

Perspective

World Contracting News, Views & Comments

Submit your news for publication to Denise Anderson at danderson@bscai.org

THE WORLD

Global Growth Looks Promising

According to Anne O. Krueger, First Deputy Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), 2004 was the best year for global GDP growth in decades as most parts of the world recorded improved growth performance. She states the prospects for 2005 remain favorable, although growth is likely to be at a slower, more sustainable, pace: from an estimated 5% in 2004 to under 4.5%. Factors that have helped in the growth are global trade, which is currently expanding at something close to twice the rate of growth of world GDP, and a sharp fall in inflation worldwide. Efforts to improve economic performance, policies and structure such as the shift to floating exchange rates on the part of many emerging market countries, have significantly reduced vulnerabilities. However, as Ms. Krueger notes, now is the time, while the global economy is performing well, to take measures that will further improve the flexibility adaptability of economies going forward. Areas she pointed to that are cause for concern are: 1- The US Current Account deficit. Since the US economy continues to be the primary driver of global growth, if deficits persist, they can have an impact on the outlook for global growth, and stability. 2 - Persistently weak growth performance of the Euro area. More rapid growth in Europe would ease pressure on the global imbalances. 3- A more buoyant Japan. This would also help ease global payments imbalances. After a year of rapid growth in Japan's economy through mid-2004, growth has slowed in recent quarters—a result, in part, of a correction in the IT sector, although economic activity should remain stable throughout 2005. 4 - Continued reform in emerging markets. A significant reduction in debt levels is essential if debt sus-

tainability is to be achieved over the medium and longer term; but with overall fiscal balances in the 3-5% range, ratios of debt to GDP are falling relatively slowly in all but the most rapidly-growing economies. According to past experience, emerging market countries with debt to GDP ratios of more than 40% are much more likely to experience difficulties in debt servicing—historically some two thirds of all such problems occurred in countries with ratios above 40%; and half of all debt servicing problems were encountered in countries with ratios of 60% or above.

AUSTRALIA-NEW SOUTH WALES

High Court Rules On Employment Agreements

Under the Howard Liberal Government's jurisdiction, contractors can engage labor under industry awards or alternatively seek to register a Certified Agreement or an Australian Workplace Agreement. Whilst both types of agreements must pass a "no disadvantage" test as against the relevant industry award, they do offer greater opportunities for flexibility. In a recent decision of the High Court (Electrolux Case) the Court ruled on two counts. Firstly, unions could only take protected industrial action about matters "pertaining to the employment relationship". Secondly, actual agreements could only be certified or approved if they contained "matters pertaining to the employment relationship". Existing Agreements however already contain a number of elements that may be deemed to be outside of the employment relationship which means protected industrial action cannot be taken upon renewal and the agreements themselves may be ruled invalid. BSCAA along with many other employer bodies eagerly awaits the outcome of the Workplace relations Amendment (Agreement Validation) Bill 2004 which will give greater certainty to this important

matter. The Bill passed through parliament on 17th December but has been referred to the Senate for an inquiry.

AUSTRALIA-NEW SOUTH WALES

Government Moves On Workplace Relations

The recently re-elected Howard Government has been quick to act following its election promise to introduce radical reforms to the Australian industrial relations system. Just prior to Christmas the Government introduced two workplace reform bills into Parliament. Both Bills have been referred to a Senate committee for inquiry. In summary, the Bills seek to restrict the right of entry of union officials on the one hand and protect small business operators from redundancy obligations on the other.

AUSTRALIA - SYDNEY

BSCAA Celebrated 40 Years In February

BSCAA held a gala dinner in Sydney on Friday 25th February. National President, John Lazzari, said, "the occasion would be an historic opportunity for industry participants to come together, to reflect on the evolution and growth of the industry and to catch up with colleagues in a spirit of celebration.

