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The Financial Express Friday | February 1, 2019

Factory owners want govt support for short period

Implementation of RMG workers' new wage

FE Report

Apparel sector leaders on Thursday demanded of the government to provide policy support, including cash incentive, to facilitate implementation of the recently revised wage structure for the readymade garment (RMG) workers.

"Government should come forward to support us, at least for a short period of one to two years, for implementation of the new wage structure," said BGMEA President Md Siddiqur Rahman.

"We don't want any factory to be closed or to lose any entrepreneur," he told a discussion on work plan for the recently formed monitoring committees in the city.

The leader of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) said the RMG exporters do not get any incentive, except for 4.0 per cent in case of new market exploration.

He said the backward linkage spinning or textile mills, members of Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA), also get 4.0 per cent cash incentive.

The labour and employment ministry on January 21 formed 29 committees mainly to monitor implementation of the latest wage structure and labour situation in different labour-intensive industrial hubs in Dhaka, Gazipur, Narayanganj, Chattogram, Khulna, Sylhet, Moulvibazar and Habiganj.

State Minister for Labour Monnujan Sufian was present as chief guest at the meeting while Labour Secretary Afroza Khan, Bangladesh Employers' Federation President Kamran T Rahman, Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association Vice President Mansur Ahmed, International Labour Organisation (ILO) Bangladesh Deputy Country Director Gagan Rajbhandari and labour leaders, among others, were present.

The minister launched the new toll-free hotline number (16357) administered by the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) at the meeting so that the workers could raise their concerns, which could be resolved through discussion.

Defending the recent workers termination in the RMG sector, the BGMEA president said the factory authorities have the right to terminate the workers on different grounds, but through abiding by the labour laws.

Citing media reports over termination of around 5,000 garment workers, he raised question about the percentage of the total 4.4 million workers.

The BKMEA vice president said the government should also consider the problems of the factory owners in implementing the new wage structure.

He demanded of the government to raise the cash incentive for new market exploration from existing 4.0 per cent to 20 per cent.

Terming wage implementation 'a tough task', the minister said capacities of all the factories are not same. "But, we don't want any further anarchy over the wage implementation. We have formed 29 monitoring committees and launched the toll-free helpline service in this regard."

Mr. Kamran T Rahman said that there are pressures from different arena because of the global spotlight on the RMG sector.

The government has recently amended the labour law, he said, adding: "What is needed now is to ensure the effective enforcement of the law. Otherwise, Bangladesh has to face international criticism."

He, however, suggested holding bilateral dialogue and communication between the owners and workers' rep-

NEW AGE SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2019,

Bangladesh's 90pc female migrants at risky homes in ME

Md Owasim Uddin Bhuyan

SINCE 2015, about four lakh female workers of Bangladesh went to Middle Eastern countries as domestic workers and most of them became victims of sexual abuse and torture.

They make up 90 per cent of the country's female migrants.

During the same period, about 46,000 other female workers, making up 10 per cent of female migrants from Bangladesh got various jobs other than as housemaids in countries that offered better working conditions, according to the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment.

In 2015, Bangladesh began sending more female workers to Saudi Arabia after Indonesia, Sri Lanka and the Philippines stopped sending their female works to the KSA amid widespread abuses by employers.

In the light of this experience the EWOE Ministry decided to encourage female workers to take more attractive jobs abroad.

EWOE ministry joint secretary for employment Jahangir Alam told New Age that they were trying to gradually scale down sending female domestic workers.

He said that some Bangladeshi female migrants were working abroad as apparel workers and cleaners at hospitals, supermarkets and other institutions.

According to Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training, the largest number of Bangladeshi female migrants returned home as victims of sexual abuse and torture without getting their wages.

A substantial number of Bangladeshi female migrants are working in Jordan, Lebanon, the UAE, Oman and Qatar, the BMET officials said

On January 24, the EWOE ministry at a meeting reviewed the state of implementation of the prime minister's directives to it and her polls pledges.

The prime minister asked the EWOE Ministry to boost female migration after providing them skill by extending the tenures of training.

Officials told the meeting that 37 technical training centres provided six-month durations' training on garment trade to female workers.

In addition, Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib Mohila Technical Training Centre provided 480 hours' housekeeping training to 30 female workers in collaboration with City and Guilds, they told the meeting.

Migrant rights activists urged the government of Bangladesh to send female migrants for jobs other than as domestic helps.

WARBE Development Foundation chairman Syed Saiful Haque said that would never be possible to protect the female workers at employers homes abroad.

He called for exploring the East Asian countries' job market for female workers.

Ovibashi Karmi Unnayan Programme chairman Shakirul Islam said that the government should evaluate the female migrants for taking the next step.

He also said that the state should set aside sufficient funds for grooming skilled female workers.

The Financial Express Monday | February 4, 2019

SDG progress report

BD lagging far behind in chasing some targets

FE Report

Bangladesh is falling behind on a number of core SDG indicators, including the ones relating to revenue generation and foreign direct investment, according to the latest SDG progress report of the government.

At the same time, unavailability of quality, accessible, timely, reliable and disaggregated data is hindering the implementation of sustainable development goals (SDGs) and the decision-making process, the report said.

The findings of the progress report were shared at its launching ceremony at the National Economic Council (NEC) conference room in the capital on Sunday.

The report showed the country has made impressive progress in reducing headcount poverty and that the total government spending on essential services like education, health and social protection is also on the rise.

