

## US says WTO summit outcome uncertain, criticises Japan

AFP, Washington

Uncertainty looms over the outcome of World Trade Organization talks to begin next month under tight security in Qatar, US Trade Representative Robert Zoellick warned Tuesday.

Japan was taking an intractable position ahead of the November 9-13 meeting, further damaging the prospects of a successful launch of new trade liberalization negotiations, he said.

The attempt to launch world-wide negotiations on measures to

free up trade would be difficult in Doha, Zoellick told a luncheon meeting of the Council on Foreign Relations think tank.

"I do not know if we will succeed," the US trade chief said.

"The United States must, of course, pursue our national interests as well as promote a global interest. If other countries refuse to cooperate and compromise, we cannot compel a result."

Zoellick attacked the Japanese stance in negotiations leading up to the ministerial meeting, the first since a protest-hit WTO gathering

in Seattle failed spectacularly to launch a new round in December 1999.

Zoellick said the Japanese had refused to give any ground in negotiations leading up to the meeting in Doha, where the United States hopes a new round of trade liberalization talks will be launched.

"I have been frankly extremely disappointed by the lack of Japanese -- I would not expect leadership -- but even respectable followship," Zoellick said.

"There is a paralysis in Japan. It is a serious problem. I mean it is a

serious problem in terms of the domestic economy. It is a serious problem in terms of East Asia and the world economy. And we are seeing it now."

Agriculture would be critical to the future of the trade negotiations, he said.

"So far while I have been willing to discuss the antidumping and countervailing duty issues in a way that tries to work out something, the Japanese have just said no to everything in the process," Zoellick said.

"That won't work."

## Regional accords hinder world trade: HK

AFP, Hong Kong

The drift towards regional and bilateral free trade agreements could undermine the world trading system and increase costs, a Hong Kong official warned Wednesday.

Hong Kong's commerce and industry secretary Chau Tak Hay made the comments in the lead up to the expected launch of a new round of global trade talks at the World Trade Organisation's (WTO) ministerial meeting in Doha, Qatar, next month.

Chau said at the World Economic Forum's East Asia summit here that the launch of the new round was more important than any regional alliances.

"A relatively recent develop-

ment in world trade has been the proliferation of free trade agreements, whether bilaterally or regionally," he said.

"The proliferation of such FTAs (free trade agreements)... will not only undermine the efficacy of the world trading system... different trading blocks with different sets of rules will also increase the costs of doing international trade."

His comments contrasted with WTO director general designate Supachai Panitchpakdi's earlier comments that the best way forward for Asia was to use regional trade agreements as stepping stones.

"In Asia, it is quite important that we always push the frontier of trade liberalisation at all times," Supachai said.

It is crucial the region move towards more regional economic integration.

"Whilst we're working on multi-lateral negotiations, I don't think we should lose sight of economic, regional, preferential trade arrangements in Asia."

Supachai said that he was pleased to see that the draft ministers' statement for Doha had "at least one paragraph" dealing with regional trade agreements (RTAs).

He said it was impossible to avoid the proliferation of RTAs around the world.

Regional arrangements should be seen as "building blocks, not stumbling blocks towards the final solution for multilateral agreements."

Chau said countries such as Singapore were attracted to bilateral or regional trade agreements mainly for "geopolitical" rather than trade reasons.

Singapore recently agreed to accords with New Zealand and Japan and the Hong Kong official said the island-state had also been in unsuccessful talks with Mexico for such an agreement, with a Mexican official admitting the trade benefits from such a deal would have been "zero".

Chau also warned the summit there would be a greater risk of protectionism in Asia if Doha failed to send the rights signals.

"We must therefore pursue free and open trade with greater vigour and commitment," Chau said.



PHOTO: PUBALI BANK

Pubali Bank Limited Managing Director Kh. Ibrahim Khaled, Deputy Managing Director Ansuruddin Ahmed, General Manager Sheikh Moazzem Hossain, Deputy General Manager Md. Jasimuddin, Asstt. General Manager Md. Hafizur Rahman and Grameen Telecom Managing Director M. Masud Isha, Asstt. General Manager Md. Manjur Hossain, Sr. Accounts Officer Faisal Ahmed and Audit Officer Rabiul Awal Khan are seen at the signing ceremony of an agreement between Pubali Bank Ltd. and Grameen Telecom recently.

