

# Star BUSINESS

DHAKA SATURDAY DECEMBER 6, 2003 E-mail: dsbusins@gononet.com

## Bush steel tariffs move avoids trade war

AP, Washington

By scrapping steep tariffs on imported steel, President Bush puts himself in the middle of an electoral brawl between Midwest and Rust Belt states he will need to win re-election, even as he averts a global trade war targeting other political battlegrounds.

Minutes after the White House announcement Thursday to repeal the tariffs, Democratic presidential candidates lambasted Bush as shunning the US steel industry by caving in to threats from global trading partners.

Even more telling, Republicans who usually ally with Bush from politically key Rust Belt states declared their dismay in what Rep. Bob Ney, R-Ohio, described as "bad news" and a "disappointing setback."

But the decision will surely endear Bush to manufacturers of automobile parts, refrigerators, door hinges and hundreds of other steel products in just-as-politically-crucial states in the Midwest that eluded him in 2000.

"There's no question it will help," said Rep. Joe Knollenberg, R-Mich., who represents 1,500 auto parts businesses in his district and fought to end the tariffs when they were imposed in March 2002. Bush lost Michigan in 2000 by a slim 217,000 votes out of more than 4.1 million cast.

Michigan, along with Minnesota and Wisconsin, account for a total of 37 of the 270 electoral votes needed to win next year's presidential election. The key steel-producing states of Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Ohio hold 46.

Facing the threat of a trade war, Bush lifted the nearly 2-year-old tariffs but promised to continue monitoring imports vigilantly to guard against a sudden flood of foreign steel entering the country.

## Go for commercial farming for more value addition

### Agri-invest seminar urges farmers, entrepreneurs

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

As banks are lowering interest rate on agriculture loan, speakers at a seminar yesterday urged farmers and entrepreneurs to go for commercial farming for more profitability and value addition.

Speaking at the concluding session of a three-day seminar on 'Agri-Invest 2003, Bangladesh', they said farmers should not get themselves confined to sustenance farming.

They said crop production apart farmers and entrepreneurs should spread agri-production to fisheries, livestock, dairy, poultry, horticulture, medicinal plants for sustainable growth of the sector which accounts for 23 per cent of gross domestic products and 62 per cent of national employment.

On the sidelines of The Agri-Invest 2003 Bangladesh, the first ever agri-based exposition in the country, which concluded yesterday, a total of 12 seminars were organised at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre, the venue of the event.

State Minister for Agriculture Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir said the entrepreneurs should utilise the incentives like easy term loan for agriculture, duty waiver in capital machinery and support for fertiliser, irrigation, seed, insecticide for rapid growth of the sector.

Chairing the concluding session of the seminar series, Finance Secretary Zakir Ahmed Khan said agri investors should utilise Equity

and Entrepreneurship Fund (EEF) for expansion of business.

"Tk 100 crore in EEF remained unutilised in last financial year due to want of good project proposals from entrepreneurs," he said, urging local investors to come up with innovative ideas for agriculture growth.

The interest rate in agriculture loan will come down further by December which he said will encourage more investment in the sector.

Dr Kamal Uddin Siddiqui, principal secretary to the prime minister, said rearing of goats can be a profitable investment which also can help reduce poverty in rural areas.

The government is offering easy term loan for goat rearing, he said calling upon private sector investors to take advantage of government incentives in agriculture.

Board of Investment (BoI) Executive Chairman Mahmudur Rahman said research, training, technology and awareness are required to improve quality of investment in agriculture.

Referring to the prime minister's declaration at the inaugural ceremony of Agri-Invest 2003 that the Ishwardi Export Processing Zone will be exclusively dedicated to agriculture industry, the BoI chief said this will open new opportunity for local and foreign entrepreneurs to invest in the key sector.

## Indian finance minister rules out interim budget

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Finance Minister Jaswant Singh Friday dismissed the possibility that the government would present an interim annual budget in February before general elections next year.

There were fears that an interim budget would be weak on reforms and take away the momentum of an expected 7.0 percent growth this year.

"There will be no vote-on-account budget. As the prime minister has said that general election will be held as per schedule, so there will be a full budget," Singh said.

The general elections are due to be held in October while the budget is presented every year in February.

Singh said that the budgetary policies would give a renewed thrust to reforms, with heavy emphasis on the agricultural sector, which makes up nearly a quarter of the economy.

## Oil falls after Opec decision

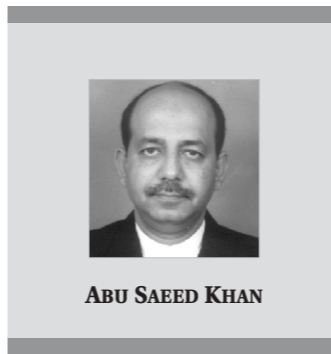
REUTERS, London

Oil prices fell on Friday as speculative investors took profits following Opec's decision to leave output unchanged and as a rally fueled by cold weather forecasts in the United States lost steam.

U.S light crude was down 22 cents at \$31.04 a barrel, while London's Brent crude was 16 cents weaker at \$29.07.

