kroner	NZ Dollar	AUP
48.78	60.125	95.715	43.510	8.8473	0.4423	0.53505

The local interbank foreign exchange market was active on Monday. Demand for dollar was steady. Demand for BDT for overnight borrowing at call was steady and the call rate ranged between 11 and 12 per cent for the day.

The yen nudged lower on Monday induced by not so positive business data. The Tankan survey showed no improvement in business sentiment upsetting the yen. Swiss Franc gained against dollar as investors moved to the traditional safe-haven due to violence in middle-east.

SHIPPING

Chittagong port

Berth position and performance of vessels as on 1.4.2002

Berth No.	Name of vessels	Cargo	L Port call	Local agent	Date of arrival	Leaving	Imprt Disch
J/1	Al Faihaa	R.S.M.S	Mumb	Mutual	16/3	5/4	477
J/2	Clover Star(Liner)	GI	Sing	Prog	25/3	2/4	2005
J/3	Mana	GI (S.Bill)	Yap	RSA	30/3	2/4	2387
J/5	BanglarGourab	GI (S.Ash)	Pipa	BSC	28/3	5/4	1425
J/6	Mania-K	C.Clink	Kohst	SSA	19/3	3/4	1446
J/7	Weddell sea	C.Clink	Cila	QLM	27/3	6/4	3250
J/8	Cagayang	GI (HRC)	Yang	H&SL	30/3	2/4	1445
J/9	Banglar Doot	Rice(P)	Yang	BSC	28/3	8/4	699
J/12	Kuo Hsiung	Cont	Sing	QCSL	29/3	1/4	33/X
J/13	Kota Singa	Cont	Sing	Pii(BD)	29/3	3/4	378/17
CCT/1	Banglar Shikha	Cont	Sing	BSC	29/3	3/4	199/X
CCT/2	Jaya Mars	Cont	Col	Everbest	30/3	3/4	108/16
CCT/3	Xpress Resolve	Cont	Sing	RSL	29/3	2/4	153/X
RM/14	BanglarMamata	Idle	Viza	BSC	13/2	10/4	
CJ	Africa	C.Clink	Sing	SSA	30/3	5/4	
GSJ	Banglar Kallol	Idle	B.Abb	BSC	10/3	6/4	
TSP	Armour-1	CDSO	Kaki	AMBL	23/3	3/4	
Rm/5	Min Ze Mu	HSD	Sing	ECSL	30/3	3/4	
RM/6	Duke	HSD	Sing	ECSL	27/3	1/4	
RM/8	Belicia	C.Pol	Dumai	Seacom	29/3	1/4	
RM/9	Banglar Kakoli	Repair	Chimney	BSC	24/2	3/4	
RM/10	AA Venture	Repair	Col	Clia	9/3	3/4	

Vessels due at outer anchorage

Name of vessels	Date of arrival	L Port call	Local agent	Name of cargo	Loading
Banga Birol (cont) 20/3	1/4	P.Kel	Bdship	Cont	Sing
Orient Freedom (cont) 23/3	1/4	-	PSSL	Cont	Sing
Hala	1/4	-	Litmond	Rice(P)	-
Chahaya Star	4/4	Yang	Uniship	GI (Log)	-
Suisen	2/4	-	Psal	C.Clink	-
Ocean Breeze	2/4	Sing	Ct	GI (Sto)	-
Oriental Queen	2/4	Jaka	SSA	C.Clink	-
Flores Sea	2/4	Shang	Rkship	Scraping	-
Banga Barta (cont) 27/3	3/4	CBO	Bandhri	Cont	Col
Sinhai (cont) 17/3	3/4	Sing	BSC	Cont	Sing
Mardios (cont) 21/3	3/4	P.Kel	RSL	GI (ST.c)	-
Kangtung (Liner)	4/4	Yang	Everest	GI (Log)	-
Banga Bonik (cont) 27/3	3/4	P.Kel	Bdship	Cont	Sing
Qc Teal (cont) 24/3	4/4	P.Kel	QCSL	Cont	Sing
Kota Naga (cont) 24/3	4/4	Sing	Pii(BD)	Cont	Sing
Baltic Leader (Roro/24) 20/3	4/4	Sing	JF	Vehi	-
Pinya	5/4	Yang	Bnship	Rice(P)	-
Tug Hua an	6/4	Sing	OWSL	-	-
Sub: Barge: Zhong Ren-3	6/4	Sing	OWSL	-	-
Peak (cont) 21/3	7/4	Sing	Pii(BD)	Cont	Sing
Qc Dignity (cont) 27/3	7/4	P.Kel	QCSL	Cont	Sing
Spring Ocean (Liner)	7/4	-	Everest	GI(St.C)	-
Jaami (cont) 30/3	7/4	-	Everest	Cont	Col
Qc Pintail (cont) 27/3	8/4	P.Kel	QCSL	Cont	Sing
Banga Bijoy (Cont) 31/3	8/4	-	Baridhi	Cont	Sing
Triumph Mumbai	10/4	Yang	RML	GI(P.Equip)	-
Qc Honour (cont) 30/3	10/4	P.Kel	QCSL	Cont	Sing
Achiever (cont) 28/3	10/4	P.Kel	RSL	Cont	Sing
Kota Berjaya(cont) 30/3	11/4	Sing	Bdship	Cont	Sing

Tanker due:

Vincita	1/4	-	Seacom	CDSO	-
Eirini	1/4	Jabe	Litmond	Crude Oil	-

Name of vessels	Cargo	Last Port call	Local agent	Date of arrival
Vessels at Kutubdia				
Dea Captain	-	-	Arafeen	R/A(28/1)
Orient Explorer	-	-	Arafeen	R/A(27/3)

Vessels at outer anchorage

Ready on:	Cargo	Last Port call	Local agent	Date of arrival
Qc Larik (Cont)	Cont	P.Kel	QCSL	31/3
Konlink (Cont)	Cont	Sing	Nol	01/04

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

STOCK