BELGIUM-BRUSSELS

EU To Benefit From New eGovernment Services

Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs)-companies usually employing under 250 employees and less than 25% owned by another organization-wishing to set up a subsidiary in another Member State of the European Union are currently faced with many bureaucratic obstacles, creating prohibitive costs including the need to travel to the new location to register the company and to sort out social security issues for staff being relocated. More than 250 participants from all EU Member States debated the priorities for eGovernment in Europe during a conference entitled "Cross-border eGovernment services for administrations, businesses and citizens" in Brussels. New EU eGovernment services will open up access and cut red tape for the free movement of people, goods

and services across Europe. Though some hurdles must still be overcome to reach this ambitious goal, a blueprint for the future technical infrastructure of eGovernment in Europe was presented at the conference. The discussions at the conference focused on: means to seize public procurement opportunities in other Member States and a reduction of the flow of paper documents to improve the efficiency of trade procedures. Paper administration is estimated as one of the major challenges to the international trade. According to World Trade Organization,(WTO) 7 - 10 % of the total value of global commerce (i.e. about 400 billion USD) is spent in the process of document exchange that accompanies the respective deals. Currently, 63% of the EU workforce is employed by SME's.

BRAZIL - BRASILIA

Brazil Economy A Model For Success

The First Deputy Managing Director of the IMF cited Brazil as an example of successful economic reform. Brazil has benefited from significant reductions in inflation rates and accelerating growth at a time when the country has been making great strides in reducing its debt burdens and restructuring its debt profile. Brazil experienced a major crisis in early 1999 when, in the wake of the Asian and Russian crises, the government was forced to abandon its fixed exchange rate regime and introduce wide-ranging reforms. By the middle of 2002, less than three years ago, Brazil was widely seen as being on the brink of another crisis, brought about by speculation about the economic policies that might follow the 2002 presidential election. The elected government committed to economic reform. As a result, prudent fiscal policies—including a primary surplus of 4.6% of GDP in 2004—have paved the way for more rapid growth and falling inflation. Growth accelerated in 2004 to about 5.2% and is expected to come in at around 3.7% in 2005, while inflation has fallen from 12.5% in 2002 to 7.6% at the end of 2004, and is projected to be at 5.1% by the end of 2005. The country's external financing needs have fallen sharply: and are now down to about a third of their peak in 1999 and the external debt position has improved markedly. As a percentage of GDP it still has a considerable way to go before reaching the levels of the mid-1990s; but as a percentage of exports, the ratio is already below mid-1990s levels. While total public debt remains relatively high: both as a percentage of revenues and as a

percentage of GDP, the ratios have started to improve slowly. The reserve position has improved since 2001, but reserves need to be built up further. In other words, a great deal has been achieved in Brazil; and while there is still a way to go, Brazil's program remains on track, which bodes well for the future.

CANADA-CALGARY

Firm Wins NATO Contract In Afghanistan

ATCO Frontec, which provides site support services and facilities management to the defense, transportation, telecommunications and resource sectors, has been awarded a contract from NATO Maintenance and Supply Agency (NAMSA), NATO's principal logistics support agency located in Luxembourg. The one-year contract, with three option years, is to provide facilities and service support at the Kabul Afghanistan International Airport and takes effect March 1, 2005. ATCO Frontec project personnel will arrive in Kabul by mid-February and will begin supplying information technology support, camp support services, equipment and facility maintenance and engineering services. The contract is in support of NATO and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), which includes Canadian Forces personnel, who are assisting the Government of Afghanistan in its nation re-building efforts. ATCO Frontec will support the NATO Facility located at Kabul International Airport and act as prime contractor with subcontractors performing specified work.

