

Slovenia's eco-hero who crushed a cement giant

AFP, Trbovlje, Slovenia

When he saw swallows nesting in the barn for the first time in almost two decades, Slovenian farmer Uros Macerl felt vindicated. His exhausting battle against a polluting industrial giant had been worthwhile.

A role model to some, an "ecoterrorist" to others, Macerl recently picked up one of the world's most prestigious environmental awards for shutting down a cement plant owned by French corporation Lafarge in his home region of Trbovlje in 2015.

The 48-year-old flew to New York in late April to receive the US Goldman Prize, which honours "environmental heroes" for their efforts to protect nature, often at great personal expense. In Macerl's case, the 13-year fight cost him his marriage.

"I've paid a high toll with my family... but it also taught my children the struggle was worth it," the father of three told AFP.

For as long as Macerl could remember, heavy industry had not only been providing jobs to Trbovlje's 16,000 or so inhabitants, but also polluting its air.

Emissions from a glass factory and coal-fired power plant would slowly rise from the Central Sava valley, enveloping the farms on the surrounding hills in a toxic fog.

In winter, "the snow was always black" because dust and ashes would turn the white blanket into dark slush

within 24 hours, Macerl recalled.

Things got worse in 2002 when Lafarge took over a 130-year old cement factory.

The company intensified exploitation using petroleum coke -- a dirty byproduct of oil refining that burns extremely hot -- and industrial waste instead of coal. "They boosted production to make as much profit as possible," said Macerl.

"Cement was like gold back then." Lafarge's actions had a devastating effect on the environment and people's health. Within a year, the level of benzene in the air jumped by more than 250 percent.

Cancer rates in the region were above the national average, 2012 data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development showed. The high concentration of acid and other toxic substances also began to destroy the vegetation.

When Macerl took over his parents farm at the age of 23, he decided to raise sheep because the fruit trees died. But the "sheep often had miscarriages," he said. A meeting with Lafarge representatives failed to produce results.

"I described the unbearable situation on top of the hills but they just made fun of me. 'If you don't like it sue us,' they told me," Macerl said.

Frustrated, he and other locals took matters into their own hands, gathering data on toxic emissions to

show the dramatic rise in dangerous air pollutants. Their research revealed that the Lafarge factory was exceeding permitted emission levels.

But the local authorities ignored the findings, according to Macerl.

"They turned a blind eye because Lafarge provided jobs, sponsored local sports clubs, donated to hospitals and heavily invested in infrastructure," he said.

The tide turned in 2009 when Lafarge applied for a new licence to incinerate car tyres and plastic.

Looking at the plans, Macerl realised that a tiny part of his farmland fell inside the so-called "pollution zone", entitling him to challenge the company's permit.

When the government failed to act upon Macerl's repeated complaints, he took his fight all the way to the top and filed a petition with the European Commission in 2010.

After a five-year legal battle, Lafarge was eventually forced to mothball its operations in March 2015 after Brussels ruled that Slovenia had run foul of EU rules regarding the plant's permits.

Macerl says there are now signs that nature is recovering, a process also helped by the coal-fired power station's closure in 2016.

"I'd never seen swallows here... but since (Lafarge's) production was halted, they've started coming. We have some 16 or 17 nests in our barn," Macerl said with a proud smile.



People stand in queue to purchase Igloo Sugar, a product of Abdul Monem Ltd, in the capital. The sugar will be sold at Tk 60 a kg during Ramadan as part of the company's corporate social responsibility initiative.

Laptop ban hot topic as airlines meet in Cancun

AFP, Cancun, Mexico

Top airline industry players are meeting Monday and Tuesday in Cancun to seek alternatives to the US and British bans on laptops and tablets on certain flights, which they say is hurting business.

The computer bans are looming large over the agenda as the International Air Transport Association (IATA) holds its annual meeting in the Mexican resort city.

Alternative proposals include sniffer dogs, bomb-detection technology, increased training -- anything but the ban, which IATA says is threatening the industry just as it was enjoying a boom.