"Child welfare indicators such as the under-five mortality rate and the neonatal mortality rate have already reached or surpassed the 2020 milestone," Dr Shamsul Alam, a member of the Planning Commission, said in his keynote presentation.

"The share of manufacturing value added to GDP has already reached 21.74 per cent in 2016-17, exceeding the 2020 target of 21.5 per cent," he pointed out.

Significant progress has also been made in ensuring access to electricity and expanding mobile and Internet coverage, the progress report said.

However, the total government revenue as a proportion of GDP stood at 10.16 per cent in 2017, lagging far behind the 2020 target of 16 per cent, the report showed.

At the same time, foreign direct investment as a proportion of total domestic budget stood at 7.4 per cent in 2017 -- way behind the 2020 target of 14 per cent.

Please Turn Over

BD lagging far behind

The volume of remittance as a proportion of total GDP, on the other hand, is around 5.1 per cent while it needs to reach 7.6 per cent by 2020, according to the report.

Similar sluggishness is also visible when it comes to quality education, reduction of inequality, renewable energy and manufacturing employment.

"The total government revenue as a proportion of GDP is falling behind target," said Dr Alam, who heads the General Economics Division of the Planning Commission.

He also noted that FDI also needs to grow in an accelerated way.

"The volume of remittances as a proportion of total GDP has also to be improved considerably," he added.

Speaking at the event, experts called for developing country-specific SDG indicators in line with the country context.

"We need to be innovative and work out our own domestic indicators in line with our own development challenges," said eminent economist Prof Dr Wahiduddin Mahmud.

He noted that up until now, the progress of Bangladesh has been mostly driven by remittances coming from unskilled and semi-skilled expatriate workers as well as ready-made garments.

"But the next stage of development should be attained through skilled workers and productive employment," he said.

Speaking on the occasion, Prime Minister's Economic Adviser Dr Mashiur Rahman blamed the country's protectionist tariff regime for low revenue generation.

"Our interest in protectionism is so strong that we find all ways to give more protection to our industries," he said.

"Unless the protectionism is brought to a rationale level, there is no way to make the local industries more competitive while the revenue generation will also remain low," he added.

Planning Minister MA Mannan, in his speech, stressed the need for strengthening the Bureau of Statistics to address the data gap in order to properly implement the SDGs.

Prime Minister's Principal Secretary Nojibur Rahman and UN Resident Coordinator in Bangladesh Mia Seppo also spoke.

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The Daily Star
FEBRUARY 6, 2019, MAGH 24, 1425 BS

Time running out on Qatar labour reform

Warns Amnesty

AFP, *Doha*

Qatar is running out of time to stamp out widespread serious labour abuse for tens of thousands of migrant workers before hosting the 2022 World Cup, Amnesty International warned yesterday.

The rights watchdog said that despite well-publicised "nascent reforms" Qatar risked breaking its promises to deliver meaningful change before the Middle East hosts football's biggest tournament for the first time.

"Time is running out if the Qatari authorities want to deliver a legacy we can all cheer, namely a labour system that ends the abuse and misery inflicted upon so many migrant workers every day," said Amnesty's Stephen Cockburn.

Although the "Reality Check" report focuses on conditions for all of the two million migrant workers in Qatar, not just the 30,000 on direct World Cup projects, Amnesty said FIFA had an "ongoing responsibility" to prevent abuse.

In response, football's governing body said it welcomed Qatari labour reforms in recent months and its continued work with "stakeholders".

"We share the view of Amnesty International that additional progress is needed for the full implementation of the commitments for comprehensive labour reform," a FIFA spokesperson told AFP.

The Amnesty report stated that despite reforms, conditions "for many migrant workers in Qatar remain harsh".

Amnesty called on Qatar to strengthen and properly enforce current labour laws, tackle worker debt by increasing the minimum wage, stop passports being held by bosses and, crucially, to fundamentally overhaul the "kafala", or sponsorship, system.

This practice, which ties workers to their employers, restricts their ability to change jobs or leave the country, remains firmly in place, said Amnesty, despite Doha's pledge to end the system.

Amnesty also called for much better protection for some 175,000 domestic workers, who remain "out of sight and out of mind".

"Holes in the reforms to date mean many workers are still stuck in harsh conditions, vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, while those who return home do so empty handed, with no compensation and no justice," added Cockburn.

The report could temper the current jubilatory mood in Qatar, where there has been widespread celebration since the national team won its first ever Asian Cup at the weekend.

The gas-rich state has initiated a series of labour reforms in recent years following intense international pressure and at a time of deep political tension within the Gulf, which has seen Qatar isolated by former neighbouring allies.

Qatar has introduced a monthly minimum wage of 750 riyals ($206), a system to ensure workers are paid electronically, and partially scrapped the exit visa system which meant workers had to seek employers' permission before leaving the country.

It also agreed in 2017 to work closely with the International Labour Organization (ILO), which now has a Doha office, to improve workers' conditions.

The Daily Star
FEBRUARY 6, 2019

Minister seeks fair prices for apparel

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh demanded fair prices for garment items from the US retailers and brands as the local apparel exporters spent billions of dollars to strengthen workplace safety that increased the cost of production.

Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi made the call during a meeting with US Ambassador in Bangladesh Earl R Miller at the minister's secretariat office in Dhaka yesterday.

"The cost of production has increased by 25 percent to 30 percent over the last five years due to remediation of the garment factories as per the recommendations of the Accord and Alliance, two foreign agencies for building inspection."