CANADA-QUEBEC

Group Combines To Create Largest In Province

The Distinction Group Inc., which offers services in the commercial cleaning and janitorial services sector through its subsidiaries Service d'entretien Distinction Inc. and Distinction Plus Inc., in the mechanical maintenance sector through its subsidiary Service d'entretien Montcalm Inc., and in the sectors of disaster intervention and air quality, through its subsidiary Steamatic Inc., consolidated two of its subsidiaries, Service d'entretien Distinction Inc. and Service d'entretien Montcalm Inc., thereby creating the largest building maintenance group in the province of Quebec with sales volume exceeding 80 million

dollars annually. According to the president and CEO of the group, this move meets the objective to supply customers with a wide range of integrated services and will allow the company to implement its plan of expansion and acquisition in Ontario and in the rest of Canada. The company has a work force made up of more than 2,500 salaried employees, associates and franchisees.

FINLAND-HELSINKI

Finland Currently Strong But Future Weak

According to a recent IMF Staff Report, currently, Finland's fiscal position is comparatively strong, with economic growth driven by the emergence and rapid expansion of the high-technology sector. However, Finland faces the demographic challenge of aging earlier than most other advanced economies. The old-age dependency ratio—defined as the ratio of the population aged 65 and older to those 15–64 years old—is projected to rise from 25 percent to around 37 percent by 2020. Driven by declining fertility rates and rising life expectancies, the ratio is projected to reach over 48 percent by 2050. The economic impact of aging will be major and the increased spending on old-age pensions will likely account for the bulk, rising to an estimated 36 percent of GDP by 2050. Finland's tax burden remains among the highest in the world and high marginal tax rates set in at comparatively low-income levels. The overall tax ratio in Finland is about 5 percentage points of GDP higher than the EU average, exceeded only by Sweden and Denmark. The government is attempting to reduce the tax burden. The 2005 budget includes a three-percentage point reduction in the corporate tax rate (to 26 percent), and a one-percentage point cut (to 28 percent) in the personal capital income tax rate and the authorities have pledged a further one percentage point of GDP reduction in labor taxes through 2007. But, without offsetting expenditure cuts or higher revenues from a rise in employment, these tax cuts are likely to raise the burden of fiscal adjustment, ahead of the onset of aging-related spending pressures. The effects of Finland's centralized wage bargaining system on labor market outcomes also plays a role by underpaying highly productive workers, while resulting in increased unemployment among the low-skilled. The authorities have tried to counter the effects of wage compression by subsidizing low-skilled employment through tax credits for domestic work, which has become quite

popular in recent years. As demand for low-wage personal services is likely to increase with population aging, the impact of wage compression is likely to be felt to a greater extent. The government has taken some steps to address the situation by putting into place initiatives to promote employment, especially of the low-skilled and older workers and implementing a significant reform of the pension system in 2005. Some of the reforms being introduced are, reduced pension benefits, pension benefits linked to lifetime earnings, an increase in the current retirement age with a sharp increase in the accrual rate after age 62, benefits weighed against prices instead of wages, an increase in pension contributions by employees aged 53 and over, an increase in the minimum age for part-time pensions from 56 to 58 years, and a halving of the accumulation of pension rights by part-time workers, previously equal to that for those working full time. However, alternative pathways to early retirement remain, complicating attempts to improve the pension system. Recently, the number of new retirees as a result of disability and unemployment has far outweighed the number of those earning standard old-age pensions. With the working age population projected to peak at about 2010, and decline by a cumulative 16 percent by 2050, absent more sweeping reforms and/or a sharp increase in productivity, the Finnish economy's potential growth is set to decline markedly.

FRANCE-PARIS

Graffiti Cleaning Company Under Investigation

The Prosecutor's office in Paris has been investigating a French graffiti cleaning company and its manager, Albert Ruimy, since July. The company, Euronettoyage, was allegedly trying to bribe a French railway employee in charge of awarding contracts, to secure a graffiti cleaning contract for the firm with the railway, SNCF. Ruimy has claimed that the payment he made, in the amount of 35,000 euros, to the SNCF employee was a loan to help the employee buy a house in Brittany. A Paris lawyer has also been implicated for advising Ruimy to pay the employee via a check. However, the lawyer states he suggested a check payment simply as a trap to expose corruption at the railway. While SNCF has acknowledged it has been questioned by the police on the matter, it is unaware that any of its employees are facing prosecution.