With fuel prices low and 3.8 billion passengers flying last year -- a figure

that is expected to double in the next 20 years -- "the industry is doing quite well," said IATA's director general, Alexandre de Juniac.

"Airlines are in the black and it's the eighth year in a row," he told journalists during a conference call ahead of the meeting.

But the bright financial outlook is clouded by the in-cabin ban on electronic devices larger than a cell phone on flights between the United States and 10 airports in Turkey, the Middle East and North Africa -- imposed in March by President Donald Trump's administration.

Britain has imposed a similar ban for flights from six countries.

The move came after intelligence

officials learned of efforts by the Islamic State group to fashion a bomb into consumer electronics.

The US Department of Homeland Security then threatened to slap the same ban on flights from Europe -- though it indicated Tuesday that it has backed off the idea for now.

IATA, whose 275 member airlines represent 83 percent of global air traffic, says the bans have already taken a toll on business. It warns that extending them to European flights would be catastrophic.

De Juniac called the laptop ban "inappropriate."

"Hot topics will include finding alternative means to keep flying securely without the inconvenience," he said.



Ahmed Kamal Khan Chowdhury, managing director of Prime Bank, attend a get together of PBL Exchange (UK) in London, as part of an effort to boost inward remittance.

Md Suhrab Uddin, a lawmaker, opens a showroom of MK Electronics at Uttara in Dhaka on June 3. Anisur Rahman Khokon, chairman of the company, was also present.



Private employees to face strict tax scrutiny

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One can inform offices about his/her tax return submission date and the serial number given in the acknowledge receipt or tax certificate.

The latest measure comes a year after the NBR made it mandatory for employers to submit a list of employees' TINs to field tax offices while claiming salary expenses.

If employers fail to do so, the salary payment that they have made will be treated as income and will be taxable, according to taxmen.

"We introduced audits into tax returns related to source tax last year. We will go for auditing the returns of files related to withholding tax," the official said.

The NBR is seeking to tighten the rules at a time when collection of payroll taxes, which accounts for nearly 2 percent of total income tax collected in a year, is on the decline, according to the NBR data.

The NBR logged in about Tk 716 crore as withholding tax from salaried persons in fiscal 2015-16, down 27 percent year-on-year, according to NBR's provisional data. The collection of withholding from salaries stood at Tk 600 crore in the first half of the fiscal year, with officials expecting total receipts from salaries to surpass last year's collections.

The NBR official said the rule to audit tax returns related to source tax was introduced last year to ensure that withholding tax comes to the state coffers properly and to curb the practice of claiming higher expenses by showing ghost employees on the payroll.

Globally, payroll tax is the main source of withholding tax. However, its contribution to total withholding tax is very low.

"This low ratio indicates evasion and non-compliance," he said, citing that withholding tax on salaries accounts for 15-20 percent of total collections in developing countries and 25-30 percent in developed countries.

To curb such tax evasions, the NBR earlier tagged a condition that salaries should be paid through banking channels.

Taxmen said the rule that made it mandatory to pay salaries to employees drawing in more than Tk 16,000 based on TIN has become instrumental in improving compliance.

The number of TIN shot up to 29 lakh now from 19.84 lakh at the end of fiscal 2015-16. The number of tax return files also surged to 15.65 lakh this year from nearly 12 lakh a year ago, according to the NBR.

"We are very happy that the corporate sector is cooperating," the official added.

Some 5.95 crore people above 15 years of age are employed in Bangladesh, with about 95 percent of them being in the private sector.

Of the employed, 2.36 crore are paid employees and 55 percent draw salaries and wages on a monthly basis, according to the Quarterly Labour Force Survey 2015-16 by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

Managers, professionals, technicians and associate professionals, clerical support workers, and service and sales workers account for one-fourth of the total employed population, according to BBS data.

India's mobile internet use increases ninefold

AFP, New Delhi

Mobile internet usage in India has increased ninefold in a single year, after the launch of a new operator sparked a telecoms price war, according to a new report.

Indians used nearly 1.3 billion gigabytes of data in March 2017 compared with around 150 million in the same period last year, said the report, Internet Trends 2017, published this week by the US investment fund Kleiner Perkins.