## Grameen Telecom, Pubali Bank sign MOU to open non-operative current account

A memorandum of understanding (MOU) for opening of non-operative current account was signed between Pubali Bank Ltd. and Grameen Telecom recently, says a press release.

General Manager Sheikh Moazzem Hossain of Business Promotion Division and Asstt. General Manager (Finance & Accounts) Md. Manjur Hossain signed the agreement on behalf of Pubali Bank Ltd and Grameen Telecom respectively.

Amongst others, Pubali Bank Ltd. Managing Director Khondkar Ibrahim Khaled, Deputy Managing Director Ansuruddin Ahmed, Deputy General Manager Md. Jasimuddin, Asstt. General Manager Md. Hafizur Rahman and Grameen Telecom Managing Director M. Masud Isha, Sr. Accounts Officer Faisal Ahmed and Audit Officer Md. Rabiul Awal Khan were present at the agreement signing ceremony.

As per the agreement, 54 branches of Pubali Bank Ltd. will open the account initially and central collection account will be opened in the form of Short Term Deposit Account at Chirikhana Road branch in Dhaka.

## AB Bank opens 63rd branch in Madhabdi

Arab Bangladesh Bank opened its 63rd branch in Madhabdi Bazar in Narsingdi on Tuesday, says a press release.

CM Koyes Sami, President and Managing Director of AB Bank, Iqbal Uddin Ahmed, Executive Vice President, M A Rais Khan, Md Shafiquddin and local elite were present at the opening ceremony.

On the opening day, the credit committee of the bank sanctioned number of credit facilities setting up a new trend in opening of a branch.

AB Bank is bringing customised banking facility to the area with a view to offering different array of products, the release added.

## Second AGM of Trust Bank held

The 2nd Annual General Meeting (AGM) of The Trust Bank Limited was held at Kurmitola Golf Club, Dhaka Cantonment on Monday, says a press release.

Chief of Army Staff Lt Gen M Harun-Ar-Rashid, BP, Chairman, of the bank, presided over the meeting.

All members of the Board of Directors and the Managing Director were present in the meeting.

The Trust Bank Limited is sponsored by the Army Welfare Trust (AWT).

The authorized capital of the bank is Tk. 100 crore. The Army Welfare Fund has provided Tk. 25 crore while another Tk. 25 crore will be raised through public offering of shares within a year or two, it said.

## China-Japan talks on trade row resume today

AFP, Beijing

Talks between China and Japan on a festering trade row over tit-for-tat import restrictions are set to resume on Thursday, China's foreign trade ministry said.

The second round of discussions on the six-month-old dispute will be held in Beijing, an official at the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation said Wednesday.

However it was not expected officials at the meeting would be able to solve the dispute immediately, said the official China Daily newspaper on Wednesday, citing unnamed "experts".

Officials attending the talks were considered too junior to be able to properly thrash out the issues, the newspaper added.

The dispute began in April when Japan invoked emergency import restrictions on three farm products: spring onions, shiitake mushrooms and rushes used in traditional tatami mats. The cheap imports came mostly from

China and were alleged to be hurting Japanese producers.

The new restrictions prompted Beijing to retaliate in June by imposing 100 per cent punitive tariffs on imports of Japanese motor vehicles, air conditioners and mobile phones.

Analysts said at the time the Japanese decision was motivated by a desire to win political support from agricultural interests ahead of parliamentary elections in July.

The row subsequently reached an impasse, with a first round of talks in early July failing to find a solution.

However, at a meeting in Shanghai earlier this month, Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and Chinese President Jiang Zemin pledged to resolve the dispute through negotiations.

There is added time pressure given a Japanese deadline of November 8 to decide whether to extend the current emergency restrictions on the agricultural products.

## Foreign workers contribute 37pc to S'pore economic growth

AFP, Singapore

Foreign workers contributed a hefty 36.9 per cent of Singapore's economic growth over the past 10 years, the trade ministry said Wednesday, as it moved to deflect opposition criticism of the government's labour policy.

In a study highlighting the contribution of the large number of foreign workers in the city-state, the ministry warned that reversing the policy of attracting workers from overseas in favour of locals would do more harm than good.

Opposition politicians, seeking to exploit the worst recession in 37 years, have been urging the government to slow down the hiring of foreign workers and give priority to Singaporeans as unemployment worsens.

