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Tofail for int'l product standard to face market challenge

Commerce and Industries Minister Tofail Ahmed has said the local products must achieve the international standards to survive in the open market economy, reports UNB.

"Export growth is never possible without manufacturing quality products," Tofail told a function organised at a city hotel marking the 30th World Standards Day yesterday.

Organised by Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institute (BSTI), the function was also addressed by Industries Secretary K M Ejazul Huq, BSTI Director General Abu Taleb and Director Liakat Ali.

Tofail called on the industrial manufacturers to produce quality goods to win consumers' trust both locally and globally, and market those at competitive prices.

"Industries must be careful about total quality system that calls for high standards, improved technologies and competitive prices," the minister said.

The ISO 9000 can give manufacturers proper guidelines in total quality management while ISO 14000 series can help them in environmental management systems, he said, emphasising the need for more active efforts to implement the international organisation for standardisation (ISO) series.

ISO is a worldwide federation of national standard bodies from some 130 countries that sets international quality management standards acknowledged by UN bodies and other international organisations, including WTO.

The Commerce Minister said the new Industrial Policy has laid emphasis on production of quality goods and encouraged implementation of ISO 9000 and ISO 14000 certifications.

He appreciated the local companies who have already endorsed the ISO 9000 certifications.

Tofail directed the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institute that plans to directly accept ISO 9000 and ISO 14000 as national codes for standardisation, to strictly remain vigilant against production and marketing of low quality consumer goods.

There is no compromise for quality of products," he cautioned asking BSTI to strengthen its inspection.

World's ten largest banks

TOKYO, Oct 14: An expected alliance between Japan's Sumitomo Bank Ltd and Sakura Bank Ltd, announced today, will create the second biggest banking force in the world, says AFP.

If they marry, the ceremony will produce combined assets of 99 trillion yen (\$925 billion). Just behind another planned alliance among Dai-ichi Kangyo Bank Ltd, Fuji Bank Ltd, and Industrial Bank of Japan Ltd.

The following list shows the world's 10 largest banks ranked according to assets, using figures from banks and the Nihon Keizai Shimbun. The ranking is based on an exchange rate of 107 yen to the dollar.

1. IBI+DKB+FUJI (Japan) 1,318 billion dollars, 2. Sumitomo-Sakura (Japan) 925, 3. Deutsche Bank AG (Germany) 906, 4. BNP-Paribas (France) 721, 4. UBS Group (Switzerland) 718, 5. Citigroup Inc. (US) 699, 6. Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi Ltd. (Japan) 652, 7. Bank of America Corp. (US) 646, 8. HSBC Holdings (Britain) 560, 9. Tokai-Mitsubishi (Japan) 551 and 10. ABN AMRO Bank (Netherlands) 527.

UAE urges OPEC compliance with agreed output cuts

ABU DHABI, Oct 14: The United Arab Emirates called on fellow OPEC members to abide by agreed output cuts yesterday after the International Energy Agency revealed earlier this week that the cartel's crude production had crept back up, says AFP.

The fall in prices on world markets following the IEA report meant it was "essential that OPEC countries maintain their output cuts," Oil Minister Obeid bin Seif al-Nasseri told the official WAM news agency.

"OPEC producers are still showing great respect for their decision to cut production and we hope to see still more respect in order to safeguard the gains already achieved and guarantee the stability of prices," he said.

Nasseri also called for a "dialogue between OPEC and non-OPEC producers to ensure a certain stability on the oil market."

After Monday's publication of the IEA report, oil prices remained below 21 dollars a barrel with the reference barrel of North Sea Brent crude fetching 20.77 dollars for November delivery.

The start of the month Brent crude was fetching well above 23 dollars a barrel on London's International Petroleum Exchange (IPE).

SEC okays regulation for investor protection fund

By M Shamsur Rahman

The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) yesterday approved a regulation paving the way for creation of funds to settle investors' claims against defaulting stock brokers.

The Investors' Protection Fund Regulation, 1999, for Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) and Chittagong Stock Exchange (CSE), one of the pre-conditions for the launching of ADB's US \$80 million capital market development programme, will come into effect after gazette notification.

