

EU ministers to meet on sidelines of WTO meeting

AFP, Geneva

European Union ministers will hold a formal Council meeting early on Friday in Geneva to discuss the crucial global trade talks underway in the Swiss city, the Dutch presidency of the EU said.

Another meeting of ministers scheduled for Thursday (1400 GMT) will be informal, the presidency said as the World Trade Organisation struggled to reconcile differences between its 147 members on bringing down trade barriers.

The EU negotiators, European Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy and Agriculture Commissioner Franz Fischler, are unlikely to be able to present a new compromise formula to their ministers during Thursday's gathering.

The new version of the WTO draft framework laying out the way ahead for global trade talks, notably dealing with agricultural subsidies, has been delayed and will only be available overnight Thursday to Friday, the organisation indicated.

Thai central bank cuts growth forecast

AFP, Bangkok

The central Bank of Thailand on Thursday slashed its economic growth forecast for 2004 by nearly a percentage point to 6.0-7.0 percent partly because of bird flu and drought.

The cut brings the central bank into line with the country's economic assessment body which reduced its forecast to the same level last month after a slowdown in the first quarter of the year.

However, the Bank, which had previously projected growth of 6.8-7.8 percent, said strong domestic spending and exports during the first five months of the year would continue to bolster growth. It estimated that the country's economy would grow by up to 7.5 percent in 2005.

Thailand's economy grew 6.7 percent last year, making it Southeast Asia's strongest performer and the kingdom's best annual performance since 1995.

Closed door talks by big five spark outrage at WTO

AFP, Geneva

Some members of the World Trade Organisation are outraged at secret debates among five key players on how to salvage global trade talks, with one delegate warning on Thursday that a price would be paid.

The comment came as Australia, Brazil, the European Union, India and the United States wrapped up two days of closed door talks at midnight on Wednesday and handed their "guidance" on how to overcome rifts on farm-related stumbling blocks to the WTO's chief farming negotiator Tim Groser.

Groser is due to present a revised proposal on agriculture

later in the day as part of a draft framework for future global trade talks, which must be agreed on by the WTO's 147 member states by Friday night.

"It is catastrophic," declared Switzerland's chief trade negotiator Luzius Wasescha, referring to the negotiating process at the key WTO meeting.

The so-called Five Interested Parties (FIPs) "consider themselves to be the leaders of the world and they are not, they are not even able to negotiate properly", he told a group of reporters outside the WTO's Geneva headquarters.

Asked to sum up the feeling of member states who were not a party to the debate among the five, Wasescha said "total frustration",

describing the rest of the WTO as "uninterested members as only five are interested".

He warned that "the price will come tonight", declining to be more specific.

Meanwhile a European trade official argued that the discussions between the five, which represent both the developed and developing world that so often clash during WTO debates, would be "very helpful" in producing an overall accord.

"We have been trying to work as intensively as possible on the political level and on the technical level," he said on condition of anonymity.

"We are trying to narrow down the positions. The objective is to

give Tim Groser clear and concise guidance where FIPs members see a possible avenue towards a compromise," said the official.

The five powerful delegations realised that a unanimous stance on their side did not preempt an overall accord, he noted.

"We are not trying to cook up something in exclusive terms we are trying to do our best to move things forward," said the official.

"At the end of the day we all have to say yes to agree."

Attempts by the five parties to narrow positions on contentious topics such as export subsidies, domestic support and market access for agricultural products would help Groser to produce a more balanced text, he added.

"I think it will help a lot. Will it be good enough, I don't know."

Underlining the frustration felt by other members of the WTO, however, 27 countries including Switzerland, Japan, China, Chile and Mexico complained at a meeting of the heads of delegations on Wednesday evening that the big five were slowing the whole process as they all struggle to reach a consensus ahead of a Friday night deadline.

"These delegations find it very hard to accept a final text that they don't feel they have ownership of," a trade source said.

Wasescha was more blunt.

"It is a scandal that the five most responsible countries are not able to negotiate and leave the decisions to a civil servant," he said.



RV Ramanujam, chief executive and director of Asian Paints (Bangladesh) Ltd, cuts tape to inaugurate the 1st Colourworld outlet of Asian Paints in Khulna recently.

CURRENCY

Table with 5 columns: Sell, Currency, Buy, and two sub-columns for Buy (OD Sight Doc, OD Transfer). Rows list various currencies like USD, EUR, GBP, JPY, CHF, SEK, HKD, SGD, AED, SAR, DKK, KWD.

Table with 5 columns: Indian rupee, Pak rupee, Lankan rupee, Thai baht, NZ dollar, and Malaysian ringgit. Rows show exchange rates for various currencies.

Local Interbank FX Trading against the Euro on back of robust US consumer confidence data. Positive economic data has reassured the market that the recent pause in US recovery is short-lived and thus raised expectation of US rate hike in the August 10 FOMC meeting. The market is now looking forward to the release of initial US jobless claims, employment cost index and gross domestic product later this week all of which are expected to support the dollar's strength. News that Japan's industrial production fell 1.3 percent in June from May undermined the yen.

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India's biggest IT firm floats IPO

AFP, Bombay

Leading Indian software services giant, Tata Consultancy Services, launched Thursday an initial public offering expected to raise up to 1.25 billion dollars, making it the biggest ever by a privately owned firm.

The firm, which became the first Indian IT company to cross the billion dollar milestone in annual revenues in the financial year that ended last March, is a unit of the country's industrial empire, the Tata Group.

Bombay-based Tata Consultancy Services Ltd, known as TCS, is expected to reap between 935 million to 1.25 billion dollars from the offering.

TCS has said it plans to use funds from the offering -- which will run from Thursday to August 5 -- for expansion and to help the firm revamp its balance sheet.

India's investor community has shown a strong appetite for recent initial public offerings (IPOs), including a slew of share issues by government-owned firms earlier

this year. The government reaped 2.31 billion dollars from the sale of a 10 percent stake in state-run oil exploration giant ONGC.

TCS has set the price band for the offering of 55.45 rupees to 900 rupees per share. The final price will be decided by the book building method. An extra 8.3 million shares may be offered if there is enough demand.

"We have got a very good response so far. We expect most probably that the issue will be fully subscribed by the end of the day (Thursday)," said an investment banker close to the issue who requested anonymity.

Analysts have said they expected robust demand for the shares against the backdrop of a growing US economy and India's booming software and back office business.

The United States and other western nations have shifted many jobs to India with its vast pool of English-speaking graduates willing to work for less pay than in the west.



M Wazirullah Bhuiyan, chairman of National Credit and Commerce (NCC) Bank Ltd, along with managing director and directors of the bank poses for photographs at the 19th annual general meeting of the bank in Dhaka on Sunday.



A training programme titled 'Women's Empowerment and Advancement by Learning and Training of Herself' organised by Women Entrepreneurs Association (WEA) began in Cox's Bazar recently. Rokia A Rahman, chairperson of WEA, inaugurated the programme, sponsored by Fair and Lovely Foundation of Lever Brothers Bangladesh.

STOCK

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Day's Market - July 29, 2004

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Non Traded Issues

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