FRANCE-PARIS

Concern For Environment Has A Stronger Role

The Organization for Economic Community Development (OECD) recently conducted an environmental performance review of France and noted that while the country has made great strides, including the growing awareness of the links between the environment and health and the stronger action being taken in this regard, the need to manage pollution, natural resources and biodiversity in France continues to be a major challenge. Concerning health, the establishment of the French Agency for Environmental Health Safety (AFSSE) in 2001 and a review of links between the environment and health paved the way for the National Health and Environment Plan in 2004. The plan aims to reduce and prevent health risks connected with the environment in the broadest sense (including the outdoor and indoor environment and the work environment). Long experience with environmental information (e.g. state of the environment reports, publication of economic data on the environment, environmental indicators) and effective and improved monitoring ensure that information is actively disseminated. The right of access to environmental information is enshrined in French law and can be invoked in court; the Environmental Charter gives it constitutional force. Under the 2002 Law on New Economic Regulations, listed companies are required to account in their annual reports for the social and environmental consequences of their activities.

GERMANY-BERLIN

DOD Will Spend \$100M To Protect Euro Bases

After the US announced in late 2004 it would withdraw approximately 70,000 US troops from Germany, Germany has decided to recall 2,500 of its troops that had been protecting about 50 American bases in Europe. Germany has been providing protection on the bases since early 2003. As a result, the Pentagon will be spending \$100 million to hire private security guards to protect its bases in Germany. As US forces are being stretched due to various global engagements, the military has increasingly turned to private contractors for services such as security and janitorial. The Center for Public Integrity in September reported the Pentagon spends half its annual budget procuring services

and goods from contractors — more than \$900 billion over the last five years. Some 56 percent of the money paid to defense contractors in 2003 went for services rather than weapons or supplies, according to the watchdog group. While the practice leaves military bases vulnerable as contractors rely on cheap foreign or local labor, and contractors may be more expensive in the short-term, Pentagon officials point out that they don't come with the same long-term healthcare and retirement costs.

INDIA-NEW DELHI

India On Track For Another Strong Year

India is on track for another year of robust growth in 2004/05 as growth rebounded to 8 percent in 2003/04, the highest level in over a decade. An IMF staff report notes that financial market confidence in India remains strong and an increase in credit has led to a renewed investment cycle, with growth projected at 6 percent in 2005. However, inflation has been running higher, driven largely by supply-side factors such as rising international oil and steel prices. Wholesale Price Index (WPI) Inflation is projected to end 2004/05 around 6 percent, before declining to an average of 5 percent in 2005/06. While the trade deficit is widening (2.6 percent of GDP in the fiscal year to end-December), there is a current account surplus of 1.7 percent of GDP and reserves remain comfortable, having reached US\$129 billion by mid-January.

JAPAN-KOBE

Coverall Continues Expansion in Japan

Coverall Cleaning Concepts, announced the opening of a new Coverall Regional Support Center in Kobe, Japan, managed and operated by Mr. Kazuyuki Horinouchi and owned by Mr. Nobuhiro Matsui. All the franchise owners servicing accounts in his Japanese market offer a complete range of commercial cleaning services focusing on the cleaning of medical centers, government agencies, office facilities and many others, all supported by the high standards and strong reputation of Coverall Cleaning Concepts. Matsui's new Kobe Support Center provides Coverall Cleaning

Concepts' franchise owners assistance on issues pertaining to their individual franchises, and keeps them abreast of the latest news and trends in the commercial cleaning industry. The center is currently open for business, and is located at 6-3-14 Mikagenaka-machi, Higashinada-ku, Kobe-city, JAPAN, 658-0054. For more information please call 06-078-845-2412. Coverall also has a large presence in Osaka. The Osaka Support Center is managed by Mr. Yoshihiko Oda, President of Daikichi Coverall. The center is located at Uranus 21, Shimanouchi 1-13-28, 2nd Floor, Chuo-ku, Osaka-shi, Osaka 542 Japan. For more information, please call 011-81-6-6241-7350.