The funds will basically allow a disgruntled investor to lodge claims for the improper use of his capital or shares by a broker.

Following the notification, two separate irrevocable funds would be created. These would be managed by two different

five-member Boards of Trustees, each headed by a chairman to be nominated by the SEC from among the 'distinguished persons not associated with any of the stock exchanges.'

Other members of each of the fund boards will include two elected broker and non-broker councillors to be nominated by the relevant bourse Councils, one SEC-nominated member from among the investors and the Chief Executive Officer of the concerned bourse.

The Board of Trustees will enjoy the administrative and management controls over the fund and will meet thrice a year. The gap between two meetings would not be more than six months.

The DSE will launch its fund

with an initial contribution of Tk 10 lakh, while the CSE will provide Tk five lakh. Members of the bourses will also make periodical contributions to the fund at the rate of Tk 0.50 for every Tk 10 lakh transactions.

Participation in the fund will be made compulsory for all DSE and CSE members.

Half a per cent of the listing companies' fees will also be added to the fund by the bourses on a quarterly basis. Besides, the Boards of Trustees would also be able to seek contingency funds from the policy-making bodies of the exchanges in case of emergencies.

The boards will maintain accounts of the funds and will have them annually audited by practicing chartered accountants.

A customer would not be allowed to claim compensation from both the funds against one defaulted member registered with the two exchanges and the maximum settlement amount against a single claim would be Tk 50,000 per investor.

An investor can make a claim if his money or shares are not utilised properly or misappropriated by a member. He will have to lodge a claim with the fund board within six months of dispute with a broker.

The investors can also make an appeal before the Councils of the bourses for reconsideration of fund board's decisions. The Councils' verdicts will then stand as final and the board will have to follow these accordingly.

Tofail at meeting with BGMEA, BKMEA Export earnings growth hinges on slump in int'l market

Though the country's export volume has increased, particularly in garment sector, export earnings have not picked up accordingly due to slump in the international market, reports UNB.

Commerce and Industries Minister Tofail Ahmed made the remark in a meeting with BGMEA and BKMEA leaders in city Wednesday.

"The government is aware of it and will continue its all sorts of cooperation to the sector as per the recommendations put forward by BGMEA and other organisations to sustain its 10-12 per cent export growth," he said.

The exporters told the minister that they cannot complete the shipment of their goods on

time due to hartal and other reasons, and sought cooperation of the government so that all concerned banks could take prompt action as per the government decision.

The minister said most of the banks are sympathetic in this regard and the government would take all necessary steps.

Keeping in mind the recommendations of quota allocation and monitoring committee on export of readymade garments to the US and Canada, the meeting decided to give additional 3 per cent allocation at category 352/652, 5 per cent at category 340/640, 3 per cent at category 341, 4 per cent at category 237 and 9 per cent at category 342/642.

The commerce minister said that the government was going to introduce Electronic Licensing Visa Information System (ELVIS) soon to check quota forgery.

He called upon the BGMEA leaders and all concerned to remain vigilant against the gang involved in quota forgery.

The meeting was informed that the number of foreign buyers for readymade garments is increasing and it would play vital role in boosting export earnings.

Commerce Secretary Syed Alamgir Farooque Chowdhury, BGMEA President Anisur Rahman Sinha, BKMEA President Monjurul Huq and EPB Director General Tajul Islam were present.

Improved New Organics from Lever Bros

Lever Brothers Bangladesh is now introducing improved 'New Formula Organics', says a press release.

The use of New Formula Organics leads to less hair breakage and fall, which is reported to be 50 per cent less.

Organics has glucasil complex, which Lever Brothers together with Elida Hair Institute, Paris, discovered through their research.

Apart from Bangladesh, Organics is present in nearly every major country and is now available in the market in three attractive sizes — 180ml, 90ml and 8ml sachet packs.

Emirates SkyCargo launches 2 new products

Emirates SkyCargo has taken a quantum leap into the future of faster freight by introducing two brand new products — Emirates Priority Plus and Emirates Priority, says a press release.

