

Investments in ASEAN: Present and Future-I

By Jamal Uddin Ahmad

I recently attended a conference organised by the ASEAN Federation of Accountants (AFA) in Bangkok as a delegate of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Bangladesh. The theme of the conference was "AFTA - new challenge for ASEAN accountants". There were several technical sessions of which two drew maximum participation and interest of the delegates. They were (i) "Investment incentives and impact on the industrial sector in the ASEAN countries" and (ii) "Structural reforms in ASEAN financial market". The standard of the papers presented, level of commentaries made and the floor participation of the delegates were excellent and highly informative. There was much information to gather from this conference with my fellow professionals as well as persons who are involved in some way or other in the economic development of Bangladesh whether within the Government or out of it.

I have made several visits to the ASEAN countries in the last three or four years. During these visits I have had extensive interactions with a wide cross section of people. I have visited important institutions and have exchanged views with Bangladeshi business people who have multi-dimensional and extensive commercial relationships with these countries.

Since the middle of the eighties, I became aware that the economic balance was slowly and steadily shifting from the west, dominated by the USA and EEC, towards the East. Reagonomics which had created

an economic rejuvenation in the west was gradually running out of steam. Japan, being constantly clobbered to slow down her exports to the west and particularly to the US, was forced to look towards east particularly ASEAN for new investments and new markets. The opening up of China was the greatest single economic development of the decade of eighties which necessitated new economic realignment to be drawn on entirely new perceptions. Direct Foreign Investment (DFI) assumed a role of extraordinary importance in drawing up the national and regional strategies for economic development. DFI not only meant capital investment, it also was the most important vehicle for access to modern technology and international markets. Unlike others, ASEAN countries were quick to respond to these signals early on and did not lose time to create a most congenial and hospitable environment for the DFI inflows to move in. Today they have replaced South Korea, Taiwan and Hongkong as the most popular centres for DFI. How is it possible for countries of ASEAN to achieve such a spectacular industrial transformation when barely a decade ago all these countries' economies excepting that of Singapore were largely commodity based? The other marvel of this accomplishment is that this was achieved without having to run up huge external debts. This is where the foreign investment particularly direct foreign investment had played its spectacular role.

A number of recent studies have concluded that investment

incentives are not the primary concern for potential investors. In a study of US investors in ASEAN, it was found that only a relatively small number of their affiliates reported being influenced by incentives, due in large part to their attempt to avoid bureaucracy. Similar conclusions were found in an opinion survey conducted in Malaysia.

The limited impact of investment incentives could have been due to the proliferation of incentives, no country has been able to offer a uniquely attractive package of incentives for investors. But one must also note that businessmen are influenced by a whole range of factors when deciding to invest in a country. Therefore, policy intervention through the extension of investment incentives alone may not bear fruits if other preconditions are lacking.

What are these other factors? Proximity to a wide-range of natural resources is one major reason for plant location. It cuts down transportation cost, giving the country a comparative advantage. Labour resources is another. Cheap labour provides an attraction for labour-intensive industries from high-cost developed countries (and NIEs) looking for cheaper alternatives. In addition to minimising costs through increased access to cheaper factors of production, investors also seek to increase revenues by increasing access to markets - reduce natural (geographic) or induced (trade policies etc) barriers. Depending on what prompt the investors to go overseas, even seemingly unrelated factors can determine

the location of plant, e.g., a lax environmental rule or controlled/docile labour force in the recipient country. Beyond that, a strong but stable economy, free and growing market, good and dependable physical infrastructure, a government administration that poses minimal hassles to investors, and political stability would most certainly receive thumbs-up from DFI. The last factor is well illustrated in the case of Philippines where investment inflow took a plunge between 1988 and 1990, no doubt a result of uncertainty over the change in political leadership. Other important considerations are availability of local partners, ability to source parts locally, and accessibility to reliable business information, and of course transparency and predictability of government policies to reduce risks of business operation.

Thus, apart from the attractive incentive schemes offered by ASEAN, foreign investors could have been drawn to this region because of the many "comparative advantages" they offer. Except for Singapore, they are blessed with vast natural resources. Malaysia has attracted a lot of DFI in the rubber products industry because it has a developed rubber sector. Philippines and Indonesia enjoy huge DFI investments in wood and wood products (including pulp and paper) due to their huge forest resources. Similarly, a lot of DFI has gone into the mining sector in Indonesia and Malaysia where these resources (especially gas and petroleum) exist for exploration, development and ex-

traction. There is also a pool of labour that is relatively cheap, thus the mushrooming of labour intensive textile industry in Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines and Indonesia, and the electrical-electronics assembly/manufacturing plants in Malaysia. More importantly, labour unrest is uncommon, thanks to the tough labour laws. Even in Singapore where wages are higher, the educated but largely docile labour force holds a big attraction for investors. In addition, environmental regulations are generally lax compared with those in the developed countries. This is probably a main reason for the heavy participation of DFI in the chemical industry in the region.

It is therefore true to say that whatever fiscal incentives are available, an investor will not invest unless it is competitive for it to do so and the investment will enhance its profitability whether in the short or long term.

