

UK govt accused of prioritising China ties over steel jobs

AFP, London

Is a new special relationship threatening an old staple of British industry? Prime Minister David Cameron's government faced damaging claims Friday that its push for closer ties with China is holding back efforts to save 15,000 steel jobs.

The row has spiralled since Wednesday, when India's Tata Steel said it was selling its UK assets. This threatens the Port Talbot steel works, Wales's biggest single employer located in an area already hit hard by the decline of heavy industry.

A glut of cheap Chinese imports is a major reason why world steel prices have plunged in recent years -- and why Port Talbot is now reportedly losing some £1 million (1.3 million euros, \$1.4 million) a day.

Cameron's government faces accusations that it has blocked higher EU tariffs on Chinese steel as anger grows that an iconic British industry dating back to the 19th century that once provided 40 percent of the world's supply is now at risk.

Charles de Lusignan, a spokesman for the European Steel Association which represents European steelmakers, said Britain had opposed a European Union plan to bolster defences against cheap

Chinese imports.

"They thought that if they blocked the changing and the modernisation of the trade defence instruments, that would give them favours with China," he told AFP.

The body's head, Axel Eggert, told Friday's Financial Times that Britain was "the ringleader in a blocking minority of member states" over the EU plan to ignore a key regulation when setting anti-dumping tariffs.

EU import tariffs on Chinese steel products are low, particularly compared to the United States. The EU duty on Chinese cold-rolled steel currently stands at 16 percent, compared to 236 percent in the US.

Nick Clegg, Cameron's deputy prime minister in a coalition government until last year, said finance minister George Osborne, architect of closer relations with China and Cameron's right hand man, had "put his special relationship with China above the UK's best interests."

Britain rolled out the red carpet for President Xi Jinping on a state visit last year which included a banquet hosted by Queen Elizabeth II.

This yielded trade deals worth £40 billion, including China taking a one-third stake in the troubled project to build Britain's first nuclear plant in

decades at Hinkley Point in southwest England.

Osborne says he wants Britain to be China's "best partner in the West" but the alliance has long sounded alarms bells for some, over human rights as well as the economy.

"It is hard to pin down the exact moment when George Osborne's love affair with China turned into a Faustian pact," Ambrose Evans-Pritchard, the Daily Telegraph's international business editor, wrote Thursday.

While ministers have ruled out renationalising the steel industry -- privatised under Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government in 1988 -- they say they will do everything possible to support finding a new buyer.

Osborne said Friday that Britain was "leading the way" in Europe in trying to make the steel industry competitive.

"Both at home, where we are cutting taxes on energy and internationally, where we are working with others to make sure there are tariffs on unfairly cheap steel, you have got a government doing everything it can to help the steel industry," he told the BBC.

Business Secretary Sajid Javid was visiting Port Talbot Friday to try and reassure workers after returning early from a trip to Australia.



Obaidul Quader, road transport and bridges minister; Md Shafiu Islam, first vice president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry; Humayun Rashid, acting president of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry; and Shawn Hakim, chief executive officer of Rancon Motor Bikes, attend the inauguration of the 11th Dhaka Motor Show 2016, Second Dhaka Bike Show 2016 and Dhaka Auto Parts Show 2016, at the International Convention City in Bashundhara, Dhaka on Thursday.

Amazon makes foray into fashion world

AFP, New York

Amazon has been making moves over the past few months to position itself as a force in the ready-to-wear fashion world.

The Seattle-based online retail titan has already revolutionized how consumers shop and has been selling clothes for more than a decade.

In 2006, it bought the site Shopbop and snapped up online footwear go-to Zappos three years later.

But its steps in recent months -- some overt and others more under-the-radar -- signal that Amazon is speeding up its foray into fashion.

For one, Amazon launched a daily, free half-hour online show on fashion in early March, its first-ever live-streaming program.

It also became the main partner of the fledgling New York Men's Fashion Week, which held its second season of shows in January.

And the giant founded by US entrepreneur Jeff Bezos has also begun airing "The Fashion Fund," a reality show during which young designers face off against each other in a competition sponsored by the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA) that organizes New York Fashion Week.

As for its more muted moves -- these

are visible on Amazon.com where new fashion labels have popped up that, it turns out, have been trademarked by the tech giant.

The labels Lark & Ro, North Eleven and Franklin Tailored have been registered by Amazon over the past few months, according to data accessed by AFP on the website of the European Union Intellectual Property Office.