They have been designed to meet the growing demand for super-fast products across the network as customers are willing to pay extra in return for value added services.

Emirates Priority Plus is a super priority airport-to-airport service with arrangements at destination for prompt and speedy delivery. It provides customers with the cargo equivalent of First Class. The customer can take advantage of late booking up to six hours before scheduled departure, late cut-off time for acceptance of consignments and the highest priority when loading.

Acceptance cut-off times vary from station to station, but at its Dubai base it is two hours before scheduled departure.

Priority Plus caters to the urgent, time-sensitive requirements of consignments in the lower weight range (i.e. general cargo up to 100 kilos) and the courier segments of the market.

Emirates Priority is Emirates SkyCargo's Business Class service, carrying a higher than standard priority for general cargo up to 1,000 kilos.

However, arrangements are in place to accept larger shipments provided that a prior booking is made with reservations staff.

Singapore to halve jobs

SINGAPORE, Oct 14: Jobs created annually in Singapore will be slashed by half to 60,000 as the city-state progresses to a knowledge-based economy needing fewer workers, manpower minister Lee Boon Yang said, reports AFP.

Cautioning that the days were gone when Singaporeans were "spoilt for choice" with 120,000 jobs per year, he said the island state would yield much fewer employment opportunities even though the economy should expand by about five per cent on an annual basis.

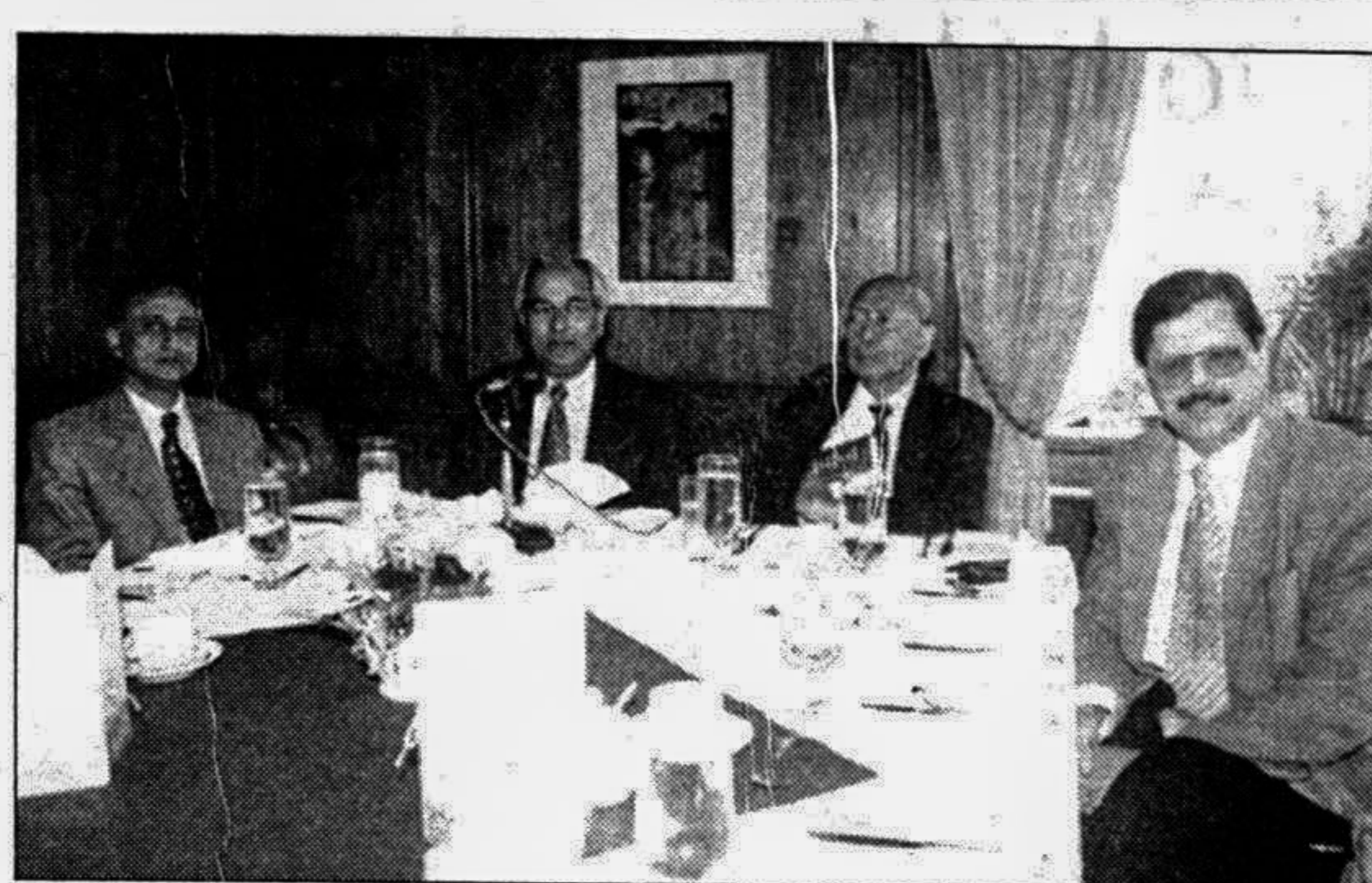
"In the post-crisis days, we cannot expect the labour market to return to the conditions prevailing in 1995 to 1997," Lee was quoted saying Tuesday by Singapore's Business Times newspaper.

