

# In North Dakota, hints of US oil industry comeback

AFP, Williston, United States

In the chilly air before dawn, a handful of men and women huddle in front of a small, one-story building on the outskirts of Williston.

They are waiting for Central Command, a temporary work agency, to open.

Workers in this oil town in the US state of North Dakota, just an hour from the Canada border, once had their pick of jobs. Many are now looking for any work they can find.

"They don't have very many jobs for us right now," said Heather Scallion, who traveled some 1,300 miles (2,100 km) from Arkansas, thinking there was still low-skilled work here. "Hurting for money, honestly," she explained.

Nearby, a ragged man in his 30s slept on a couch. Scallion was fairly certain he was homeless, because he slept on the same spot every day, wearing the same clothes.

Just minutes from this temporary work site, at the state-run employment agency Job Service North Dakota, it is a far different world. There is a shortage of workers for highly skilled positions in drilling and oil pump maintenance, among others.

"There were layoffs when oil really tanked," said Cindy Sanford, who heads the agency's Williston branch. "Now what's happening is those companies are bringing people back."

North Dakota is now seeing hints of a recovery from the bust. As crude prices have rebounded to the \$40 range after a stunning crash, there are signs that the industry is slowly

regaining its footing.

But the recovery has been uneven, a distinct case of the haves and the have-nots, as skilled laborers see their prospects improving, while the less desirable workforce feels little optimism.

The Command Center offices are just across from the train tracks that used to ferry coal, livestock and grains, but now shoulder trains loaded with crude from the vast oil and gas deposits that lie deep underfoot, known as the Bakken and Three Forks formations.

When hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, and horizontal drilling techniques made those deposits easier to reach, Williston became the epicenter of North Dakota's oil production.

The industry turned the sparsely populated state into a buzzing hub of investment and hiring starting in 2010, while the rest of the US economy was still stuck in low gear.

At the height of the boom in 2014, Sanford said that they could be so desperate to recruit workers they just had to make sure candidates were alive. "We'd laugh and we'd say, 'Breathe into the mirror. Oh, it didn't fog up. Try again,'" said Sanford.

In those heady days, low-skilled workers could easily earn \$18 an hour. Williston doubled in size in about four years, to roughly 30,000 people. Then, the price of oil plummeted, from highs above \$100 a barrel to below \$30, forcing many drillers to shut down their operations and lay off tens of thousands. Booming Williston went bust.

From his truck, Monty Besler points to so-called "man camps," make-shift mobile housing developments once buzzing with out-of-town workers. They now sit empty. "We've lost a lot of companies," said Besler, an oil industry consultant, whose license plate reads "Frac8r" - as in "frackenerator," a nickname given to him by colleagues.

Besler has seen boom and bust cycles before. "We'll have a winnowing, and in the process the stronger companies will survive," he said.

He has reason for such optimism. While oil production still continues to decline, analysts expect it to stabilize next year. Meanwhile, the number of active oil rigs is rising again and they have become more efficient and productive, according to the US Energy Information Administration.

"The industry is going to resume a very modest, but positive, growth in supply in 2017," said Raoul LeBlanc, a US energy analyst at IHS.

He cautioned that even though jobs are starting to return, salaries are generally lower than in boom times. "We may never get back to the levels of employment that we had," LeBlanc said.

But Besler believes the industry can rise again. If prices can be sustained in the \$50-60 per barrel range, Besler said, "that starts to bring the outside money back in, the investment groups that were pouring money into the Bakken before."

The city of Williston is anticipating that Bakken will power the local economy for decades to come, budgeting \$1 billion on roads, bridges, and a new airport.



LANKABANGLA FINANCE

Md Nurul Huque Manik, head of cards at LankaBangla Finance Ltd, and Md Shafiqul Islam, head of marketing and sales at US-Bangla Airlines Ltd, exchange the signed papers of a deal at a programme. The cardholders of LankaBangla will get equal monthly instalment facility for up to six months on total bill at zero interest under the ezyapp scheme at all outlets of US-Bangla.

## Iran urges US to unblock aircraft deals, seeks investors

REUTERS

Iran urged the United States on Sunday to remove remaining obstacles to it buying passenger planes following the lifting of international sanctions and spread out the welcome mat to foreign investors as it seeks to boost its aviation sector.