The explosion in data use comes after the country's richest man Mukesh Ambani, shook up the telecoms market with the launch of new operator Jio in September.

The 4G telecom operator launched with an offer of free service for the rest of the year, followed by vastly cheaper data plans and free voice calls for life. That led to a dramatic fall in the average cost of mobile internet in India, which the study said was 1.9 dollars in March compared to 4.4 dollars three years earlier.

By March this year Jio had 108 million subscriber, and was charging just 17 cents per giga of data.

Despite regulatory and technical obstacles, India's mobile internet market has huge growth potential with hundreds of millions expected to get online over the next decade using smartphones. The country counts one billion mobile phone users, but nearly three-quarters of its population lacks access to the internet. In 2016, only 350 million Indians were able to go online.

Businesses dally in e-BIN registration

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The revenue authority also directed the field offices to update the NBR higher ups, including its chairman, every evening by e-mail on this front.

The NBR also formed a four-member team to monitor the progress of a checklist prepared to ensure that the groundwork for the new law has been laid properly before its

implementation. The new law envisages a single and uniform 15 percent VAT instead of the multiple rates under the VAT Act 1991.

Framed at the prescription of the International Monetary Fund, the law was supposed to be implemented from July 2015.

But it was delayed in the face of opposition from businesses who

have been demanding continuation of multiple rate of VAT on the ground that the application of single rate will hurt many small and medium firms and fuel living costs.

The NBR maintains that prices will not rise in most cases because of the scope for firms to get input tax credit and exemptions to many primary and essential commodities.



Md Ismail Hossain Siraji, chairman of Jamuna Bank, and Shafiqul Alam, managing director, attend a programme to celebrate the bank's 17th anniversary at Dilkusha in Dhaka.

Interest rate on deposits now below inflation

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The higher excise duty will only cause sufferings for the middle-class, who depend on returns from their savings for sustenance, said a senior executive of a private bank.

The private banks saw a 14.12 percent year-on-year growth in deposits in March this year, which was 8.19 percent a year earlier.

As of March, the total deposits in the banking sector stood at Tk 913,834 crore, of which Tk 16,705 crore was surplus, according to the central bank data.

In fiscal 2017-18, accounts with balance of up to Tk 1 lakh will remain exempt from excise duty.

An excise duty of Tk 800 will be imposed on debit or credit balance exceeding Tk 1 lakh but less than Tk 10 lakh, up from Tk 500 at present.

For balance between Tk 10 lakh and Tk 1 crore, the excise duty would be Tk 2,500, about 67 percent higher than the current rate.

Accounts with balance between Tk 1 crore and Tk 5 crore will be hit with Tk 12,000 excise duty. It is now Tk 7,500.

And for balance exceeding Tk 5 crore, Tk 25,000 will be slapped on as excise duty, up from Tk 15,000 now.

As of December 2016, about 83 lakh accounts stand to be affected by the proposed increase in excise duty form next fiscal year.

Linde, Praxair agree to \$73b merger

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Linde shareholders will be offered 1.54 shares in the new company for every Linde share they hold, while Praxair shareholders will be offered one for one -- leading to a roughly 50:50 ownership split, according to the deal.

Wolfgang Reitzle, Linde chairman and a veteran dealmaker, is considered the mastermind behind the deal.

Reitzle, 68, was the architect of Linde's \$10 billion deal to take over British BOC in 2006 and re-engineered the \$50 billion Lafarge-Holcim building materials merger in 2015. He will be the chairman of the merged company.

Last trading price of each Linde Bangladesh share was Tk 1,290 on the Dhaka bourse yesterday.

For Sale

A 52,000 Reiter Compact spinning mill in excellent working condition with Auto Doffing and Link corners is available for outright sale in India.

Interested parties can get in touch on the following email ID's and contact no either for total equipment or to takeover entire plant with land, buildings and Machinery.

Email IDs are: rk_viraj@yahoo.co.in anitha_tb@yahoo.com

Contact: 01776621638; Swamy.