The minister also warned of more retrenchments ahead as the fast pace to technology meant companies should constantly seek out new products and services, and look for better and lower-cost opportunities.

"Increasingly, our workers have to be information technology (IT)-savvy, attuned to the latest technology and comfortable with the demands of the new jobs created," Lee said.

Singapore wants to become a knowledge-based economy in the 21st century, with plans to attract more high-tech industries and research groups.

Lee said it was being increasingly applied, from the electronic and manufacturing-based industries to retail sectors and even "traditional" industries like construction.



A K M Shamsuddin, President of the Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce and Industry, speaks at a meeting of the Chamber with the visiting Singapore trade and investment delegation at a city hotel yesterday. Ridwan Dzafir, leader of the Singapore delegation, is on his left. Also in the picture is FICCI Secretary Jahangir Bin Alam.

—FICCI photo

LDCs' proposal to 3rd WTO ministerial confce Dhaka calls for integration into global trading system

Bangladesh and five other countries have asked the third ministerial conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to take energetic action to broaden and improve the ability of least-developed and transitional economies to take advantage of the global trading system, reports UNB.

The five countries are: United States, Lesotho, Nigeria, Senegal and Zambia.

In a formal proposal, these nations recommend that the Seattle ministerial call on the WTO to "Launch a new action agenda to strengthen and enhance the WTO's ability to work with other international institutions" in delivering assistance to members, particularly the least developed.

The new action agenda should reinforce WTO's Integrated Framework (IF) for the least-developed countries by ensuring that programmes respond to the needs and interests of participants, and by exploring the possibility of establishing a designated development partner programme to assist least developed countries.

The proposal states that the

Integrated Framework was in many ways a "sound approach" but notes that in practice it had some shortcomings. It calls on the ministers in Seattle to give specific directions to the WTO to make "Important and immediate improvements" to the system of delivering assistance to the least-developed countries.

A new approach should be adopted by ministers at Seattle with the aim of revitalising the success of the initial work done under the IF and strengthening existing forms of cooperation.

Beyond the Integrated Framework, the proposal also calls for "a new separate framework for the delivery of capacity-building technical assistance to a broader range of WTO members who are less advanced or are economies in transition."

Some of the concepts of the IF could "eventually be employed in developing a programme to plan and deliver technical assistance to non-least-developed countries in the WTO system," the proposal states. "Such a programme would be separate from the IF

itself, which was designed to respond specifically to the substantial needs of least-developed countries.