Munshi shared the info in a press conference after the meeting with Miller.

The minister sought cooperation from the US envoy to convey the message of the price hike plea to the American retailers and brands, as any particular government cannot fix the prices of garment items.

The minister said, for instance, the t-shirt which was supposed to be produced at a cost of $1 earlier now costs as high as $1.25 or $1.30 a piece.

"So, we can demand around 25 percent to 30 percent rise in the price of garment items now."

"We will hold a meeting with the CEOs of almost all major retailers and brands like Walmart, Inditex, Target and Primark soon to urge them to increase the prices of garment items as we spent a lot of money to fix the loopholes in the factories," the minister said.

Munshi also said the buyers always demand higher compliance at the factory level, but they do not want to increase the prices of the products.

The ambassador told the minister that he could be a good salesman for Bangladesh in his country during his time as an envoy of the US.

Currently, the amount of the investment of the US investors in Bangladesh is more than $2 billion and more American investors are interested to invest in infrastructure, power, airlines and LNG, he said.

Regarding the reinstatement of the GSP for Bangladesh to the US, the minister informed the envoy about the progresses that the south Asian country has made for workplace safety in the garment sector.

However, neither the minister nor the ambassador shared details about the GSP as Bangladesh's trade privilege was suspended by the US government in June 2013 citing poor labour rights and weak safety standards in the garment factories.

Munshi said 90 percent of the factories have already completed the remediation work.

Bangladesh can play the key role in the US's Indo-Pacific strategy and reap a significant benefit from it, said Miller. "The US values the partnership of Bangladesh."

The US is the single largest export destination for Bangladesh as the bilateral trade remains unbalanced toward Bangladesh.

"So we need to work together for reducing the trade imbalance," he said.

The diplomat said he had already asked many American CEOs to come to Bangladesh as they mainly come to the Indian capital Delhi for investment.

"It is my duty to bring them to Dhaka where there is a ready market of 160 million for the US investors," the envoy said. "Workers' safety, factory safety and labour rights have a lot of interest in Washington."

Bangladesh can be an example to the world, not just to the developing countries, but to the world on how workers have access to the labour rights and working in safe condition, he said.

Accord and Alliance have done an extraordinary job over the last couple of years, he said, adding that the amendment to the labour law is very encouraging.

The Daily Star
DHAKA WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 6, 2019,

EU to provide 205m euros for quality education

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

European Union will provide 205 million euros to Bangladesh for quality education and training for the next four years.

The EU yesterday launched the Human Capital Development Programme for Bangladesh 2021, aiming to promote the implementation of long-term sustainable education policies towards a lifelong learning approach, bringing together primary, technical, and vocational education.

A signing ceremony of a bilateral financing agreement between the European Union and Government of Bangladesh on HCDP-21 was held yesterday at Economic Relations Division (ERD) in Dhaka.

Ambassador Rensje Teerink, head of delegation of European Union to Bangladesh and Monowar Ahmed, secretary of ERD, signed the agreement.

The 205 million euros are to be divided into three parts -- 150 million for primary education, 50 million for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and 5 million for complementary technical assistance, said a EU press statement.

"The Government of Bangladesh acknowledges the longstanding support of the EU in a sector as crucial as education. We are looking forward to strengthening our solid partnership and making an important contribution to reaching sustainable development goals by 2030," said ERD Secretary Monowar Ahmed at the signing ceremony.

The EU programme is putting special emphasis on a few key targets: quality education through better trained teachers and revised curricula, including learning materials, increased enrollment of out-of-school children into the formal education system, and equal access.

The Financial Express Thursday | February 7, 2019

Export earnings grow 13.39pc in July-Jan period of FY '19

FE Report

Earnings from the country's merchandise exports in the first seven months of the current fiscal year (FY) stood at US$ 24.17 billion, marking a 13.39 per cent growth over the corresponding period of last fiscal, according to official data.

The exports fetched $21.32 billion during the July-January period of FY 2017-18.

The export performance was 7.91 per cent higher than the target set for the seven-month period of this FY, data showed.

The single month earnings in January last grew by 7.95 per cent to $3.67 billion from $3.40 billion in the same month last year, according to the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) data released on Wednesday.

The January performance also surpassed the target set for the month by 1.59 per cent.

The earnings from export of readymade garments (RMG) during the July-January period of the current FY grew by 14.51 per cent to $20.21 billion from $17.65 billion in the corresponding period of last fiscal, according to the EPB data.

The earnings also surpassed the target by 7.65 per cent.

The country earned $10.14 billion from knitwear exports during the period under review. It marked a growth of 13.86 per cent compared to $8.90 billion in the corresponding period of the last FY.

Export of woven garments in the first seven months of FY'19 grew by 15.18 per cent to $10.07 billion, from $8.74 billion in the same period of the last FY.

The earnings from home textile exports witnessed a slight fall by 0.79 per cent to $490.2 million during the period. Earnings from home textile, also, fell short of the target by 9.23 per cent during the period.

When asked, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) President Md Siddiqur Rahman termed the RMG export growth 'good' and attributed it to the safety measures taken by the industry.

The entrepreneurs have invested huge amount of money in workplace safety remediation and setting up environment-friendly factories, he said.

All those efforts have helped regain the buyers' confidence and encouraged them to source products from Bangladesh, he said, adding these work also helped improve the image of the country as well as the sector.

