

Wolfowitz must quit, say ex-World Bank executives

AFP, Hong Kong

More than 40 senior former World Bank officials called Monday for the immediate resignation of its embattled leader Paul Wolfowitz, saying he had lost trust and respect.

In a letter to the Financial Times, the 42 ex-employees called for change following revelations that the bank's president used his influence to ensure a favourable job and salary for his girlfriend.

"We believe that he can no longer be an effective leader," said the letter, which was signed by staff including four former senior vice presidents and 14 ex-vice presidents.

"He has lost the trust and respect of bank staff at all levels, provoked a rift among senior managers, developed tense relations with the board, damaged his own credibility on good governance -- his flagship issue -- and alienated some key shareholders at a time when their support is essential for a successful replenishment of the resources needed to help the poorest countries, especially in Africa."

The letter concluded: "There is only one way for Mr Wolfowitz to further the mission of the bank: he should resign."

In an accompanying editorial the business daily backed the former staff's concerns.

"If Paul Wolfowitz remains head of the World Bank, he will preside over a rudderless hulk," the leaders said.

"That is today's inconvenient truth. The US has always had the prerogative of nominating the president of the bank. But this privilege carries with it a big responsibility. Exercising that responsibility now requires acceptance of an immediate change in the bank's top leadership."

Wolfowitz, a former US deputy defence secretary pivotal in decisions leading to the Iraq war, ordered a hefty salary worth nearly 200,000 dollars for his bank employee girlfriend, Shaha Riza, in 2005.

China to boost oil reserves

ANN/ CHINA DAILY

China's future energy demands will rely more heavily on clean power such as wind and solar, but more oil would be stockpiled in case of emergencies, a top official said.

China aims to boost its oil reserves to amounts equivalent to 30 days worth of imports by 2010, according to Chen Mingde, vice-chairman of the National Development and Reform Commission, during the two-day annual meeting of the Boao Forum for Asia, which closed yesterday.

Oil reserve sites should be located at places where transport infrastructure was advanced, ideally next to refineries, Chen said during a panel discussion.

It was the first time that an official from the commission revealed details about the oil reserve plan.

Chen said the country does not plan to increase its reserves to the levels of many developed countries -- oil imports up to 90 days.

"We have so many areas that need money - education, healthcare and social security," he said.

"We are short of funds. On the other hand, oil prices at international markets are still fluctuating at high levels. If we increase our reserves very aggressively, that will have impact on the price."

Chen said China had decided that it needed oil reserves to deal with emergencies.



PHOTO: ONE BANK LIMITED

Zahur Ullah, first vice-chairman of One Bank Limited, cuts a tape to inaugurate the bank's 24th branch at Dagon Bhuiyan in Feni on Thursday. Directors Asoke Das Gupta and Kazi Rukunuddin Ahmed, and Managing Director (current charge) Farman R Chowdhury, among others, were present.

Citigroup, HSBC launch retail business in China

AFP, Beijing

US-based Citigroup and Britain's HSBC were among a group of banks that started providing local-currency retail services in China Monday after receiving the final green light, state media said.

The group, which also included Britain's Standard Chartered and Hong Kong's Bank of East Asia, began operations after passing an audit by local regulators last week, the China Daily reported.

While the four banks will now in principle have access to the country's two trillion dollars of domestic household savings, the lenders are likely to mainly target China's wealthier customers, the newspaper said.

At the same time, domestic lenders, trying to fend off competition in the retail market, are also stepping up their efforts to court higher-end customers with services such as private banking, it said.

Beijing agreed to open up the tightly held industry when it became a World Trade Organization member in 2001.

SingTel eyes central Asia, Middle East

AFP, Singapore

Singapore Telecommunications is eyeing investment opportunities in central Asia and the Middle East, but its business will primarily be focused in Asia, its new chief executive said Monday.

Chua Sock Koong, who took over from Lee Hsien Yang this month as head of Southeast Asia's biggest phone company, said however that SingTel needed time to understand the new markets well.

"As strategic investors, you need to know these places a lot better before you can make an investment," she said in her first news briefing as CEO.

"Financial investors are somewhat different. You know it's a portfolio approach -- you don't invest in such large amounts so you can get in and out easily."

India may keep key rates unchanged

AFP, Mumbai

Under pressure not to halt rapid growth, India's central bank may keep key rates unchanged when it meets on Tuesday, even though inflation is well above its target zone, analysts said Monday.