The other most important non-fiscal incentive considered by the investor is the requirement of equity conditions. This issue is of particular significance to Malaysia where prior to 1986 foreign participation was generally restricted to 30 per cent of equity. The liberalisation of this factor in the countries of ASEAN in particular Malaysia has been very effective in attracting DFI. Especially with the increasing globalisation of business, foreign investors increasingly feel more comfortable to have majority control over the establishment especially if it has substantial exports and involve heavy capital outlays.

This can be substantiated in the case of Malaysia when the number of projects with wholly or majority foreign equity increased from 304 in 1985 to 709 in 1991 after the liberalisation undertaken by the government.

This does not, however, imply that fiscal incentives are unimportant. These incentives can still play a critical role in influencing DFI inflow into a country in general and into designated sectors in particular. In the real world, investors tend to assess policy incentives together with other "comparative advantages" of the country concerned, and weigh them against the disincentives imposed. Incentives may thus be treated as compensation for lack of natural advantages or for policy-induced disincentives such as restrictions on foreign equity or land ownership and foreign exchange controls. This can best be illustrated in the case of Indonesia where officials replaced costly incentives like tax holiday in the mid-1980s and in stand instituted reforms to extend investment licenses to 30 years, lower minimum investment for foreigners from US\$4m to US\$250,000, open up of banking and finance sector, and liberalise foreign equity rules for export-oriented industries. As a result, foreign investments in Indonesia jumped almost 10-fold between 1986 and 1990 [of which close to two-thirds are export-oriented industries].

(To be concluded tomorrow)
The writer, a Chartered Accountant by profession, is a former Deputy Prime Minister of Bangladesh.

Shipping Intelligence

At the close of trading on August 7, 1993

Week opens on mixed note

Week's trading on the floor of Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) opened on a mixed note on Saturday.

Both the turnovers gained. Volume reached 7733 issues from 4348, a rise of 77.851 per cent. Value increased from Taka 326376.00 to Taka 527254.50 showing a gain of 61.548 per cent.

A total of 36 stocks were traded against Thursday's 34 and gainers continued domination on the floor. The gainers outnumbered losers by 17 to nine while 10 others traded at previous rates.

But the DSE All Share Price Index suffered a loss of 1.001 points. It fell to 419.8206 from 420.8563.

DAY'S TRADING AT A GLANCE

DSE Share Price Index	419.8206
Market Capitalisation (Tk)	1581662455.10
Turnover in Volume	7733
Turnover in Value (Tk)	527254.50

Company's name	Previous price Tk	Closing price Tk	Change (absolute) Tk	Change (% over price)	Number of Shares sold
Gains (17)					
Shares:					
Quasem Drycells	9.68	9.70	0.20	2.066	300
Shaham Textile	81.00	82.60	1.60	1.975	50
The Ibbinsa	99.50	101.00	1.50	1.507	40
GQ Ball Pen	75.00	76.00	1.00	1.333	120
United Insurance	206.00	208.48	2.48	1.203	120
Thai Aluminium	81.00	82.00	1.00	1.234	10
Rahim Textile	100.00	101.00	1.00	1.000	1000
Afrah Automobiles	179.00	180.64	1.64	0.916	70
Green Delta	208.00	209.00	1.00	0.480	30
8th ICB M Fund	57.75	58.00	0.25	0.432	230
Apex Footwear	182.00	182.58	0.58	0.318	260
Bestimco	20.24	20.30	0.06	0.296	1100
Kohinson Chemical	67.00	67.17	0.17	0.253	160
Eastern Cables	81.31	81.50	0.19	0.233	170
Monno Ceramic	285.42	286.00	0.58	0.203	50
Debentures:					
Bestimco	1937.00	1940.00	3.00	0.154	05
Bestimco Pharma	1090.00	1095.00	5.00	0.458	06
Losses (09)					
Shares:					
Islami Bank	1452.00	1400.00	-52.00	-3.561	01
Dhaka Vegetables	67.89	66.00	-1.89	-2.783	20
Bata Shoe	42.00	41.00	-1.00	-2.380	1160
Renwick Jaincewar	85.00	83.00	-2.00	-2.352	35
Umanisa Glass	273.09	271.00	-2.09	-0.765	06
BD Autocars	60.79	60.42	-0.37	-0.608	285
BD Oxygen	76.63	76.19	-0.44	-0.574	800
Paper Processing	15.06	15.00	-0.06	-0.398	30
Cig Cement	196.09	195.00	-1.09	-0.555	145
Traded at previous rates (10)					
Shares: Al Baraka Bank (1), National Bank (30), Atlas Bangladesh (250), Zeal Bangla Sugar (700), Desh Garments (60), Dulamia Cotton (180), Eagle Star Textile (40), Padma Textile (20), Quasem Silk (200), Apex Tannery (70).					