JAPAN-KOBE

Finance Ministry Seeks Services For Buildings

Daizou Nakayama, Director of Coordination Division, Kobe Customs and the official in charge of disbursement of the procuring entity, has posted a notice seeking bids for cleaning services for 10 buildings, in the Kobe Customs Headquarters area. The performance period will be from 1 April, 2005 through 31 March, 2006. Bids must be submitted by 2:00 PM, 23 March 2005. For more information contact, Yuji Kawabata, procurement section, Accounting Division, Kobe Customs, 12 Shinko-cho, Chuo-ku, Kobe 650-0041 Japan TEL 078-333-3019.

NEW ZEALAND-WELLINGTON

Real Estate Firm Manager Of AXA Portfolio

CB Richard Ellis has been appointed manager for the New Zealand AXA portfolio. Its properties include the AXA Centre at 80 The Terrace, Wellington, the AXA Centre at 41 Shortland St., Auckland, and the HP Tower at 49 Symonds St., Auckland. Together, the three properties have a net lease area of almost 38,800 square metres, with 10,554sq m in the Wellington AXA Centre, 17,380sq m in the Shortland St. building and 10,860sq m at Symonds St. CBRE's senior director of asset services, Warren Hutt, says the appointment reflects the commitment the company has made to property and facilities management in New Zealand. There has been significant growth in its managed portfolio

in Wellington, Christchurch and Auckland during the last 12 months. CBRE also manages the State Insurance Tower and Mobil on the Park in Wellington for AMP NZ Office Trust.

PARAGUAY-ASUNCION

Headway Made But Challenges Ahead

A mission from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) visited Asunción during February 1-11, 2005. The mission was headed by Mr. Alejandro Santos and met with Finance Minister Borda, Central Bank President González, senior officials, as well as business and legislative representatives. The main findings of the mission were: macroeconomic performance was significantly better than anticipated in 2004, as real GDP grew by almost 3 percent, the highest in almost a decade. Inflation fell below 3 percent in 2004, one of the lowest in the region, and the lowest in Paraguay in more than two decades. The fiscal accounts were in surplus for the first time in a decade and international reserves are at record highs. The main challenges for 2005 will be to consolidate the macroeconomic gains of the recent past and to continue implementation of the structural reform agenda. An important objective for 2005 will be to maintain fiscal discipline while paying due regard to social spending and on the structural side, while there are many challenges ahead, the IMF notes efforts should be concentrated on implementing the public banking reform agenda.

SOUTH KOREA-SEOUL

Unemployment Rates Up

Government reports note that South Korea's unemployment rate rose to nearly a four-year high of 3.6 percent in January due to an increase in the number of new job seekers. According to the National Statistical Office the number of people without jobs increased to 904,000 in January from 855,000 the previous month although the office claims the numbers do not reflect current economic conditions. Early indicators pointed to an economic rebound but the unem-

ployment figures dampened the outlook although authorities do expect the figures to improve. Service jobs fell 1.6 percent from a month earlier, while positions in the transportation, telecommunications and finance sectors fell 0.7 percent. President Roh Moo Hyun's administration is setting aside 100 trillion won (\$98 billion), or 59 percent of its annual budget, for spending in the first half of 2005 to help meet its target of creating 400,000 jobs this year.

TAIWAN-TAIPEI

Looking Out For Foreign Migrant Workers

The Council of Labor Affairs (CLA), hoping to improve communication and opportunities for foreign migrant workers, is going to allow foreign workers to seek new employers through three public announcements, up from the current two. The CLA is drafting an amendment to the Regulation Governing the Transfer of Foreign Migrant Workers To Employers which stipulates that if the employer of a foreign migrant worker dies or emigrates, or the employee has been laid off, the worker may be able to switch employers through a local Vocational and Employment Center by putting up a public announcement. Prospective employers may then hire these workers by attending public bids at the centers. However, labor rights groups point out that employers can still easily deport migrant workers, particularly if the workers don't meet their standards, in order to meet hiring quotas. The groups also ascertain that due to language barriers, many hires are unaware of their job descriptions and rights. They suggest the best way to handle the situation is to eliminate the bidding process altogether for workers looking to change employers.