Inflation in the world's fourth-largest economy reached 6.09 percent in the first week of the current fiscal year beginning April 1, against 5.74 percent the previous week.

The central bank aims for inflation between 5.0 to 5.5 percent.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI), which has warned of overheating with the economy growing at around nine percent a year, has raised short-term lending rates twice this year, by a quarter of a percent each time, to 7.75 percent.

The rate is now at its highest level in more than four years and the amount of cash that commercial banks must hold on deposit has been raised by 50 points to 6.50 percent.

But analysts said that in the latest quarterly review of monetary policy,

the RBI will keep its powder dry and try to talk down inflationary expectations.

"We expect the RBI to keep policy interest rates unchanged for the remainder of the year," said Rajeev Malik, Asia economist with JP Morgan Chase in Singapore, adding that more "hikes are likely" later this year if inflation remains higher than forecast.

A day before the policy review, the benchmark Mumbai stock exchange 30-share Sensex index crossed the 14,000 points level intraday, its highest level in nearly two months, as investors also discounted a rate hike.

"Recent monetary tightening has been stringent, swift and unexpected. It is maybe too soon since the previous round to tighten again," said Manika Prem Singh, chief economist with brokerage Edelweiss Capital.

The bank is seeking to curb fast credit growth which has been fueling inflation by hiking rates as well as requiring banks to set aside more cash as reserve to drain money from the banking system.

CURRENCY

Following is Monday's (April 23, 2007) forex trading statement by **Standard Chartered Bank**.

Major currency exchange rates			Exchange rate of some currencies		
	BC Sell	TT Buy		Per USD	BDT per Currency
US dollar	69.50	68.50	Indian rupee	41.62	1.66
Euro	95.90	91.61	Pak rupee	60.68	1.14
Pound	140.77	135.57	Lankan rupee	109.65	0.63
Australian dollar	59.44	55.81	Thai baht	34.82	1.98
Japanese yen	0.60	0.57	Malaysian ringgit	3.42	20.16
Swiss franc	58.52	55.58			
Swedish kroner	10.75	9.70	USD forward rate against BDT		
Canadian dollar	62.99	60.36		Buy	Sell
Hong Kong dollar	8.91	8.75	1 M	68.60	69.61
Singapore dollar	47.04	45.17	2 M	68.72	69.82
UAE dirham	19.08	18.50	3 M	68.87	70.04
Saudi riyal	18.68	18.12	6 M	69.32	70.76
Danish kroner	13.28	11.95			
Kuwaiti dinar	236.98	235.25			
*All currencies are quoted against BDT			* The forward rates are indicative only and fixed dated		
* Rates may vary based on nature of transaction			USD rose slightly against the Bangladeshi Taka.		
Local Market			Money Market		
FX: Local inter-bank FX market was active on Monday as the international market opened for the week. The demand for USD remained stable, and the volume of cross currency transaction was more compared to yesterday. The			Money market was active on Monday. Call money rate remained unchanged and ranged between 7.00 and 7.25 per cent.		



PHOTO: STRATEGICA

Rahimafrooz has become the main sponsor of Nirapod KormoKhetro Mela, a safety-health-environment awareness campaign to be held in old town area of Dhaka from April 28 to May 11. Sayeed Hassan, chief operating officer of Rahimafrooz Batteries Ltd, and Syed Mahabubul Alam, managing director of Strategica Ltd, sign an agreement in this regard on Sunday. A N M Sharfuddin (Numan), manager, HR & QMS, and Kazi Javed Islam, general manager of Rahimafrooz Batteries, are also seen.



PHOTO: JAMUNA BANK

Jamuna Bank Ltd has signed a bill collection agreement with Warid Telecom International Ltd recently in Dhaka. Under the deal, the bank will collect bills and receivables on behalf of the mobile phone operator. Muneer Farooqui, chief executive officer of Warid Telecom, and Md Motior Rahman, deputy managing director of the bank, signed the deal.



PHOTO: UTTARA BANK

Uttara Bank Vice Chairman Md Asaduzzaman inaugurates the new premises of the bank's Elephant Road Branch at Alishan Complex on Sunday. Managing Director and CEO Shamsuddin Ahmed and Deputy Managing Director MA Halim were present were also present.

STOCK