Japan may seek WTO help to resolve India steel tariff dispute

REUTERS

A worker stacks steel pipes in the western Indian city of Ahmedabad.

REUTERS

Japan said it may ask the World Trade Organization (WTO) to help resolve a dispute related to India's "safeguard" tariffs on the import of hot-rolled steel.

Prompted by massive steel exports from the China, the world's top producer, countries including the United States and Australia as well as the European Union have imposed duties on steel imports. As the second-largest global steel producer, Japan's own exports are potentially under pressure because of these protectionist stances.

India has extended its safeguard import taxes on some steel products until March 2018, in a bid to stop cheap overseas purchases from flooding its market and bolster the domestic steel sector.

Japan will make repeated requests to the Indian authorities to ensure the consistency of their measures with the WTO agreements, the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) said in its annual report on unfair trade on Wednesday.

The India safeguard tariffs were placed as one of the priority issues that the METI will be working on, said Osamu Nishiwaki, director of rules and dispute settlement at METI, on Thursday.

"We will step up our bilateral discussions with India over the safeguard measures," he said.

Asked whether Japan may consider bringing the issue to the WTO soon, Nishiwaki said it will depend on the results of the bilateral talks.

Japan exported about 1.25 million tonnes of hot-rolled steel to India in 2015, or about 10 percent of its total hot-rolled exports of 13 million last year, according to the Japan Iron and Steel Federation.

Japan earlier criticized India's tariffs and a decision to put minimum prices on imported iron and steel at a WTO meeting in April.

The METI report on Wednesday also identified Vietnam's safeguard measures against semi-finished steel products and steel bars as policies that may not be consistent with international rules.

Vietnam began provisionally imposing additional tariffs of about 23 percent on semi-finished steel products and 14 percent on steel bars from March, the report said.

The global trade dispute over steel escalated last month after the U.S. slapped Chinese steelmakers with final import duties of 522 percent on cold-rolled flat steel.

Still, Chinese steel exports rose 3.7 percent to 9.42 million tonnes in May from the previous month, customs data showed on Wednesday, as mills continued to ship output abroad.

German minister wants EU to curb foreign investors

AFP, Berlin

Germany's economy minister urged Thursday the EU to shield its key industries from foreign investors after Chinese appliance giant Midea made a controversial bid for German robotics group Kuka.

Sigmar Gabriel, who is also vice chancellor, has recently expressed his disapproval of Midea's takeover bid.

Writing a guest editorial for Friday's edition of business weekly WirtschaftsWoche, Gabriel said the EU should be protective of not only its security and defence sectors.

"We should discuss whether we should also take into consideration the industrial interests of the EU vis-a-vis those of investors, for sectors that are strategic for the future of the European economy," he wrote.

"The areas where the seeds of prosperity and value creation of tomorrow are sown have changed. We must take this change into account," argued the centre-left Social Democrat.

Chinese appliance giant Midea -- best known for its washing machines and air conditioners -- last month launched a takeover offer for Kuka.

PARTEX GROUP

MA Hashem, chairman of Partex Group; Aziz Al Masud, managing director of Partex Fashion; Jina Masud, a director; MM Nurun Nabi, general manager; and Shaheen Parvez, head of operations, attend the launch of a showroom of Red Origin, a concern of Partex Fashion, at Uttara in Dhaka.

Apple revamps App Store, may not win over developers

REUTERS

Apple Inc announced a series of long-awaited enhancements to its App Store on Wednesday, but the new features may not ease concerns of developers and analysts who say that the App Store model - and the very idea of the single-purpose app - has seen its best days.

The revamped App Store will let developers advertise their wares in search results and give developers a bigger cut of revenues on subscription apps, while Apple said it has already dramatically sped up its app-approval process.

The goal is to sustain the virtuous cycle at the heart of the hugely lucrative iPhone business. Software developers make apps for the iPhone because its customers are willing to pay, and those customers, in turn, pay a premium for the device because it has the best apps.

The store is now more strategically important than ever for Apple as sales of the iPhone begin to level off and the company looks to software and services to fill the gap. Apple CEO Tim Cook said on a recent conference call that App Store revenues were up 35 percent over last year.

But the store is also a victim of its own success. Eight years after its launch, it is packed with more than 1.9 million apps, according to analytics firm App Annie, making it almost impossible for developers to find an audience - and increasingly difficult for customers to find what they need, as some 14,000 new apps arrive in the store each week.

"The app space has grown out of control," said Vint Cerf, one of the inventors of the internet and now a vice president at Alphabet Inc's Google, who was speaking at a San Francisco conference on the future of the web on Wednesday. "We need to move away from having an individual app for every individual thing you want to do."

AB BANK

Shamim Ahmed Chaudhury, president and managing director of AB Bank, and Mohammed Kabir Hossain Bhuiyan, managing director of Bangladesh Telecommunications Company Ltd (BTCL), attend a deal signing ceremony. Customers of BTCL can now pay their bills online through the branches of the bank.