He, however, demanded government's support at least for one to two years in implementing the new wage structure, seeking 3.0 per cent cash incentive for readymade garment exporters to help remain competitive and increase the export volumes.

The earnings from jute and jute goods in July-January period of the current FY continued to decline as it fell by 24.66 per cent to $498.66 million from $661.86 million in the same period of the last fiscal year.

The country earned $626.42 million from exports of leather and leather products in the first half of FY '19, marking an 11.71 per cent negative growth during the period.

Earnings from leather footwear grew 7.35 per cent to $384.30 million in the July-January period.

Frozen and live fish exports in the first seven months of the current FY witnessed 2.01 per cent growth to $361.09 million during the same period of the current fiscal year, according to data.

When asked, Bangladesh Frozen Food Exporters Association (BFFEA) President Md Aminulllah identified traditional farming, low production of local species 'bagda' and failure to compete with low-priced, small-sized vannamei for the 12.37 per cent negative growth of shrimp exports.

He also demanded policy support to increase bagda cultivation and switching over semi-intensive shrimp cultivation and introducing the vannamei cultivation to be competitive in the global market.

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Financial Express Thursday | February 7, 2019

Skilled migration almost stagnant

Arafat Ara

An official move to send skilled workers abroad has hardly produced any visible outcome as the number of outbound skilled workforce remained static in 2018.

The rate of skilled workers was about 43 per cent both in 2017 and 2018, showed statistics released by the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET) on Wednesday.

A total of 317,528 out of 734,181 overseas workers were skilled in 2018. It was 434,344 out of 1008525 in 2017.

Other categories, including professional and semi-skilled ones, also remained almost stagnant.

The BMET figures showed that the rate of professional outbound workers was 0.44 per cent in 2017 and 0.36 per cent in 2018.

Semi-skilled workers' rates were about 15 per cent in 2017 and 16 per cent in 2018.

According to experts, there is no alternative to skilled workers as their demand is increasing globally.

Skilled workers send more remittances and also help to reduce workplace exploitation, they said.

The experts also criticised the government's improper policy to develop demand-based and country-specific skilled manpower.

Workers get training in 45 trades in 71 technical training centres (TTCs) in the country.

When contacted, a senior BMET official said the government has a plan to send 50 per cent skilled workers abroad by 2021 and cent percent by 2030.

It has made multiple initiatives to achieve the target.

They have made a deal with City & Guilds, a UK-based global skills development organisation, which is providing training in at least six TTCs.

Shakirul Islam, chairman of Ovibashi Karmi Unnayan Programme, said it is necessary to outline a proper policy to enhance the number of skilled and professional outbound manpower.

Maximum workers are now going abroad with individual visas or so-called free visas. But it is very tough to identify their categories, he added.

They usually are not employed in the companies which are mentioned in their employment visas. So, it should be stopped and bring more company visas, he said.

Mr Islam stressed the need for necessary upgradation of the TTCs and inclusion of vocational education general curriculum to increase skilled migration abroad.

Since 1976, Bangladesh has sent about 12 million workers abroad. Of them, the majority went to the Middle-Eastern countries.

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The Financial Express

Friday | February 8, 2019

First shipbuilding SEZ gets BEZA's licence

$150m dry-dock to create 3,000 jobs

FE Report

The country's first and the largest private dockyard with a capacity of 0.1 million DWT (deadweight tonnage) got licence for shipbuilding and repairing from Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority (BEZA) on Thursday.

BEZA awarded the final licence to Karnaphuli Dry-Dock Special Economic Zone (SEZ), a concern of Karnaphuli Ship Builders, at a programme in a city hotel with its Chairman Paban Chowdhury in the chair.

It is the eighth economic zone (EZ) of the proposed 100 EZs, and the first SEZ dedicated to shipbuilding and maintenance. Other seven are multi-sectoral EZs.

The area of Karnaphuli Dry-Dock SEZ is 20 acres, while its expected primary employment is 3,000. The total investment of the SEZ is US$ 150 million with $105 million loan from World Bank.

Large ships can be repaired in the dry-dock after construction of its jetty, expected to be completed by next month (March). The authority expects to earn $120 million from the SEZ.

In his speech, Karnaphuli Dry-Dock SEZ Managing Director Engineer M A Rashid said about 3,000 ships operate to and from Chittagong Port annually.

At present there is only one dry-dock in Chittagong, run by Bangladesh Navy. It has a capacity of 20,000 DWT, which is insufficient to provide necessary services to the ships. Singapore operates its ports with 50 dry-docks, he further said.

Besides, the developed countries are gradually closing their dockyards due to high production cost. The labour cost of a Tk 1.0-billion ship in those countries is about Tk 350 million. But in Bangladesh the labour cost for the same will come down to Tk 15-20 million, he added.

A release of BEZA said more than 2,500 ships operate through Chittagong Port a year along with 30 ships of Bangladesh Shipping Corporation and private owners. Besides, there are many ships of Bangladeshi owners, registered in other countries.

It is mandatory to repair these ships after every two-three years. But, these ships cannot do it due to capacity constraints of Chittagong Dry Dock Limited. So, the owners of small ships are being bound to repair their ships outside the country.

The BEZA chairman in his speech said investment in the SEZs will be very much secured. The authority has to be ready to face the challenges of meeting the expectations of the investors as well as to provide quality utility service to the SEZs.

Paban Chowdhury also said BEZA was very cautious in giving licence to a SEZ only for shipbuilding and maintenance, as private EZ is a new concept and shipbuilding is an exclusive type of business.

Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) Chairman Commodore Md Mozammel Haque said there is a shortage of qualified manpower in shipbuilding sector despite its huge potentials.

Many companies of the sector have collapsed due to lack of efficient management. Only infrastructure is not sufficient, he added.

National Skills Development Authority Executive Chairman Faruque Hossain said about 23 ministries have respective training programmes to develop skilled human resources in the country. But conducting these programmes in a sporadic way will not be that much effective.

The authority will work as a coordinator in this regard. It will implement the programmes, develop necessary curriculum, provide certification, and monitor quality, he added.

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The Financial Express Sunday | February 10, 2019

Digital workplace and artificial intelligence

Emerging technologies have the potential to disrupt HR and redefine its future. Innovative use of AI and social media is crucial to transform HR operations and workplace, and play its role to keep the organisation moving forward, writes Md Aminul Haque

IN the age of social media, big data and artificial intelligence (AI) which continue to evolve at a rapid pace, businesses are embracing these technologies to move towards a model digital workplace.

When it comes to human resources (HR) and talent management, the business processes are continuously evolving with the integration of AI and social media transforming the daily HR tasks and interactions in the organisations. In the current scenario, HR function has become more important to find out ways to hire and retain best talents, and improve their productivity and efficiency by leveraging technology to make informed decisions.

The use of emerging technologies in organisations is redefining how people perform their assigned tasks and how they are evaluated. As a result, workplace is transforming, and HR needs to transform even faster to embrace the change.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND HR: To ensure that they are prepared to step in the era of AI, firstly, HR practitioners need to make sure that people are at the centre of the talent technology they choose for their workplaces.

New tools driven by artificial intelligence should not affect the paramount role of the individuals as the efficiency and productivity gains and ultimate value the technology deployment brings to the workplace is determined by them. This should be the top priority of HR and technology is already there to innovatively deliver the best possible employee experience, interventions and learning opportunities.

Secondly, innovative use of technology for analytical capabilities should be another prime objective of organisations embracing AI. They need to leverage smart analytics driven by AI to make better informed decisions.

While the organisations look to hire and retain best available human resources, such employees and candidates are also aware of their worth and they expect more from the employers in terms of benefits and career progression, which often result in high employee turnover and increase in recruitment and retainment costs.

Emerging talent technologies allow for real-time analytics and integration of all data sources to help HR practitioners meet this challenge organisations are facing today.

Pacific Jeans and Ananta Group -- two of the leading denim manufacturers in Bangladesh have already started their Human Capital Modernisation journey. Modern workplace inclusion is in their roadmap.

AI assists HR practitioners to make better insight-driven decisions about the talent using the HR data available and allow organisations to simplify complex processes to deliver the best possible employee experience.

IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA: Social media over the last decade or so has largely redefined how we communicate and this is not just limited to us as individuals but has also taken organisations on board. Social media has the power to make or break an organisation's image within hours, and as a result, HR is constantly under pressure to deliver only the best image of the company on social media. Recruiters now need to ensure a positive image of the organisation on social networks to attract the best talents as they take advantage of social media tools to recruit them.

By leveraging technologies like the Oracle Talent Acquisition Cloud platform, HR can harness the power of the cloud to source talents across multiple social and digital community channels. Following the identification of prospective candidates and existing employees through social listening tools, the next step is for organisations to actively engage with them.

For social recruitment and engagement programmes to be truly effective in the long run, HR needs to have well-established channels, both online and offline, to continue conversation and ensure that they bring new recruits into the fold. For example, as part of one of the most recruitment-intensive industries, Apollo Hospitals in India, with its 32,000-strong workforce and 61 hospitals relied heavily on technology to hire and retain a diverse, knowledge-based workforce. Oracle HCM enabled Apollo Hospitals to clear the bottlenecks, eradicated the functional silos and helped it to manage the complete life cycle of an employee with ease. It gave an integrated platform to handle talent management challenges. PVR Cinemas, the largest chain of multiplexes in India, are using Oracle HCM Cloud technology to create a seamless and connected HR experience, leading to employee-centric processes and a marked change in customer experience. For example, the business previously used Excel files for the employee lifecycle process; but with Oracle, all that data has been shifted to a single source on the cloud for instant visibility of employee performance.

Additionally, to help businesses attract, engage and retain employees, Oracle is driving new innovations within its Oracle HCM Cloud that makes the HR experience even more akin to everything people love about social media. Employees can choose a "newsfeed" style interface for easy access to relevant updates, enjoy personalised and proactive training recommendations, and use automated chatbots to get quick answers to routine questions. These updates are coming soon to Oracle's HCM Cloud, and existing customers will have automatic access to the updated suite of AI-driven HR tools as soon as they're in place.

The next-generation of workers want more insight into the business of their organisations and also expect to remain connected with their employers and colleagues. Social media is a great tool to facilitate this, sharing moments as they unfold and to provide exclusive access through intimate online forums or live onsite visits for a select group of employees or potential recruits.

Emerging technologies have the potential to disrupt HR and redefine its future. Innovative use of AI and social media is crucial to transform HR operations and workplace and play its role to keep the organisation moving forward.

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Sunday | February 10, 2019

961 export-oriented RMG units come under digital mapping

961 export-oriented RMG units

FE Report

A total of 961 export-oriented ready-made garment (RMG) factories located in Dhaka district have been brought under the digital mapping system to have better ideas about the industry based on credible data.

