

Wolfowitz fate still in doubt after WB meet

AFP, Washington

The fate of scandal-hit World Bank president Paul Wolfowitz hung in the air Friday after a crisis meeting of bank directors, as pressure on the former Pentagon number two mounted in Europe.

In a terse and vaguely worded statement, Wolfowitz said he "looks forward to implementing the recommendations of the board," which is broadening its probe beyond the favoritism scandal enmeshing the embattled chief.

The 24 executive directors, who are drawn from governments, met past midnight to discuss revelations that Wolfowitz ordered a hefty salary worth nearly 200,000 dollars for his bank employee girlfriend, Shaha Riza, in 2005.

That has opened Wolfowitz to accusations of hypocrisy as he steers a controversial campaign against corruption in the World Bank's 24-billion-dollar annual lending.

Echoing a statement from World Bank ministers Sunday, the directors expressed "great concern"

over the affair, which has caused a rebellion among the global development lender's 10,000 staff.

"The executive directors agreed on a process to deal with the situation urgently, effectively and in an orderly manner," they said in a statement.

The board appointed a subcommittee to analyze "ethical, reputational and other relevant standards" surrounding not just Riza but other appointments ordered by Wolfowitz at the bank, including of two former White House aides.

Over 136,000 Nepalese leave for foreign employment

XINHUA, Kathmandu

Nepali foreign employment agencies have exported a total of 136,805 job aspirants to 15 different foreign employment destinations in the first nine months of the current fiscal year ending in mid-July, a government report said Saturday.

According to the Labour Department, of the total number of the people who left the country during the period, around 40 per cent were absorbed by Malaysia. Another 26 per cent left for Qatar and around 19 per cent were employed in Saudi Arabia.

The government report has also shown a decline in number of job aspirants leaving for Qatar. In the review period, labor export to second largest Nepali labour absorbing country fell by around 20.9 per cent to 35,056.

Despite lowered exports to the two major labour destinations, the number of job aspirants leaving for Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates (UAE) surged by around 110 per cent and 30 per cent, during the period.

Global mobile phone sales slow

AFP, Washington

Global mobile phone shipments slowed during the first three months of the year, but market leader Nokia still shipped over 90 million handsets, an industry survey showed Friday.

The survey by research firm IDC said overall global shipments grew 10 percent during the quarter compared with last year, as market growth cooled.

Finnish phone-maker Nokia shipped double the number of handsets of its closest rival, US phone maker Motorola, which is struggling to maintain momentum and ring up fresh sales amid a fierce price war.

Nokia shipped 91.1 million units compared to Motorola which shipped 45.4 million handsets.

during the first quarter, according to IDC.

Nokia's year-over-year shipments grew just over 21 percent, but Motorola's shipments dropped 1.5 percent, the survey found. The US firm was the only one of the top five to see a decline in sales.

Samsung, the third largest maker, shipped 34.8 million handsets followed by Japanese-Swedish group Sony Ericsson, which shipped 21.8 million units, and Korea's LG Electronics, which moved 15.8 million phones.

IDC said the slower sales pace was not surprising because so many people already own mobile phones. IDC said fresh demand is expected to come from owners looking to upgrade their phones, rather than from people buying a first phone.



PHOTO: UNITREND LTD
Managing Director of Berger Paints Bangladesh Ltd Masih Ul Karim inaugurates a 'Berger Colour Bank' outlet in Chittagong recently. The company opened another six outlets in the port city last week. Senior officials, among others, were present at the opening ceremony.

Dollar stabilises, but remains near historic lows against rivals

AFP, New York

The dollar firmed slightly against other currencies Friday but remained close to its all-time low against the euro and 26-year lows against sterling as traders consolidated ahead of the weekend.

Analysts said traders would await fresh data on economic momentum in the United States in the coming week, which would offer further clues on the directions of interest rates.

The euro fetched 1.3590 dollars at 2100 GMT from 1.3609 late Thursday, after flirting with its historic record of 1.3666 dollars set on December 30, 2004. It had risen as high as 1.3637 dollars in trading Friday.

The dollar was changing hands at 118.66 yen, against 118.50 yen on Thursday.

Sterling meanwhile edged lower to 2.0026 dollars after 2.0032 a day earlier, near its highest level against the dollar since 1981.

Scotiabank analyst Camilla Sutton said that after the greenback fell 0.6 percent in the past week

against a basket of other currencies, many are expecting further weakness in response to a softening economic picture.

"Data last week continued to support our view that the US economy is weakening," she said in a note to clients.

In the face of this situation, she said, "Our view continues to be that the Fed (Federal Reserve) will be forced to cut rates twice in 2007, whereas the market expects one cut in 2007."

The surging euro meanwhile has led to some angst in the eurozone among officials who worry that a high currency will hurt exports and the region's fragile recovery.

In Berlin, finance ministers from the 13-nation eurozone shrugged off the surging strength of the euro.

"The growth situation in our area is improving, is robust, is broadening," said Luxembourg Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker after chairing a meeting of eurozone finance ministers and central bankers in Berlin.



Nasir Uddin Ahmed, group general manager (Administration) of Dipon Group, a pipeline construction company, and Khandaker Omar Farhan, head of Direct Sales of Grameenphone Ltd, pose for photographs at a corporate agreement signing ceremony recently. As per the deal, the mobile phone operator will provide complete communication facilities under its 'Business Solutions' package for Dipon Group.



Muneer Farooqui, chief executive officer of Warid Telecom International Ltd, and Hamidul Huq, managing director of United Commercial Bank (UCB) Ltd, exchange documents after signing a bill collection agreement recently. Under the deal, the bank will collect bills and receivables on behalf of the mobile phone operator through its branches across the country. Other senior officials from both the sides are seen.

McDonald's Q1 profit up 22pc

AP, Chicago

McDonald's Corp extended its hot streak to four years with a 22 percent jump in first-quarter earnings, and also said Friday it will sell nearly 1,600 restaurants in Latin America and the Caribbean to a franchisee again it pledged to return to shareholders.

The announcement sent the fast-food leader's shares briefly to an all-time high of \$49.70 before they dipped in profit-taking. The once-stagnant stock has quadrupled since falling to \$12.12 in March 2003.

The planned transaction involving restaurants in 18 countries will result in a non-cash impairment charge of \$1.6 billion in the second quarter. But it reduces the company's financial exposure in a challenging region and will net McDonald's about \$700 million in cash.