Company	FV/ML (Taka)	Closing Rate (Taka)	Northern Jute	Shamser Jute	Specialised Jute	Shine Pakur Jute	Sorali Aash
BANKS (02)							
Al Baraka Bank	1000/1	825.00	10/50	NT			
Al Baraka	100/5	200.00	100/5	100.00			
City Bank	100/5	330.00	10/50	NT			
Eastern Bank	100/20	110.00	10/50	NT			
IDLC Ltd	100/20	219.00	10/50	NT			
IFIC	100/5	170.00	10/50	NT			
Islami Bank	1000/1	1400.00	100/10	50.00			
National Bank	100/5	99.00	100/10	76.00			
Pubali Bank	100/5	100.00	10/50	14.30			
Rupali Bank	100/10	69.00	10/50	10.00			
U.C.B.L	100/5	88.00	100/5	32.00			
Utara Bank	100/5	93.00	10/50	165.00			
INVESTMENT (08)							
ICB	100/5	100.00	10/100	2.80			
1st ICB M. Fund	100/5	375.00	100/5	20.00			
2nd ICB Fund	100/5	185.76	100/5	130.00			
3rd ICB M. Fund	100/5	161.38	100/5	11.00			
4th ICB M. Fund	100/5	160.00	100/10	96.00			
5th ICB M. Fund	100/10	101.00	100/10	180.00			
6th ICB M. Fund	100/10	58.00	100/10	180.00			
ICB Unit Cert.							
PHARMACEUTICALS & CHEMICALS (18)							
Amber Pharma	10/50	12.30					
Bangla Process	100/5	61.00					
BCIL	100/10	286.67					
Bestimco Infusion	100/20	240.00					
Bestimco Pharma	100/5	425.00					
Glaxo	10/50	125.00					
I.C.I	10/50	10.00					
N. Polymer	100/10						
Kohinson Chemical	100/5	67.17					
Petro Synthetic	10/50	450.00					
Pfizer	100/5	178.00					
Pharma Aids	100/5	50.00					
Pharmaco	100/5	32.00					
Progressive Plastic	100/5	95.00					
Reckitt & Colman	10/50	35.00					
Rahman Chemicals	100/10	33.00					
Therapeutics	100/5	70.00					
The Ibbinsa	100/10	101.00					
Wata Chemical	100/20	126.00					
PAPER & PRINTING (06)							
Eagle Box	10/50	22.50					
Monosop Paper	100/5	30.00					
Paper Converting	100/5	70.00					
Paper Processing	100/10	15.00					
Padma Printers	10/50	30.00					
Sorali Paper	10/50	52.00					
FOOD & ALLIED (35)							
A.B. Biscuit	100/5	200.00					
Alpha Tobacco	10/50	45.00					
Amran Sea Food	100/5	15.00					
Apex Food	100/5	650.00					
Aroma Tea	100/5	60.00					
Bangla	100/5	120.00					
B.D. Plantation	100/5	800.00					
Bengal Food	100/5	119.25					
B.L.T.C.	100/5	800.00					
B.T.C.	10/50	74.00					
Cig. Vegetable	100/10	61.00					
Dhaka Vegetables	100/5	95.00					
E.L. Camella	100/5	1040.00					
Frugling Export	10/50	2.20					
Gemini Sea Food	100/5	45.00					
Hill Plantation	100/5	550.00					
Modern Industries	100/5	320.00					
N.T.C.	100/5	210.00					
Rabeya Flour	10/100	NT					
Rupani Oil	10/100	4.30					
Tulip Dairy	100/10	50.00					
Yousaf Flour	10/50	NT					
Zeal Bangla Sugar	10/50	6.60					
SERVICE (02)							
Bangladesh Hotel	10/50	13.00					
Bd. Service	10/50	NT					
MISCELLANEOUS (18)							
Apex Footwear	100/20	182.58					
Apex Tannery	100/5	335.00					
Aramit	10/50	30.00					
Bata Shoe	10/100	41.00					
Bestimco	10/100	20.30					
B.S.C.	100/5	60.00					
Chittagong Cement	100/5	195.00					
G. G. Ball Pen	10/50	78.00					
High Speed	100/5	50.00					
Hindustan Ltd.	100/10	6.00					
Milon Tannery	100/5	10.00					
Monno Ceramic	100/5	286.00					
New Dhaka Refac	100/20	80.00					
Phonics Leather	100/5	100.00					
Savar Refractories	100/5	77.00					
The Engineers	100/5	100.00					
Tespak Ind	100/10	100.00					
Umanisa Glass	100/5	271.00					
DEBENTURES (04)							
Bestimco	1999/1	1940.00					
17% 1998							
Bestimco Infusion	1500/2	1725.00					
(17% 1998)							
JUTE (02)							
Ahad Jute	100/10	NT					
Arwana Jute	10/50	NT					
Delta Jute	10/50	8.50					
Gawisa Jute	10/50	NT					
Islam Jute	100/5	45.00					
Jute Spinner	100/5	80.00					
Mutual Jute	100/5	105.00					

DSE SHARES AND DEBENTURES

Note: * = Face Value ML = Market Lot NT = Not Traded AL = Allotment Letter

Fish production falls alarmingly in Moulvibazar

MOULVIBAZAR, Aug 7: Fish production in the haor areas of the district has fallen alarmingly causing concern among the people