

Business Briefs

Agriculture

China faces 'imminent challenge' from WTO

China's entry into the World Trade Organization is posing an "imminent challenge" to Chinese agriculture, National People's Congress Deputy Yao Hui of Tieling, northeast China, stated on March 15. Yao Hui warned that measures to counter the effects of WTO entry on China's traditional agriculture, are "the most important of the important tasks" in rural areas today.

Yao Hui, from a region which is the granary of China, said that China's agriculture is still at its traditional level, and in most rural areas, people still "depend on Mother Nature for food." The lack of mechanization is the cause of high production costs and high prices, as well as the poor quality of harvests. China's staples, such as corn, wheat, and paddy rice, are not competitive in the international market.

Agriculture must be restructured, Yao Hui stated. In addition, it is essential to educate farmers, so that they will be able to improve agricultural production. This work must be undertaken "with a sense of urgency and crisis," he said.

Crop mixtures must be restructured, to produce more cash crops and diversify production, including by expanding animal husbandry. Such methods have raised farmers' incomes to 2,700 yuan (about \$340) a year in Tieling. Water conservancy projects are also essential, he said.

West Africa

Plans for economic integration mapped out

The heads of state of West African nations met in the Nigerian capital in late March and mapped out plans for economic integration, the Nigerian daily *Guardian* reported. Most important was that there was a consensus to improve infrastructure ties, which are being promoted most strongly by Nigeria and Ghana, with the French-speaking states of Togo and Benin strongly lining up with their

larger neighbors.

A feasibility study, which should be completed within six months, was agreed on by the seven countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) for two regional rail links. One is to run from Lagos, through Cotonou and Lomé, to Accra; the other, from Lagos through Niamey to Ouagadougou. On energy, the summit adopted an accelerated approach toward implementation of a 330 kilovolt interconnection among Ghana, Togo, Benin, and Nigeria; tying in all other member countries will also receive priority attention. Also discussed, and being spearheaded by Nigeria and Ghana, is a plan for a West African shipping line, a regional airline, and cooperation in telecommunications.

Put into immediate effect, according to the final communiqué, were: "All checkpoints on international highways within [ECOWAS] are to be dismantled henceforth. The mandatory residency permits are also to be abolished." There will be joint border patrols by neighboring states Niger, Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Ghana, Burkina Faso, and Mali, to monitor and police national borders, in addition to closer collaboration between the police and internal security agencies. Prior to the meeting, Nigeria took the lead by removing all such checkpoints and embarking on measures to curb corrupt practices by customs and security officials on highways, according to statements by President Olusegun Obasanjo.

Technology

Indian satellite to assist education

On March 21, a European Ariane 5 rocket placed India's Insat 3-B satellite into orbit, which will be exclusively dedicated to providing communications for mobile services in urban and rural areas, including for education and health care.

Insat 3-B, India's tenth telecommunications satellite and the sixth it has built domestically, is the first in a new series of third-generation telecommunications satellites. The multi-purpose Insats have been used for television broadcasting, meteorological ob-

servations, and communications.

The Indian government has been able to beam instructional television programs to remote areas, but now, with the Insat 3-B, interaction between students in remote areas and teachers will be possible, and rural schools will be able to download texts and lessons. Until now, the only two-way communication between teacher and students has been by telephone.

Insat 3-B will also inaugurate telemedicine capabilities in India, where more than 70% of the nation's 450,000 doctors work in cities. "Transponders [on the satellite] will be reserved to set up voice, video, and data links between top city hospitals and health-care clinics in remote villages," stated Dr. Ramamurthy Ramani, deputy director of satellite communications for the Indian Space Research Organization, in Bangalore. Health-care providers in rural and isolated areas will have access to the specialists in the top Indian hospitals.

Medicine

Nigerian doctor given patent for AIDS vaccine

The Nigerian Ministry of Commerce has granted patent rights to Dr. Jeremiah Abalaka, a Nigerian surgeon who claims to have developed both preventive and curative vaccines for the AIDS virus, the Nigerian newspaper *Vanguard* reported on March 3, 24, and 27. *EIR* is further investigating this development.

Dr. Abalaka is quoted that the patent right now allows him to mass-produce and market the vaccine in Nigeria, but not in other African countries. The human immunodeficiency virus, which causes AIDS, has infected about 2.6 million Nigerians. It is noted that "many Nigerians are trooping to his Medicrest Specialist Hospital, in Gwagwalada, in search of the vaccine."

According to Dr. Abalaka, at least 16 of over 500 patients currently taking the treatment have had their sero-positive status reverted to sero-negative, while others have had their viral load reduced almost to non-detectable levels.