UK-CAMBRIDGE

Prison Service Slated For Reform

Her Majesty's Prison Service has appointed Lambert Smith Hampton to advise on the expansion of its £ 5.5 billion estate. LSH won the contract, covering site acquisitions and disposals, planning and estate management in England and Wales

for the next three years, over CBRE, Chesterton, DTZ and Knight Frank. The estate includes 130 prisons, excluding privately owned facilities. Previously, the service kept most of its property work in-house, but in light of the significant changes proposed, it felt an external advisor necessary.

UK-MANCHESTER

Demand For Office Space Up

According to a survey by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors demand for office space in England and Wales is rising at its fastest rate in four and a half years, indicating a market rebound and a positive corporate outlook. Most of the growth shown in the fourth quarter of 2004 was in northern and southern England, some of it attributed to the Government's relocation of various departments to regional areas. However, demand in other sectors such as retail and industrial, remained stagnant and lease lengths were still in decline with landlord inducements, such as periods of reduced rent, prevalent. London, which is experiencing an excess supply, is the one bleak spot with many office spaces remaining vacant.

US-WASHINGTON

Free Tool To Access Germany's Market

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the German Institute for Standardization (DIN) offer a free service that gives U.S. exporters, including chemical manufacturers, access to DIN product standards to dramatically improve their opportunities to sell in Germany and the European Union (EU). For U.S. exporters, Germany is the largest single market in the 25-country European Union with chemicals export sales of \$3.3 billion in 2003. These exports represented 13 percent of the \$26.5 billion in U.S. manufactured merchandise exported to Germany in 2003. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce points out that American companies interested in exporting products to Germany should do their homework to make sure they know precisely which standards apply to their products. As the largest market with the most stringent standards in Europe, Germany's existing standards will likely form the basis for eventual European standards. The entire EU market for U.S. chemical exports totaled \$28 billion in merchandise sales in 2003. The U.S.-based DIN INFO-POINT office can access almost one million of the

most important German and European standards, enabling American companies to bid and compete in these markets successfully. For a nominal fee, hard copies of detailed standards can be purchased. More information DIN@USCHAMBER.com.

CORPORATE MEMBER NEWS

Ecolab

Ecolab Inc.'s no-rinse floor cleaner WASH 'N WALK™ took top honors as the most innovative new cleaning product for the foodservice industry, in the cleaning and chemical category of the North American Foodservice Grand Prix New Product Awards sponsored by the International Foodservice Distributors Association (IFDA) and the Canadian Council of Grocery Distributors (CCGD). The awards, presented in January at the IFDA Partners Executive Forum in Washington, D.C., identify and recognize innovative new products within the North American foodservice industry. The competition is judged by a panel of experts including operators, culinary experts, distributors and trade press. The judging includes preparation and sampling of each product in a test kitchen and an analysis by the judging panel. Products are ranked upon uniqueness and innovation, product attributes, operator convenience and quality appeal. Ecolab launched WASH 'N WALK™ to foodservice customers in January 2004, meeting the contest parameters of product introductions between Nov. 1, 2003, and Oct. 31, 2004.

UPCOMING EVENTS

BSCAI Annual Convention and Trade Show

Orlando, Florida
April 1-5, 2005

Visit the BSCAI website at www.bscai.org for more information or call 703-359-7090.

16th Congress of the World Federation of Building Service Contractors

Seoul, Korea
October 16-19, 2006

Visit the WFBC website at www.wfbc.org and the website at www.kasmo.or.kr for more information.



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888-568-4606 www.mercuryfloormachines.com

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