After focusing on clothes designed, made and sold by others, Amazon -- whose revenue in 2015 passed the \$100 billion mark -- is developing its own clothing lines.

When contacted by AFP on the topic, Amazon declined to comment.

"I'm happy to reach out once we are ready to share news and overall strategy regarding our business," said a spokeswoman for Amazon Fashion.

"Amazon has made apparel a priority," analysts with KeyBank Capital Markets wrote in a February research note after attending the MAGIC apparel trade show in Las Vegas.

"Amazon is being viewed as a strategic opportunity and partner" in the vendor community they wrote, with some believing that "it can be a top three customer for them in the medium-term."

Customers appear to like what's in the works.

"There's... the ability to have the

world at your fingertips in one place," said Marshal Cohen, chief industry analyst at the NPD Group.

"Brand sites or traditional retail sites have limited offerings. Whereas when you look at Amazon, the offer of products is mind boggling," he added.

"The ability to reach across so many brands, so many styles, so many sizes, so many options, it gives a feeling of much greater opportunity to secure the product that you want."

Amazon has the potential to make a significant mark on the fashion world, according to Cohen.

"There's plenty of opportunity to better what has been done by the fashion industry, from a basic, and also midlevel and even from a designer perspective," he said.

Analysts at the Cowen Group said in July that they expected Amazon to become the leading US apparel retailer by 2017, ahead of Wal-Mart and Macy's.

They forecast \$27.7 billion in revenue next year and \$52 billion in 2020 -- and that in the United States alone.

On a more international front, chains such as H&M and Zara also have reason to be concerned.

If the inauguration late last year in Seattle of a brick-and-mortar bookstore is anything to go by, Amazon one day could decide to open ready-to-wear clothing stores.



NOVOAIR

Mofizur Rahman, managing director of Novoair, attends the launch of the airline's flights on the Dhaka-Barisal route on Saturday. Novoair will run the flights on Saturdays, Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Huawei's upcoming flagship phone to sport Leica camera

AFP, Shenzhen, China

Chinese tech company Huawei's next smartphone will sport a camera from premium German manufacturer Leica, it said Friday as it announced a jump in profits driven by its consumer division. The smartphone maker in late February announced the partnership with Leica, one of the most respected names in the camera industry, in a bid to improve its premium smartphone selection.

"We are going to launch our P9 flagship phone very soon and this is a product that we worked with Leica to produce," Huawei deputy chairman Guo Ping said at a press conference held at their Shenzhen headquarters, where the company's annual results were announced.

Distrust, policy mismatch hinder Saarc trade: analysts

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Saarc came into being and India and Pakistan joined because if one did not join the other might take the leadership and vice versa, Chowdhury added. "Saarc remains hostage to India and Pakistan," said Zubair Malik, representative of Saarc Trade Promotion Network.

Trade between India and Pakistan is quite insufficient, but informal trade between the two countries, despite having 1,500 miles of heavily guarded borders, is about \$5 billion.

Selim Raihan, a professor of economics at Dhaka University, presented the keynote paper on the subject identifying India as the major export market in South Asia.

In case of intra-regional trade, India's import from South Asian countries came down to 0.6 percent in 2014 from 0.8 percent in 2006, while its export increased slightly to 5.8 percent from 5.2 percent in 2006. In case of Bangladesh, imports from South Asian countries increased to 15.8 percent in 2014 as compared to total import, from 13.1 percent in 2006, while its export decreased to 1.9 percent from 2.5 percent in 2006.

Afghanistan, Bhutan and Nepal are neglected when it comes to intra-regional trade, Raihan said.

Lakshmanan Savithri, director of Kathmandu-based Saarc Secretariat, highlighted the urgency for implementing South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation Road Connectivity Project and the BBIN project for better connectivity in the region. Besides, she urged all to work together in the field of health, education, poverty and climate change.

Speakers also said 1 percent increase in trade facilitation will increase Bangladesh's exports to India by 4 percent.

They said customs rule and other informal barriers bar many entrepreneurs from Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan to enter the Indian market. "We need to be integrated, more connected. None, even India, can grow alone, although Delhi thinks differently," said Kanak Mani Dixit, editor of Himal Southasian, a magazine based in Kathmandu.

Hedayatullah Al Mamoon, senior secretary of the commerce ministry; Monoj Kumar Roy, additional secretary of the ministry; and Ali Ahmed, chief executive of Bangladesh Foreign Trade Institute, also spoke.