The "Proposal on capacity building and technical assistance" was submitted this week to the WTO as part of the on-going preparations for the upcoming Seattle ministerial and is the revision of an earlier proposal integrating input from a number of additional countries.

FBCCI calls on S'pore to help reduce trade imbalance

The FBCCI leaders on Wednesday urged the authorities and business leaders of Singapore to take pragmatic steps for reducing the huge trade imbalance between the two countries, reports BSS.

The business leaders made the appeal when a Singapore Trade and Investment delegation visited FBCCI (Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry) to share business experiences with local entrepreneurs.

Secretary General of Singapore Confederation of Industries, Thiam Hock Chee, led the delegation.

Highlighting the special geo-strategic location of Bangladesh, vice president of FBCCI M A Mumin urged the Singaporean entrepreneurs to establish industrial parks, infrastructures, consumer goods plants and light engineering industries in Bangladesh.

"Like Suzhou and Wuxi in China, Batam and Bintan in Indonesia and Bangalore in India, Singapore may consider to invest in Bangladesh," he said.

Eighteen Singaporean companies have invested in joint venture projects in Bangladesh. But the trade imbalance against Bangladesh peaked at US dollar 450 million in 1998-99 fiscal, the FBCCI leader said.

The FBCCI leader lauded Singapore for its emergence as a leading financial centre, business port and a top location for investment in the world.

Bangladesh signs Bhairab Bridge deal with UK

The United Kingdom and Bangladesh yesterday signed the final agreement to build the Bhairab Bridge over the river Meghna on the Dhaka-Sylhet highway, reports UNB.

Economic Relations Division (ERD) Secretary Dr AKM Masihur Rahman and acting British High Commissioner Stephen Turner signed the Exchange of Letters at the ERD office.

A 1.15-km road bridge over the Meghna at Bhairab, with 1.5 km approach roads, on the highway between Dhaka and Sylhet will be constructed under the project.

The bridge will be built by Edmund Nuttall Limited, a British company, appointed by competitive tender. Construction work is due to begin in December this year and the bridge

is due to open in 2002, competitors said.

The overall project is expected to cost nearly 71 million pounds sterling (Tk 570 crore) of which Britain's Department for International Development (DFID) will provide approximately 21 million pounds sterling (Tk 168.50 crore).

A further 17.78 million pounds sterling (Tk 142.70 crore) will be financed by a loan from the Standard Chartered Bank backed by Britain's Export Credit Guarantee Department (ECGD). The government of Bangladesh will finance the remaining 32.44 million pounds sterling (Tk 260.40 crore).

Halcrow, a British consultancy firm, is providing technical assistance to the Bangladesh government.

Clinton pushes environment, labour up WTO agenda

WASHINGTON, Oct 14: US President Bill Clinton yesterday proposed moving labour and environmental issues higher up the agenda of new world trade talks in an effort to blunt charges that freer trade means more harm to workers and wildlife, says Reuters.

The president proposed in a speech that a working group on trade and labour be created during World Trade Organisation negotiations beginning in Seattle on Nov. 30 to Dec. 3.

The panel would seek to bring WTO trade policies in line with international standards on issues such as minimum wages and workers' rights to organise, and to review broader issues such as the adjustment of workers to increased free trade, US officials said.

"How can we deny the legitimacy or the linking of these issues, trade and labour, in a global economy?" Clinton said in outlining US aims for the trade talks in a speech to the centrist Democratic Leadership Council.

The initiative is in line with Clinton's effort to sell the benefits of free trade to ordinary citizens around the world — and to win the support of reluctant

pro-labour democrats in his own party who have blocked earlier Clinton trade goals.

"We must put a human face on the global economy," Clinton said. "We need to ensure working people everywhere feel they have a stake in global trade, that it gives them a chance for a better life, that they know that spirited economic competition will not become a race to the bottom in labour standards and environmental pollution."

The Seattle ministerial meeting will launch a new round of talks on trade liberalisation among the WTO's 134 member nations. White House officials said Clinton plans to attend the meeting.