Under the public database system, the authorities map factory names, GPS location, postal address, number of workers, products, export countries, brands and buyers, memberships, affiliations and certifications.

Of them, 855 units are registered by the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) and 144 are members of Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA). There are some units that have registered with both the trade bodies.

About 774,422 workers have been listed under the mapping where 60.8 per cent are female and 39.2 per cent are male workers.

Out of the 961 factories, 13 are not members of any of the trade bodies-BGMEA and BKMEA, said Syed Hasibuddin Hussain, project manager of Digital RMG Factory Mapping in Bangladesh (DRFM-B) while talking to the FE at the launching ceremony of the digital map containing information on export-oriented RMG factories.

Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi launched the map on Saturday at the BGMEA headquarters in the city.

Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) president Shafiul Islam Mohiuddin, BGMEA president Md Siddiqur Rahman, BKMEA vice president Mansoor Ahmed, Department of Inspections for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) inspector general Shamsuzzaman Bhuiyan, among others, were present at the launching ceremony.

Out of the 961 factories, some 448 factories have been assessed on fire, electrical and structural integrity by Accord and 169 by Alliance, according to the map information.

A total of 579 units are affiliated with Business Social Compliance Initiative, 356 with SEDEX, 175 with OEKO-TEX, 126 with WRAP and 109 with ISO inspection organisations, it shows.

Initiated in 2017, the map incorporating factories from across the country was expected to be completed in 2021, Mr Hussain said.

Led by Brac University with lead funding from C&A Foundation and support from Brac USA, the BGMEA, BKMEA and DIFE also are the strategic partners of the project.

Terming the map time-befitting and important both for buyers and apparel makers, the minister stressed the need for including information on buyers who so far increased prices of apparels and how much after the latest wage hike and those who expressed interests in doing so.

He also stressed the need for fair prices from buyers. FBCCI president Mohiuddin pressed for fair prices for locally-made garment items and ensuring transparency in the whole supply chain.

BGMEA president Md Siddiqur Rahman said though apparel makers invested a huge amount of money for workplace safety, prices of apparels were not increasing in tandem with the cost of production.

He expressed fear that many workers might be jobless due to failure to implement the latest wage structure by the garment factories.

He, however, suggested including information of only export-oriented garment factories in the map saying they couldn't take the responsibility of those not affiliated with the trade bodies.

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NEWAGE
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2019

Nurjahan returns from KSA empty-handed

BMET begins hearing migrants' problems

Md Owasim Uddin Bhuyan

NURJAHAN Begum, 30, of Kurigram worked as a domestic worker in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for six months, four months without any wage and last Ramamdan she was repatriated by Bangladesh embassy as her employer used to torture her.

Mother of two kids, Nurjahan returned to Bangladesh empty handed.

On Monday, Nurjahan while narrating her sad story at the 1st public hearing organized by the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training said 'I was forced to work hard from early morning to late at night. If I demanded wage the employer responded by kicking me so that I fell unconscious.'

Though the government trumpeted that female migration was free of cost, a broker in the capital took Tk 50,000 from Nurjahan to send her to the KSA as a domestic worker.

She said at the hearing that she was locked up inside a bathroom and her employer burnt her right leg with boiling water.

Unable to withstand torture she said that one day she ran away from the employer's house and spent one night inside a cave in a hilly area.

'Later, I took shelter at Bangladesh embassy before returning to Bangladesh with support from an NGO,' said Nurjahan.

'I would humbly appeal to the government to ensure that no other women of Bangladesh became victim of such torture abroad,' she said in tears.

Female workers Rina Akter and Rupali Khatun also narrated similar stories at the public hearing.

Bangladesh Nari Sramik Kendra executive director Sumaiya Islam who helped Nurjahan to return to Bangladesh from the KSA told the public hearing that Nurjahan was paid no wages for four months and paid much less wage for two other months.

It's modern day slavery in Saudi Arabia, she told New Age after the public hearing.

BMET director general Salim Reza who chaired the hearing said that the BMET would hold weekly public hearing at 11AM every Monday.

He urged the recruiting agents who took part in the public hearing to reduce migrant workers' problems in destination countries.

Recruiting agent and SA trading proprietor Abdul Alim said that Bangladesh government should request Saudi government to open a cell under the Saudi labour ministry to dispose of the cases of the female migrant workers in Saudi Arabia.

Al Rabeta managing partner Mohammad Abul Bashar said that Bangabhaban officials asked him over phone to bring back such women victims within six hours which no recruiting agency could do.

BMET director for immigration Atiqur Rahman and director for training Nurul Islam, recruiting agency owners were present at the hearing.

The Daily Star
DHAKA MONDAY FEBRUARY 11, 2019

Ensure quality public investment: CPD

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) yesterday urged the government to ensure the quality of public investment or else many will be left out from the benefits of economic growth.

The think-tank particularly mentioned three major areas -- education, healthcare and social protection -- where the government should give immediate focus to make public spending more efficient.

"The economy needs to enhance the quality of education as well as improve the health care system for all to ensure inclusiveness of economic growth," said CPD Chairman Rehman Sobhan.

Sobhan's comments came yesterday at a dialogue styled 'Pursuing Inclusive Growth: Priorities for the New Government', organised by the independent think-tank at the capital's Lakeshore Hotel.

The Awami league government is now in its fourth term, so they should make a strong commitment to ensuring the quality of public investment.