The study by the ministry's top economists, said "it would be impossible for Singaporeans to have enjoyed the high GDP (gross domestic product) growth rate in the last decade without the contribution from foreign talent, given the slower growth rate in local labour and skills profile."

Foreign workers contributed 36.9 per cent of the total GDP growth from 1991 to 2000. This translated to 2.87 per centage points in the average growth rate of 7.79 per cent during the 10-year period, it said.

In contrast, local labour accounted for only 14.1 per cent of the total growth.

Out of Singapore's population of four million, more than 750,000 are foreigners, many of whom are professionals working in banks as well as in the manufacturing and services sector.

## Deutsche Bank net profit plunges 37pc

AFP, Frankfurt

Deutsche Bank, the biggest bank in Germany, said Wednesday its net profit slumped 37 per cent to around 2.8 billion euros (2.5 billion dollars) in the first nine months of the current year as a result of lower investment income and increased risk provisions.

Net profit amounted to 2.754 billion euros in the period from January to September, down from 4.368 billion euros in the same period a year earlier, Deutsche Bank said in a statement.

Pre-tax profit was down 38 per cent at 3.658 billion euros, the statement said.

"The cost-cutting measures launched at the beginning of the year are showing results," the bank said.

"Operating expenses were cut by eight per cent in the third quarter from the second quarter," even if they rose to 16.035 billion euros for the first nine months as a whole from 15.139 billion euros a year earlier, it added.

## Board meet of Islami Bank held

A meeting of the Board of Directors of Islami Bank Bangladesh Limited (IBBL) was held on Wednesday at the Board Room of the bank at Islami Bank Tower in the city, says a press release.

Presided over by Shah Abdul Hannan, Chairman of the bank, the meeting was attended, among others, by local and foreign directors including Yousif Abdullah Al-Rajhi, representative of Al Rajhi Company for Industry & Trade, K. S. A., Professor Korkut Ozal, representative of Islamic Development Bank (IDB), and Engineer Mohammad AL-Khateeb, K.S.A.

The meeting evaluated the overall performance of the bank and expressed its satisfaction over the achievements made so far and took some important decisions relating to future business strategies of the bank in the context of the present economic condition of the country.



PHOTO: AB BANK

Picture shows C M Koyes Sami, President and Managing Director of Arab Bangladesh Bank Ltd, presides over the credit committee meeting that approved the credit proposals of newly opened Madhabdi Branch on Tuesday.

## S'pore eyes business opportunities in ME

AFP, Singapore

Singapore has turned to the Middle East for business opportunities despite security concerns in the region, the Trade Development Board said Wednesday, as the city-state searches for a path out of recession.

Participation in an investment fair in the United Arab Emirates next week is seen as a bridge to other markets in the area.

"Undeterred by security concerns in the Middle East, a group of local companies will... seek new investment opportunities in its manufacturing sectors," the board said in a statement.

"TDB has identified the UAE as the beachhead in the region in which Singapore companies can springboard into surrounding markets."

The board will lead 14 compa-

nies -- covering the electronics, chemicals, engineering and technology fields -- to the Investment and Business Fair from November 5-7 in Dubai.

Involvement in such trade fairs has taken on more importance as the island braces for a protracted slump, said the TDB.

"In the face of a severe and possibly prolonged economic downturn, TDB's role of assisting Singapore companies to successfully internationalise to such high growth markets as Dubai, has taken on an added dimension of urgency."

The UAE economy grew 20.4 per cent in 2000 and Singapore is keen to expand growing bilateral ties between the two nations.

Bilateral trade grew 24.2 per cent 2000 to 4.4 billion Singapore dollars (2.4 billion US).



PHOTO: THE TRUST BANK

Lt Gen M Harun-Ar-Rashid, BP (middle), Chairman of the Board of Directors of The Trust Bank Limited and Chief of Army Staff, presides over the 2nd Annual General Meeting of the bank at Kurmitola Golf Club, Dhaka Cantonment on Monday. Maj Gen Tarique Ahmed Siddique, Vice Chairman, Brig Gen Anwar Hossain, Director, Zahid Hossain Chowdhury, Managing Director, and Brig Gen Asrarul Haque, Director of the bank, are also seen in the picture.

## CURRENCY

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