

US under fire for its protectionist policies

AUCKLAND, Sept 7: The United States finds itself under fire for protectionist policies ahead of this week's Asia-Pacific economic summit, putting a country used to lecturing Asia about free trade in an awkward spot, reports Reuter.

In recent days Tokyo has lashed out at American efforts to curb Japanese steel shipments.

New Zealand and Australia are incensed over US restrictions on lamb imports, fuelling charges in an Auckland-based business magazine that President Bill Clinton is a free trade hypocrite.

Neither the steel nor the lamb disputes are on the official agenda for the summit of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, which began on Tuesday in Auckland, New Zealand.

But they may emerge as hot topics during US bilateral talks and could embarrass a country that endlessly preaches to others

to open their markets.

The number of trade disputes between Washington and its trading partners in Asia and Europe have grown and intensified in recent months as the US trade deficit has soared.

The trade imbalance rose 16 per cent in June to record \$24.62 billion, and was expected to get even worse in the months ahead, putting pressure on the US Congress and Clinton to clamp down on imports.

"Politically, there is a point that it begins to strain," US Commerce Secretary William Daley said in a recent interview.

Some of America's most important trading partners say Clinton has already gone too far.

They point to US measures to curb steel shipments from Japan, South Korea, Russia and Brazil, and an emergency loan programme approved by Clinton to help cash-strapped US

producers compete with foreign companies.

Clinton is under pressure from US industry groups to impose additional tariffs later this month on Japanese shipments of steel wire rod, used to make a wide range of products from coat hangers to auto parts.

Japanese Trade Minister Kaoru Yosano warned Clinton that wire rod tariffs could spark a protectionist backlash, and "undermine our current efforts to further liberalise trade."

In response to complaints by US ranchers, the United States has imposed limits on lamb imports from Australia and New Zealand, whose farmers produce about 95 per cent of all lamb imported by the United States.

Australian Prime Minister John Howard has slammed the US decision as "hypocritical" and decided to take the case to the World Trade Organisation.

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dispute would be a background issue at APEC but a US trade official insisted the issue would not cloud the agenda.

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But Australian farm and government sectors see the plan as a thinly veiled disguise for export subsidies for US produce, especially wheat.

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