Sobhan went on to call for an in-depth investigation to get to the malady of cost and time overruns of big projects.

"This is not just a problem of corruption -- there is a problem of efficiency too," he added.

The country still lags behind in ensuring quality health care, said Rashid-E-Mahbub, former president of the Bangladesh Medical Association.

"Moreover, there is a blame game on who is responsible for the lag," he added.

Some students acknowledged in a recent programme that they have passed many board exams but they have little efficiency in English, said Rasheda K Choudhury, executive director of the Campaign for Popular Education.

"But English proficiency of a few can't be a benchmark of an education system of a country. Moreover, our education system is producing efficient population," he added.

Planning Minister MA Mannan acknowledged that there are some problems in the quality of education and health care as well as leakages in social security.

"But, we are fighting hard to ensure quality, so we need time. We are making some mistakes as we are rushing towards development."

"This is proof of cumulative deficit of learning."

Choudhury, a former advisor to the caretaker government, suggests reviewing the curriculum as there are huge non-secular and racism materials in the books.

"It is true that there are some bad communal content in the text-books, but we are solving it slowly," said Mohibul Hassan Chowdhury, deputy minister of education.

There will be no compromises on secularism as the Awami League is a secular political party.

The minister said they also want equity, equality and inclusiveness in growth, so they are taking advices from many think-tanks and economists.

Fahmida Khatun, executive director CPD, presented a keynote paper at the event.

There are two major concerns about the economy: the higher growth could not generate adequate employment and the benefits of growth are unequally distributed.

To ensure inclusive growth, the government should focus on quality education, which would enhance the efficiency of students.

The government should focus on quality healthcare for all as well as higher coverage of social protection for all, she added.

M Syeduzzaman, a former finance minister, Mustafizur Rahman and Rounaq Jahan, distinguished fellows of the CPD, also spoke.

A publication titled "State of the Bangladesh Economy and National Elections 2018 Priorities for Electoral debates" was unveiled at the programme.

The Financial Express
February 12, 2019

EPZ Labour Bill lands in JS

Bangladesh Export Processing Zone (EPZ) Labour Bill-2019 was placed in parliament on Monday to make it friendlier for the EPZ workers, reports UNB.

Liberation War Affairs Minister AKM Mozammel Huq, who is in-charge of Prime Minister's Office in parliament, placed the bill in the House.

Later, the bill was sent to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Ministry for further scrutiny.

The committee was asked to place its report over the bill before the House within 15 working days.

Placing the bill, the minister said the proposed law will ensure fixation of minimum wage, recruitment, owner-labour relation, salary payment, accident compensation, healthcare and security.

As per the bill, the EPZ workers will be allowed to form association to place their demands.

The Financial Express February 12, 2019

Accord proposes 281-day exit plan

Monira Munni

The western retailers' platform Accord has proposed a 281-day plan before it hands over its ongoing safety-related function in the country's readymade garment sector to a relevant authority, officials said.

The time-bound exit plan came after the government committee pressed for the same with a 13-point observation on its previous transition plan, they said.

The committee, however, feels it would be possible to reduce the time to 160 days from the proposed 281, people involved with the process told the FE.

The committee also asked the Accord not to tag any conditions with the plan.

The implementation of the plan might take up to 14 months due to some conditions.

"It seems the Accord wants to prolong the handover process incorporating 'ifs and buts'," a committee member said.

Govt wants it to curtail time

Though the issue of Accord's extension remained under judicial consideration, the authorities formed the committee to finalise a time-bound handover plan.

The committee includes representatives from the government, the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) and the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) and Accord.

The BGMEA had earlier proposed that the Accord's function could be handed over to the Remediation Coordination Cell (RCC) within 150 days or five months.

Accord, in its draft proposal, said the fully-remediated garment factories would be handed over to the Cell under the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) as regular schedule while factories that lag behind in remediation would be transferred in phases if statistics on the remediation progress and penalties for non-compliance are available.

In another proposal related to the non-compliance penalties, it said factories below the average correction rate will be raised at least to stage three within 10 months if full remediation is not completed by then.

The government made a 13-point observation in Accord's proposed transition plan placed last month and asked for focusing on the smooth transition from the platform to the Cell within a stipulated time.

In September last year, the Accord submitted an exit plan to the government to wrap up its ongoing workplace safety activities in the country's readymade garment sector in six phases without outlining any timeframe.

The Cell, which is currently overseeing the remediation activities in the garment factories inspected under the national initiative, has been set up to take over the functions of the western retailers' platforms -Accord and Alliance- once it develops capacity.

The Accord, a platform of more than 200 global apparel brands, retailers and rights groups based mostly in Europe, was formed immediately after the Rana Plaza building collapse to improve the workplace safety in the country's apparel industry for five years that ended in May last.

The government allowed a six-month extension until November 30 while the platform wants to stay for some more time.

Accord has so far handed over the responsibilities of its inspected 100 garment factories, which have fully completed all the required remediation work, labour ministry officials said.

The 'Alliance', another platform, folded its operations in the garment sector here as its transitional period ended on December 31.

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The Financial Express February 13, 2019

RMG unrest aftermath

Over 11,000 workers lose job: IndustriAll

FE Report

At least 11,600 workers of 99 readymade garment (RMG) factories have been fired for their alleged involvement in the recent labour unrest in the country, demanding due implementation of the wage structure and removing discrimination in it.

IndustriAll Bangladesh Council (IBC) came up with the information in a press conference in the city's National Press Club on Tuesday.