Iran provisionally agreed earlier this year to buy over 200 jets worth \$50 billion at list prices from Airbus and Boeing under an agreement between Tehran and world powers to ease sanctions in exchange for curbs on Iran's nuclear activities.

Both deals hinge on the longer-than-expected process of winning US Treasury approval, which is needed due to the high proportion of U.S. parts in virtually all modern jetliners, including those made by Europe's Airbus.

There have also been delays in getting European banks to finance the deals because of restrictions over the use of U.S. dollars and concerns over legal risks if sanctions are re-imposed.

Roads and Urban Development Minister Abbas Akhoundi told an aviation conference that Iran was complying with its obligations and meanwhile continued to negotiate with other planemakers.

"We are negotiating with all those big names... There are a lot of obstacles but I am sure that because we have respected all the international rules and regulations, all those problems are going to be resolved," he told the CAPA Aviation Finance Summit, the second large gathering of aviation leaders in Tehran since sanctions were lifted in January.

Critics in the US Congress argue that Iran could use passenger jets for military purposes such as transporting fighters to battle U.S. troops or allies in Syria or transfer the aircraft to airlines still under US sanctions.

US critics of the nuclear deal also say it could allow Iran to skirt remaining sanctions by transferring jets acquired by national carrier IranAir to airlines that remain on a US blacklist, such as the country's largest carrier, Mahan Air.

In an interview with Reuters, Akhoundi dismissed the concerns. "We have a contract. We will stick to it," he said.

He also told a news conference that the Tehran event, attended by dozens of foreign firms, proved that aviation was international in scope and "the U.S. government cannot stand against it," according to a translation of his remarks.

The House of Representatives in July passed two amendments that would stop the aircraft sales, although to become law they need to be approved by the Senate and signed by President Barack Obama.

Iran estimates it will need at least 400 aircraft to renew and expand its fleet, including some 250 in the next 10 years.

Besides the aircraft sales, Iran is dangling the prospect of significant business for Western companies including nationwide airport expansion as it emerges from decades of sanctions.

"There are more than 60 airports in Iran but 80 percent of flights are in just 10 and these are working beyond capacity; that is why we need to develop," Akhoundi said.

"They are all ready to attract investors, who are welcome to invest in any part," he told the conference held at Tehran's Imam Khomeini airport, which plans a \$2.8 billion expansion.



NCC BANK

Khaled Afzal Rahim, head of cards of NCC Bank Ltd, and Sohail Majid, head of sales and marketing at Novoir Ltd, exchange the signed papers of a deal at a programme. The credit cardholders of the bank will get SmartPay equal monthly instalment facility for up to six months at zero interest.

## Samsung says sold off shares in four tech firms

AFP, Seoul

Samsung Electronics said Sunday it had sold shares it held in four technology companies including US chipmaker Rambus and Japan's Sharp to free up money and focus on its main business.

The South Korean tech giant also sold shares in Dutch semiconductor equipment maker ASML and US hard drive maker Seagate, it said in a statement.

Samsung -- the world's top smartphone maker which also manufactures memory chips, TVs and home appliances -- has for years bought shares in other tech firms in semiconductor or display panel industries.

"It was aimed at focusing on our core business by efficiently managing the investments made in the past in line with changes in business environments," Samsung said.

The news of the sales came as the firm is mired in a major recall of its flagship smartphone over a series of battery explosions.

The global recall of the Galaxy Note 7 smartphone raised alarm among air carriers and aviation safety authorities

worldwide that banned the device on flights.

Samsung sold off half of a 3-percent stake it held in ASML, and its entire stakes in the other three companies for "efficient management of assets," it said.

It had held a 4.5-percent stake in Rambus, 0.7 percent of Sharp and a 4.2-percent stake in Seagate.

The firm did not elaborate on the timing or the value of the sales.

Yonhap news agency estimated the value to be about 1 trillion won (\$890 million), including 600 billion won from the sale of the ASML shares.

Samsung and its sister firms have in recent years divested from non-core operations as the parent Samsung Group sought to streamline business amid a generational power transfer in the founding Lee family.

The group's current chairman Lee Kun-Hee has been bedridden since suffering a heart attack in 2014 with his son, J.Y. Lee, widely believed to take over.

The junior Lee, currently the vice chairman of Samsung Electronics, was nominated last week by the firm's board as a new board member.

