



Ishtiaque Ahmed Chowdhury, CEO of Trust Bank, and Selima Ahmad, president of Bangladesh Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry, exchange the signed documents of a deal at a programme on Monday, for working on the capacity building of prospective women entrepreneurs.

India retail inflation seen picking up

REUTERS, Bengaluru

India's retail inflation is expected to have picked up slightly in July after cooling in the previous three months, a Reuters poll showed, but likely remained well below the central bank's 4 percent medium-term target.

Much of the increase is attributed to the return of food inflation. Vegetable prices have risen sharply following erratic monsoon rains. The consumer price index likely rose 1.87 percent last month, after dipping to an historic low of 1.54 percent in June, according to the median forecast of nearly 30 economists.

But forecasts ranged from 0.90 percent to 3.60 percent. The data is expected to be released on Aug. 14 at 1200 GMT.

"Vegetables like tomatoes and onions caused a bit of disruption with price rises driven by uneven monsoon rains. However, the new season will start by September and the arrival of new stocks should ease some of the recent pressure," said Tushar Arora, senior economist at HDFC Bank.

Food and beverages account for nearly half of the consumer price index basket and are largely dependent on the mon-

soons - which deliver about 70 percent of India's annual precipitation.

Uneven distribution of rainfall so far this year could lead to lower grain production, which would increase imports of edible oils, pulses and sugar, pushing prices up. It could also limit exports of cotton, rice and feed ingredients.

Forecasters also expected the wholesale price index rose 1.3 percent in July, after four months of easing inflation. In June the WPI rose 0.9 percent.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) cut interest rates last week - making it the first Asian central bank to ease this year - but maintained its neutral stance and said inflation could accelerate.

"The (next) RBI rate decision will depend on the August inflation figure, which comes before the October policy meeting," said Nikhil Gupta, economist at Motilal Oswal Financial Services. Gupta added the RBI could cut rates once more if inflation remains below or at 2 percent. However, a July 28 Reuters poll predicted the central bank would cut in August but then keep on the sidelines until at least 2019 as economic growth is expected to accelerate.

Trade forum to showcase Trump's Africa policy

AFP, Lome

US President Donald Trump barely mentioned Africa or trade with the continent during his whirlwind campaign and has been mostly silent about the region since taking office.

But the annual African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) forum being held in the Togolese capital Lome this week will bring together top US officials and African ministers.

The gathering will finally shine a light on Trump's policies toward the region of 1.2 billion people.

It was a trade deal inked between the United States and eligible African countries nations under Bill Clinton's presidency and enacted in 2000.

It gives 39 African nations duty-free access to the US market for about 6,500 products including

textiles, cars, fruit and wine.

Those countries permitted to participate in AGOA are obliged to prove that they are making efforts to improve human rights, the rule of law and worker protections.

Early signs were not good for the 45th president's interest in trade with the continent.

He spoke regularly on the campaign trail about the need to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement and to get a better deal with China -- but Africa did not feature in his top priorities.

But he has now sent his top trade negotiator Robert Lighthizer to Lome for the two-day meeting that concludes on Thursday along with a top level negotiating team.

Trump himself will not attend the talks.

When asked if Trump's "America first" policies would benefit African

countries or simply guarantee cheap commodities for the US, State Department spokesman Brian Neupert said that Washington has "very significant interests in Africa".

"There are opportunities for American investors in several sectors. For example in the energy sector -- the opportunities are enormous. Also in agriculture," he told AFP. "But Africa's infrastructure has to modernise, in partnership with the US private sector."

David Gilmore, the US ambassador to hosts Togo, told the tiny West African country that it must "continue to improve conditions for the private sector" to benefit from trade with the US. Trump has often hit out at perceived trade barriers and protectionist policies adopted by other countries.

If there was any change to the agreement or how it operates it is

likely that it would be intended to ensure "the elimination of barriers to United States trade and investment" as detailed under the law.

The US has already forcefully warned African countries seeking to ban imports of used clothes not to do so if they want to continue benefiting from AGOA.

The ban was agreed by the six countries of the East African Community -- which includes Kenya and Tanzania -- in 2016 to stimulate local industry rather than relying on the importation of used garments, known locally as "okrika".

"The AGOA criteria is very clear about not putting in place bans or restrictions on US products," said Constance Hamilton, acting US trade representative to Africa, ahead of the Lome meeting.

She warned that the east African move put 40,000 US jobs at risk.



ABUL KHAIR STEEL

SM Monjurul Islam, brand manager and head of brand marketing department at Abul Khair Steel, poses with an award as one of the Asia's top 50 brand leaders, at an event in Singapore. The award was presented by a network for corporate professionals named CMO Asia that recognises experts for excellence in branding, marketing and other fields.



JANATA BANK

Shaikh Md Wahid-uz-Zaman, chairman of Janata Bank, attends a programme to lay the foundation stone of Janata Bank Regional Staff College building in Khulna on Sunday.

US push for freer Nafta e-commerce meets growing resistance

REUTERS, Mexico City

A US proposal for Mexico and Canada to vastly raise the value of online purchases that can be imported duty-free from stores like Amazon.com and eBay is emerging as a flashpoint in an upcoming renegotiation of the Nafta trade deal.

Vulnerable industries like footwear, textiles and bricks and mortar retail in Mexico and Canada are pushing back hard against the proposal by the US trade representative to raise Mexican and Canadian duty-free import limits for e-commerce to the US level of \$800, from current thresholds of \$50 and C\$20, respectively.