During a volatile session on Thursday, oil prices dropped by more than half a dollar immediately after news that the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries was leaving output unchanged, though it would meet again on February 10 to review its policy.

## Telecom: Missed fortune brings misfortune



ABU SAEED KHAN

It happened at Mont-Blanc Restaurant in Palexpo, Geneva on October 17. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) was hosting farewell cocktail for the exhibitors and visitors of its quadrennial extravaganza called Telecom World.

Swiss vineyards may not be as prestigious as its watch industries. But the Helvetian cellars don't disappoint the connoisseurs of Bordeaux or Tuscany either. Earlier, on October 11 while having lunch with the media, the ITU's Secretary General Yoshio Utsumi joked, "You would better drink a lot and not ask me any difficult questions."

The media was, certainly, not drunk and Utsumi survived. Because the telecom industry has been scratching its head since 2000 and mumbling, "www" -- what went wrong?

Therefore, similar questions were needless to repeat for Utsumi.

But in the farewell party, Hamadoun Touré, ITU's Director of Telecommunication Development Bureau or BDT, revealed what has been going wrong with Bangladesh. Voice of this charismatic African lion is equally firm and warm like his grip. "I am grateful to Bangladesh for its vote in electing and re-electing me in ITU."

Hamadoun's department assists the ITU's member countries with various telecom development projects. We had extensive discussions on various issues pertaining to the development of ICT and

telecom sectors of Bangladesh. I asked Hamadoun about non-existent Bangladeshi officials in ITU. He said Bangladesh government should have forwarded the CVs of its candidates.

I remembered how our telecom ministry had been sitting on just retired BTTB's chairman FQM Faroque's application for a senior position in ITU during early 2001. Merit of this extraordinary telecom engineer is being wasted in the ghetto of telecom regulatory com-

lutely free for Bangladesh. "It is not a charity, but the fundamental right of Bangladesh as a member state of the ITU," he said and repeated, "But you have to ask for it."

Hamadoun said that ITU, being the world's oldest telecom body, has the best information of worldwide telecom experts in its fingertips. "No organisation can match the quality of ITU's expertise in ICT and telecom," he challenged.

ber, is aware of it. But BTTB management has been concealing these opportunities and consistently misleading the government on sectoral reform issues.

Our neighbours have been steadfast for sustainable ICT development, exploiting ITU's assistance. Whereas our ICT task force (actually task-force) have locked the nation in the fantasy kingdom of billion dollars software exports and VoIP legalisation! How long the elite will mislead the country to

## PASSWORD

All it needs is a simple email from Bangladesh government to get the handful assistance from ITU. BTTB, being the ITU's member, is aware of it. But BTTB management has been concealing these opportunities and consistently misleading the government on sectoral reform issues. Our neighbours have been steadfast for sustainable ICT development, exploiting ITU's assistance. Whereas our ICT task force (actually task-force) have locked the nation in the fantasy kingdom of billion dollars software exports and VoIP legalisation! How long the elite will mislead the country to overlook the treasures it deserves?

mission. We are pretty good at making fire woods out of mahogany.

However, I said unlike Nepal, Bhutan, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka Bangladesh has been getting no project assistance from ITU. The BDT chief replied, "We have money but the cue is long and Bangladesh has to apply for it. All I need is an email, requesting for assistance, and I immediately respond to it."

Hamadoun Touré said ITU provides free hardware and software along with necessary training, for spectrum management, to the telecom regulators. "We are ready to assist on drafting the licenses for fixed, mobile and other services," said the BDT chief.

He also confirmed that ITU can help in restructuring the BTTB if Bangladesh government desires. Hamadoun Touré categorically said all these services are abso-

I complained about the scarcity of ITU publications among the telecom professionals in Bangladesh. "It is equally expensive and difficult for Bangladesh to make payments in Swiss Francs for every purchase," I commented.

Hamadoun said, "Bangladesh gets 80 per cent discount on any purchase of ITU publications." I argued, "But sending payments to ITU remains a problem due to our orthodox foreign currency regulations."

"Bangladesh doesn't need to pay anything upfront," he explained, "Tag your payments for publications with the membership fees." The farewell party was getting over. Neither Hamadoun nor I had any chance to eat and drink. I left Palexpo with a perplexed mind.

All it needs is a simple email from Bangladesh government to get the handful assistance from ITU. BTTB, being the ITU's mem-

overlook the treasures it deserves?

Our prime minister is attending the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Geneva. She is also addressing this summit on December 11. ITU is hosting this first of its kind assembly of global leaders.

It will be politically correct, strategically advantageous and decisively effective if the PM seeks ITU's assistance to build a sustainable information society. It will be not a donor-beggar game but a rare opportunity to establish the right of Bangladesh as a member country.

Bodies concerned like our permanent mission in Geneva should ensure Bangladesh presents a realistic proposal when our PM formally meets the ITU secretary general. Hamadoun Touré, ITU's director of BDT, will attend that meeting. Trust me.

The writer is a telecom analyst

## STOCK