Brexit could mean benefit cuts for poor families: economists

BBC NEWS

Low income families could receive hundreds of pounds less in benefit payments if the UK leaves the EU, according to an economic think tank.

In its central forecast, the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) said some households could lose up to £2,771 a year.

Falling national income might result in cuts to the welfare budget by 2020, the NIESR study said.

The Vote Leave campaign said the report was based on "dodgy" assumptions.

Using existing forecasts, NIESR assumed that national income will fall by up to 6 percent by 2020 if the UK leaves the EU, compared to what it otherwise would have been.

It also assumed that the government would stick to its promise to balance the books by 2019/20.

In that case, it said, the government would need to save £44 billion by the end of the decade, a large proportion of which could come from the welfare budget.

However, the government could choose instead to cut other areas of spending or raise taxes.

The welfare budget represents about 28 percent of all current government spending, according to the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR).

"Based on these assumptions, our results show that a disproportionately large share of the costs of Brexit is likely to fall on low income households," said Angus Armstrong, one of the report authors and a former Treasury official.

The NIESR report used existing forecasts from seven published sources, including the Treasury. But none of these use a "dynamic" model.

In other words they take no account of any policy changes that might be announced in response to a UK exit from the EU, such as a cut in base rates by the Bank of England.

If 25 percent of the necessary savings were to come from welfare spending, the biggest cut in benefit payments and tax credits would be £1386 a year, the NIESR study says.

That would be for a lone parent of working age who has two children.

The minimum would be £465, for a couple, both working, with no children.

If 50 percent of the savings were to come from the welfare budget, the biggest cut would be £2,771, and the smallest would be £930.

"The effect on low income families is likely to be large," said Katerina Lisenkova, another of the report's authors.

However the Vote Leave campaign said the findings were not credible.

"This is yet another report from a former supporter of the euro masquerading as new research that is simply recycling and repackaging previous reports," said Matthew Elliott, chief executive of Vote Leave.

"That means the same dodgy assumptions of establishment economists and the Treasury underpin the findings - it is the same people who predicted the world would end if we did not join the euro."

The NIESR study suggested that net migration from the EU into the UK would fall by two-thirds in the event of a UK exit.

It also found that the population profile of the UK would become older.

BBC NEWS

More than a million people in the UK live in destitution.

Amazon launches full online supermarket service in UK

BBC NEWS

Amazon is launching a full online supermarket service in the UK.

From Thursday, Amazon Prime customers in central and east London will be able to order a full weekly shop and get it delivered the same day.

It plans to roll the deliveries out further across the UK, but has not set a specific date.

"We are launching with a comprehensive offer in a limited area and will take our time to hone our service," said Ajay Kavan from AmazonFresh.

That service has been running in the US since 2007.

Amazon UK has so far sold only a very limited amount of fresh food through its Prime Now service. It also sells long-life products such as cereals, pasta and nappies.

According to retail expert Bryan Roberts, from TCC Global, although Thursday's launch is limited to 69 postcodes in London, it will be the last thing the big four grocers - and Ocado - wanted to hear.

"While there is no cast-iron guarantee of success... I'm tempted to believe that we'll look back on today as something of a disruptive game-changer up there with the entry of Aldi and Lidl," he said.

Amazon recently did a deal with Morrisons, making hundreds of products available through its website. This is now being increased and food from other suppliers will also be on offer.

It means that customers will be able to shop from 130,000 products, including fresh fruit and vegetables, at prices which Amazon claims will be more competitive than the main grocers. It will also offer specialty food from 50 local suppliers.

Glencore sells agri unit stake, shifts debt

AFP, Zurich

Swiss commodities trading and mining giant Glencore said Thursday it had sold another stake in its agriculture business and would shift $3.6 billion in debt to the subsidiary.

The sale of 9.99 percent in Glencore Agri for $624.9 million in cash to British Columbia Investment Management Corporation follows the April sale of 40.0 percent to Canada Pension Plan Investment Board for $2.5 billion.

Glencore said that at the closing of the transaction, following regulatory approvals and other conditions, some $3.6 billion of Glencore Agri's debt that it had been carried by the parent company would be transferred to the agriculture subsidiary.

The funds from the sale of the 49.9 percent stake in Glencore Agri, plus a smaller transaction, means the company has reached $3.2 billion out of its target $4-5 billion in asset disposals the year to pay down its debt.

A plunge in prices of oil and metal and mineral commodities pushed Glencore last September to undertake drastic efforts to avoid collapsing under debt that then stood at some $30 billion.

PUBALI BANK

Md Abdul Halim Chowdhury, managing director of Pubali Bank, and Syed Mohammad Musa, director for operations at the National Identity Registration Wing of the Election Commission, pose at a deal signing ceremony. Pubali Bank can now verify the data of its customers through the database of the Election Commission.

ESQUIRE ELECTRONICS

Md Mofazzal Hossain, chairman of Esquire Group, opens a showroom of Esquire Electronics, at Bangabandhu National Stadium Market in Dhaka. Arifur Rahman, managing director of Esquire Electronics, was also present.