## Ministries will sit Wednesday to resolve Jubok controversy

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To find ways to return the swindled funds, the government formed two commissions in 2010 and 2011, headed by former Bangladesh Bank governor Mohammed Farashuddin and former joint secretary Rafiqul Islam respectively.

Due to the enormity of the tasks that are needed to be done, both the commissions recommended a permanent commission to be formed. In August 2014, the government formed a seven-member panel to review the recommendations of the previous two commissions.

The committee, which handed its report to the commerce ministry in December 2014, backed the recommendation for a permanent commission. No commission has yet been formed.

## Top telcos' data earnings up 40pc

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As of June, Grameenphone has 2.18 active mobile internet customers, who consume 517MB of data on average every month. The average data volume was only 301MB a year earlier, according to its annual quarterly report.

In the first six months of the year, Grameenphone logged in Tk 5,570 crore in total revenue, with data services accounting for 8.98 percent of the sum. A year earlier, data services' share of the total revenue was 6.62 percent.

Banglalink, the second largest operator, earned Tk 223 crore from the data segment in the first half of the year, which is 9.2 percent of its total income, according to the company's published report.

Data services accounted for 6.03 percent of the operator's total revenue

of Tk 2,320 crore a year earlier.

Robi earned Tk 291 crore from data services in the first half of the year, which was Tk 226 crore a year earlier.

The operators have been offering smart data packages in recent months attracting warm responses from customers.

At the same time, the prices of smartphones have also come down, said a top official of the telecom regulator.

"The rise in data earnings means we are moving toward a digital society," said the official.

Banglalink has about 2.2 crore Facebook accounts, who belong to the top revenue-generating segment, industry insiders said.

Besides, services like entertainment, health and education can also be

found on the mobile platform currently.

Despite a shortage of local contents, some new initiatives are being taken for entertainment and education, which are helping operators generate more revenue, they said.

However, the operators' gross revenue did not get the same boost during the period: it increased 1.45 percent year-on-year to Tk 10,417 crore.

The other three operators -- Teletalk, Airtel and Citycell -- do not disclose their revenues to the public. Of them, Teletalk and Airtel offer 3G services.

Airtel, which is very close to merging with Robi, has around 30 lakh 3G connections and Teletalk 15 lakh.

Citycell, the oldest operator in Bangladesh, has very few customers.

## Banking services at post offices on cards

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Currently, there are around 8,900 post offices across the country and it will be the biggest banking channel if the finance ministry gives a go-ahead to the proposal, Tarana said.

Bangladesh Post Office has a savings instrument that provides interest at more than 10 percent.

The post offices also provide other financial services like life insurance, savings certificate, elec-

tronic money transfer, ATM services under postal cash cards, money order and postal order.

The government plans to introduce digital postal centres across the country, Tarana said.

## Labour leader, rights group demand fair compensation to Tampaco fire victims

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"Significant work has also been directed towards enhancing the capacity of Bangladesh Fire Service and Civil Defence, as well as the country's labour inspectorate -- improved working conditions and safety standards across all industrial sectors also depend on strengthening these organisations," Ryder said.

Despite progress, the incident at Tampaco Foils highlights that there can be no room for complacency and much ground still needs to be covered, he said.

Strengthening the capacity of regulatory oversight bodies is key as is

the need to bring together diverse stakeholders to establish a stronger culture of preventative safety in all industrial sectors, the ILO chief also said.

In another statement, Clean Clothes Campaign, a global rights group, said the fire and structural collapse at Tampaco Foils factory demonstrates the ongoing dangers to industrial workers and the failure of global corporations to take meaningful steps to protect the safety of workers in their supply chains.

According to its corporate website, Tampaco Foils' customers include two of the world's largest consumer

products brands: Nestle and British American Tobacco.

If this information is correct, the question for Nestle and BAT is why they were producing at a factory where basic safety precautions, like inspection of boilers, were not taken, Clean Clothes Campaign said.

That apparent negligence gives rise to two additional questions: what steps these corporations will now take to prevent similar disasters in other overseas factories and whether these corporations will provide meaningful compensation to the workers injured at Tampaco Foils and to the families of those killed, it said.



MERCANTILE BANK

Kazi Masihur Rahman, CEO of Mercantile Bank, and Ikram Farazy, CEO of NEC Money Transfer Ltd, attend the signing of a deal at a programme. Bangladeshi expatriates living in different countries in Europe will be able to remit money to Bangladesh through the channel.