GSP efforts hit a wall

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"I am hopeful that the US will respond to our progress reports as we have fulfilled all the conditions," Mamoon said. Bangladesh has been performing well in the exports, especially in garment shipments, even after the suspension of the GSP, he said.

Bangladesh's garment exports to the US markets rose about 13 percent to \$5.65 billion in 2015 compared with the previous year. "So, we are still competitive in that market," he said. Before the suspension of the GSP, Bangladesh exported goods worth more than \$26 million to the US market under the trade privilege.

Bangladesh also signed the Trade and Investment Cooperation Forum Agreement with the US in 2013 in the hope of regaining the GSP.

Philippine casinos should also return funds to BB: senators

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He tagged two other men as the ones who told him the money would be coming in to the country.

"Kim Wong returning \$4.6 million is only the first step," said Aquino.

Citing testimony in the previous hearing, Aquino said Wong had received much more than \$4.6 million.

He also said he was hoping that other parties that got the funds would follow Wong's example and turnover the money to authorities soon.

But he made it clear that returning the money would not automatically clear their names.

"Of course, these actions will not absolve any party as the investigation by the authorities is ongoing and the true picture of what happened is still unclear to the public," he said.

Sen. Ralph Recto also said that Philrem, which transferred the money to the casino operators, should be the next to return to the AMLC whatever remains of the \$81 million that is under its control.

"They should give back all they can, so that these could be returned to

Bangladesh," he said.

Sen. Teofisto Guingona III, chair of the blue ribbon committee, said more could be done to ensure that more than \$4.6 million would be returned.

"It's clear we could recover more and do more to return the money to Bangladesh, and bring back the international financial community's trust in the Philippines," he said.

Wong will still have to face the charges filed against him as well as an investigation by the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR). "We are looking at everyone involved in the heist," BIR Commissioner Kim Henares said.

The BIR is conducting a parallel but independent investigation on the tax compliance of the personalities allegedly involved in money laundering.

AMLC officials said Wong giving back the stolen money would not let him off the hook even as his lawyer maintained his client's innocence.

AMLC Executive Director Julia Bacay-Abad said they would not withdraw the case they earlier filed against Wong and another Chinese businessman, Xu Weikang.



JIBAN BIMA CORPORATION

AKM Shahidul Hoque, inspector general of police, receives a cheque from Md Abu Bakar Siddique, general manager of Jiban Bima's Dhaka regional office, as settlement for an insurance claim.

Govt sets new rules for fuel import

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The government organisation will have to own refinery with annual processing capacity of six million tonnes.

The government-owned organisation must have five years' experience and annual fuel export capacity of five million tonnes. In case of export of finished petroleum products, the supplier organisation or any of its directors cannot be loan defaulters. Any case in this regard cannot be pending in any international court.

However, in case of supply on government-to-government basis, the organisation will have to be listed with the BPC on the basis of specific criteria.

The criteria include the government-owned supplier organisation must submit expression of interest to BPC or the mineral resources division.

The BPC through the Bangladesh embassy in the country concerned of the exporter will collect and scrutinise the necessary information regarding the ownership and other information.

If the organisation is considered satisfactory, the BPC will enlist it after the necessary talks.

The BPC imports fuel worth about Tk 50,000 crore to Tk 60,000 crore every year, but various questions remain over its import process and the accounting system.

Even the International Monetary Fund under its extended credit facility loan set a condition that the BPC would have to get audit done by an international firm.

As BPC did not comply with it, the release of an instalment of the loan was deferred.

Handset imports rose 5pc last year

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It indicates a large chunk of the population will enter the mobile market in about five years, lending a boost to the sector, Hoque said. The mobile market also reflects Bangladesh's recent economic development, said Ruhul Alam Al Mahub, president of BMPIA.

"Users are hungry for data, which is also increasing revenues of the mobile phone operators."

Currently, there are 12 million smartphones being used in Bangladesh, according to BMPIA.

In Bangladesh, there are 91 registered brands, with about 50 in operation in a market, in which local brands are dominant, the importers' association says.

About 84 percent of imported handsets are those of local brands, and 16 percent are of international ones, data shows. However, international brands hold about 28 percent share of Bangladesh's smartphone market.

"Although local brands are still dominating the sector, global mobile business trends show international brands will increase dominance in future," said Hoque, who is also a director of Symphony, the local top-selling handset brand.