The talks will be the ninth round since the global trading system started in 1947 and the first since the 1995 founding of the WTO, which sets trade rules and referees disputes.

Major US unions and environmental groups have planned to hold protests at the meeting, arguing that global free-trade policies lead to exploitation of workers and degradation of the environment.

Many developing countries oppose WTO standards on such issues, saying they cannot af-

ford them.

The US consumer advocacy group Public Citizen on Wednesday issued a report accusing the WTO of usurping local and national authority and concentrating wealth and power in the hands of large corporations.

"This is not free trade," said Public Citizen President Joan Claybrook. "It is monopolistic trade that concentrates more and more power in the hands of fewer and fewer corporate CEOs."

Clinton said he disagreed with the protesters' aims but added the United States would push the WTO to be more open.

The WTO has been treated for too long like some private priesthood for experts," Clinton said. "The world doesn't work that way any more. This open world we're trying to build where anybody can get on the Internet and say anything is a rowdy, raucous place."

"If we want the world trading system to have legitimacy we have got to allow every legitimate group with any kind of beef, whether they are right or wrong, to have some access to the deliberative process of the WTO," he said.

Asian stock markets shrug off Dow decline

SINGAPORE, Oct 14: Most Asian stock markets were higher today despite an overnight drop on Wall Street, with Tokyo shares closing up 0.2 per cent as merger talk between two leading Japanese banks sounded sweet to investor ears, reports Reuters.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng index closed 0.1 per cent higher at 12,486.82 after bargain-hunting offset the effects of an unexpectedly weak government land auction.

The Nikkei ended at 17,780.26, up 25.77 points but below the key 18,000 threshold.

The dollar slipped below 107 yen in late trade after hovering above it for much of the day following a Bank of Japan decision to expand its money market operations.

At 0915 GMT, the dollar stood at 106.85/90 yen, up from 106.50/52 yen in late New York on Wednesday.

Two of Japan's largest banks, Sumitomo Bank and Sakura Bank, said on Thursday they were in merger talks, breathing life into local bank shares.

The Bank of Japan decision yesterday and news on Sakura and Sumitomo Bank were the strong buying factors," said an

equities strategist at a local brokerage. "That's why the market wasn't that discouraged by Wall Street's weak overnight performance."

The Dow Jones Industrial Average finished down 1.8 per cent at 10232.16 on Wednesday in a volatile trading day, wiping out last week's 376.76-point advance.

Oil prices in Asia were down 20 cents per barrel at \$22.86 by 0915 GMT as some traders pocketed profits.

Asian spot gold was at \$322.00/324.00 per ounce, barely changed from its opening price of \$322.50/324.50 but up from New York's \$320.00/322.00 close on Wednesday.

"The outlook for gold is bullish," a trader said, adding short-covering moved gold higher from New York's previous close.

The Korea Composite Stock Price Index rose 1.2 per cent to close at 866.02 after a rally in brokerage shares more than wiped out early losses stemming from Wall Street.

Faith in the island's technologies pushed Taiwan's TAIEX up 0.6 per cent despite Wall Street's falls and fresh US

anti-dumping penalties on locally-made computer memory chips.

Australia's Benchmark All Ordinaries index closed down 0.2 per cent at 2901.3 after a late, Asian markets-inspired rally helped cut earlier losses, traders said.

Singapore's Straits Times index, which fell to a morning low of 2,077.15, was up 0.8 per cent at 0917 GMT at 2,112.54 on selective buying.

Malaysia's main index closed up 0.1 per cent at 738.05.

Pakistan's main stock exchange was down almost six per cent by 0919 GMT on the first day of trade since a military coup overthrew Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's government two days ago, but the coup had little impact in other Asian markets.

New Zealand's main index closed up 1.6 per cent at 2,128.48, with brokers reporting enthusiastic buying which pushed trading volumes through NZ\$150 million.

The Philippine 33-share main index lost 0.2 per cent to end at 2,046.60 on the Dow's losses. Thailand's composite set index was down 0.3 per cent in late trade, while Jakarta stocks closed down 0.7 per cent at 567.78.