For the Mexicans, the main worry is that such a move could open a back door for cheap imports from Asia and beyond. For Canadian retailers, the fear is that e-commerce companies will undercut their prices.

The US plan was unveiled in July as part of the Trump administration's goals to renegotiate the 25-year-old treaty.

While Mexico and Canada are still formulating their responses, Mexico City is leaning strongly against the proposal in its current form, and Ottawa may not be far behind.

The proposed \$800 level "opens a completely unnecessary door" to imports from outside the Nafta trading bloc, Mexican Economy Minister Ildefonso Guajardo said on Thursday

on the sidelines of a Nafta-related event, calling it "a very sensitive topic."

The growing controversy over how to account for a burgeoning regional e-commerce sector dominated by the United States highlights a rare area where the Trump administration is pushing to liberalize trade rules rather than tightening them.

Much of Trump's criticism of Nafta stems from his belief it has decimated US manufacturing as companies shifted production to Mexican factories with cheaper labor, creating a US trade deficit with Mexico worth more than \$60 billion.

But Mexican and Canadian business leaders fear the rule change could make their industries vulnerable, arguing that unless online retailers can show products are made in North America, they should not be exempted from duties levied on other imports.

"We can't open the door to inputs from outside the region coming in tax-free when we're talking about the need to reduce the deficit and create jobs," said Moises Kalach, who fronts the international negotiating arm of Mexico's CCE business lobby. "It goes completely against that."

Guajardo said Mexico's retail group the National Self-service and Department Store Association, which includes powerful members such as Wal-Mart de Mexico, had visited him

last week to express concerns about the proposal. He said the group's representative brought to the meeting a \$250 jacket bought on the internet as evidence that violations to the existing limit were already threatening members' businesses.

"Suppose there was an \$800 free limit. Can you imagine how many shirts Vietnam could send to Mexico in a packet below that price? They could easily flood us with packets of 100," he said, while recognizing the need to smooth customs processes. Complicating efforts to agree on a common set of rules is a tangle of diverging regulations on tax and how the restrictions on imports differ in the region depending on whether they enter by air, sea or land.

Amazon.com Inc and eBay Inc declined to comment for this story.

eBay has previously said it supports an increase to Canada's low-value customs 'de minimis' threshold for e-commerce to promote seamless access to the global marketplace. "Increasing the threshold 'absolutely' is eBay's top priority in the Nafta renegotiation, a person familiar with the matter said.

Canadian opposition is being led by retailers, whose industry association said it was concerned about "the behavioral shift that would inevitably result if shoppers can buy a far wider range and higher value of goods tax-free and duty-free."

Austrian firms, lawyers complain to EU about wage dumping law

REUTERS, Vienna

An Austrian law to deter companies from contracting out work to lower-cost eastern European firms breaches EU regulations, an industry body has argued in a filing to the European Commission, which has supported this view in a related court case.

Austria's Association of Metaltechnology Industries said late on Tuesday it had filed the complaint over the law against companies that use cut-price labour, saying it makes it hard for Austrian groups to work with foreign contractors.

The association listed as a recent example Austrian engineering group Andritz being fined around 22 million euros (\$25.8 million) for using a Croatia-based contractor for a 7 million euro project in Austria.

Andritz has appealed against the fine. Wages in Austria are typically higher than in its eastern neighbours, many of which are EU members. The government in Vienna is pushing for ever-tougher laws to discourage Austrian companies from hiring foreigners, a contentious goal given that within the EU the flow of services and workers should be free.

"The Association of Metaltechnology Industries has already filed a complaint in March ... with the EU Commission against the aspects of the (wage and social dumping law) that are contrary to (European) Union law," the association said.

"The Andritz case shows ... that the

assignment of (jobs to) external service providers is being rendered practically impossible," it added.

Association chief Christian Knill said the way Austrian authorities interpret the law is a "permanent threat" to companies and he expected companies to exit the Austrian market gradually should such practices continue.

In a related case brought on behalf of Slovenian contractors, law firm Grilc Vouk Skof, which operates in Austria and Slovenia and also represents the Croatian firm in the Andritz case, said it had asked the Commission for an opinion on Austria's law.

Grilc Vouk Skof sent Reuters a letter in German dated May 11 from the Commission to the European Court of Justice, where the law firm has lodged a Slovenian challenge against the Austrian law. It expects a decision later this year or in 2018.

The Commission said in the letter that the way Austria implements its law "breaches article 56 of the (treaty on the functioning of the European Union)".

The Commission was not immediately available to comment on Wednesday on the Austrian law.

The article says "restrictions on freedom to provide services within the Union shall be prohibited in respect of nationals of Member States who are established in a Member State other than that of the person for whom the services are intended".

China's aluminium foil makers plan challenge to US dumping duties

REUTERS, Beijing

China's top aluminium foil producers are preparing to launch a legal defence challenging a preliminary US ruling on Wednesday to impose hefty penalties on imports from the world's top producers, two sources familiar with the matter said.

Loften Aluminum, China's top foil exporter to the United States, is joining 11 other companies to fight the ruling, the first such case since the inauguration of US President Donald Trump, an official at the company said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The China Nonferrous Metals Industry Association (CNIA) is leading the charge on the case, an official at the body said.

The companies plan to file their case later this month, the Loftan official said. If the duties are implemented, Loftan would face anti-subsidy duties on its foil sales to the United States of 80.97 percent.



One of the winners of Singer's ongoing campaign—Eid offer e sobai kaat, 300 free fridge e bajimat—receives a free fridge from Singer officials at a programme.