Nigeria's National Institute for Pharma-

A MEKONG RIVER pact to facilitate trade and travel was signed by Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, and China, after four years of negotiations, the Thai daily *The Nation* reported on March 8. Along the upper Mekong, from the Simao area in southern China to Luang Prabang in Laos, 14 new ports will be opened.

THAILAND'S heavy industries, designed to serve the domestic market, are being restructured for export. The petrochemical industry, nurtured to serve domestic demand that was projected to grow exponentially, now needs to export about 50% of its output. Steel is in a similar situation. Thus, the collapse of domestic demand, not cheap labor, is the source of "steel dumping" in the United States.

XEROX announced on March 31 that it will lay off 5,200 employees worldwide, including about 10% of its U.S.-based middle- and upper-level management, and shut down several manufacturing plants in the United States.

GERMANY said on March 28 it will authorize 4 million deutschemarks (about \$2.5 million) to rebuild the bridge over the Danube River at Novi Sad, Yugoslavia, which was destroyed by NATO. The move is seen as a gesture toward the Serbian opposition, which has criticized the West for not repairing damage from the war, using the excuse that Slobodan Milosevic is still in power.

PRIVATIZATION of water resources worldwide was pushed at the United Nations Second International Forum on Water, which met in Holland in March to discuss a proposed "Hague Declaration on Water Security in the 21st Century."

FAMINE threatens 12 million people in the Horn of Africa, including in Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, Kenya, and Uganda, according to the UN. These are nations where British-instigated wars have been raging, and the situation has been made worse by drought.

ceutical Research and Development is quoted saying that the vaccine had reduced significantly the viral load in two patients with HIV being monitored by the institute. It not only investigated the physician's claims, but also brought in the "Atlanta-based Center for Disease Control in order to give Dr. Abalaka's work the needed international recognition," according to the newspaper. "We note that Dr. Abalaka had written many embassies explaining his work but has been generally ignored. Their reaction is understandable; what good can come out of Africa?" the newspaper commented ironically.

Petroleum

India-Nigeria oil deal means broader partnership

India and Nigeria have signed a major oil deal which could cement a strategic energy partnership. At the conclusion of the two-day meeting of the Indo-Nigerian Joint Commission, Indian External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh pointed out that Nigeria, according to the deal, would eventually supply oil to India at the rate of 120,000 barrels a day. "The importance of the agreement lies in obtaining the backing of the Nigerian government for assured oil supplies to India," Jaswant Singh said.

Pointing to the urgency which Nigeria attaches to the implementation of the economic agreements, Nigerian President Olu-segun Obasanjo, who was the special guest at India's Republic Day celebrations on Jan. 26, said that "the need of the moment is action."

The deal is seen by Indian analysts as an important "building block" in New Delhi's quest to achieve energy security. India has indicated that in the short run, Nigeria, the Persian Gulf, and Southeast Asia, especially Indonesia, are expected to be India's major energy suppliers. But Bangladesh, Qatar, and Turkmenistan are also likely to emerge as India's partners for its energy supplies, especially natural gas.

India and Nigeria will also cooperate in power generation. India's Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd. has submitted a proposal for the construction of a 370 megawatt power plant, in addition to a 110 MW captive ther-

mal power unit for a Nigerian steel mill. Nigeria has also requested that India overhaul the Soviet-equipped Ajaokuta steel mill. A decision is expected within the next two months.

Banking

German mega-mergers fuel rich-poor divide

Germany is being divided into the "A people" and the "B people," where 20% are making money and 80% are becoming obsolete, the daily *Bildzeitung* reported in stories on March 23 and 24 on the effects of mega-mergers in the banking sector. Although the merger of Deutsche Bank and Dresdner Bank may fall through, the policy is increasingly dominant among banking institutions.

The paper reported on the intention of Dresdner Bank to split its customers into two categories. The first category, those customers with at least 200,000 deutschemarks (about \$125,000), were to continue banking with the new entity resulting from the merger of Deutsche Bank and Dresdner Bank. The remaining customers were to be shifted to Bank 24, where the small customers of Deutsche Bank are already being sent. This meant that 11 million customers would have to do their banking at the 1,700 tiny offices of Bank 24, so that Deutsche Bank and Dresdner Bank could concentrate on the asset management of their wealthy customers.

On March 24, under the headline "Up-roar by the Enraged B People," the daily published statements by several ordinary people who are angry about the Dresdner Bank and Deutsche Bank plans. Futurologist Horst W. Opaschowski is quoted, saying that the move toward a "two-class system" under "turbo capitalism" will become the most important issue of the 21st century in Germany. An example, he said, is that the large private banks are only interested in doing business with the wealthiest 20% of the people.

However, says *Bildzeitung*, the 80% will know how to fight back, "this the fat banks can be assured of. . . . The gentlemen in pin-striped suits are underestimating the rage of the affected people."