Besides, some 3,500 workers have been sued in 34 cases in Savar, Ashulia and Gazipur over the RMG sector unrest, and over a hundred of workers are in jail.

Furthermore, the workers are facing harassments by police and factory owners every day, the organisation alleged.

IBC demanded immediate restoration of the sacked workers at their respective factories and withdrawal of the cases, in which they are facing harassment. Besides, it also sought immediate release of the arrestees.

IBC General Secretary Salahuddin Shapan read out the written statement of the trade union at the press conference.

Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) is developing a database of RMG workers, and it has already included information of 3.5 million workers in the database.

But, allegations of using the database against the workers' re-recruitment process have surfaced, which must be stopped, he added.

Besides, the owners are hanging photos of the terminated workers at factories, which is also creating untold sufferings for the workers.

The basic purpose behind these attempts is to restrain workers from being involved in trade unions, pointed IBC.

The owners, however, did not terminate the workers through fair trial, which is a violation of human rights and goes against the workers' rights as declared by International Labour Organization (ILO), it observed.

The latest termination of workers has crossed all the previous records in Bangladesh. If the harassments go on unabated, further protest might take place, it added.

IBC Chairman Md Giasuddin Ahmed urged the government, the garment owners and the authorities concerned to form a tripartite probe-body to look into these incidents and take necessary steps to bring a peaceful end to the problems to save the country's leading source of foreign currency.

IBC leader Nazma Akhter said the workers returned to their respective factories after a tripartite meeting among the government, the owners and the workers on January 13.

But harassments have not stopped even after the assurances (of not harassing) provided in the meeting, she noted.

Leaders and members of IBC, victim garment workers, and trade union leaders were also present in the press conference.

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EDITORIAL The Financial Express Wednesday | February 13, 2019

Relocating plastic factories

Growth potential and prospects of plastic industry can only be expected to be realised if the industry is shifted to a suitable location -- a plastic hub, maybe on the outskirts of the capital. Industry leaders have also been demanding for a dedicated location which beside providing hazard-free production process will also help meet various compliance needs of overseas buyers, writes **Wasi Ahmed**

FOLLOWING the shifting of tanneries from Hazaribagh to Savar, the next big move that has to be in place is the shifting of plastic manufacturing units to a safe, hazard-free location. Although there are many problems facing the tanneries in the relocated tannery hub at Savar, the authorities are reportedly working to address those as part of the relocation package. As for relocation of plastic factories, the main problem, unlike that of the tanneries, is that these are numerous in number -- in all conceivable shapes and characters -- and are spread out all over the country.

While pollution caused by plastic waste is tormenting the environment including aquatic resources necessitating urgent action, the reason why this manufacturing sector needs better management is the ever-increasing demand for plastic products at home and abroad. The country's export of plastic goods marked a 21 per cent rise in the first half of the current fiscal year over the corresponding period of the last fiscal. Plastic sector fetched US$ 56.54 million during July-November period of FY 2018-19 compared to that of the first half of FY 2017-18 -- US$46.63 million. The export target of the sector was US$100 million for FY 2018-19. In the FY 2017-18, the country exported US$98.48 million, according to Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) data.

The figures, clearly, are not big enough to inspire great optimism. However, the fact remains that in Bangladesh, plastic plants have only recently opted for modern technology in producing various food and non-food grade products. With more technology back-up, and accompanying diversification, the industry -- though scattered and even disorganised -- has the potential to grow extensively if provided with the right facilities. In this context, it may be noted that exporting was far from the targeted goal of the industry even a decade back, though there were few enterprises which were exporting in small volumes. Mainly it is the local demand that motivated factories -- medium, small and very small -- to produce plastic products.

Annual sales of plastic products in Bangladesh are currently estimated at around Tk 150 billion in the local market, in which household items account for nearly Tk 20 billion. Increase in domestic supplies reportedly grew at 15 per cent a year over the last several years. Industry insiders, quoted in recent newspaper reports, said the sector is experiencing fresh investment to the tune of Tk 1-1.5 billion each year. The country's plastic sector is said to employ around 1.2 million people directly and indirectly in well over 4,500 small, medium and large manufacturing units. Value addition in manufacturing is also commendably high, ranging between 50 and 70 per cent. Earnings from plastic exports stood at $85.70 million in fiscal 2013-14. At present, around 5,000 factories are producing plastic products in more than a dozen categories.

Use of plastic products in the country has grown manifold thanks to the dynamic improvement in recycling technology -- a key stimulus in increased production on the one hand and growing consumer preference on the other. However, lack of quality and diversification in product range is commonly attributed as the main impediment to the sector's growth to a far higher level. This holds true in respect of domestic consumption but more so, when it comes to exporting.

Global market of plastic is essentially demand-driven. Price structure of plastic products is highly wide-ranging, able to absorb immensely diversified products by the low, middle and up-end market segments.

Despite the progress reported in the media recently, concerned quarters consider these far from what it actually should have been in view of the overwhelming surge in global demand. Major improvement in infrastructure, waste management, recycling and skills development are some of the critical areas in need of urgent attention to push the growth momentum to the desired level. In addition to these basics, product development and product adaptation should be attended to as a matter of priority. This, unfortunately, is an area many of the manufacturers miss out resulting in less than expected success in accessing overseas markets.

Now, these potential and prospects of growth can only be expected to be realised once the industry is shifted to a suitable location -- a plastic hub, maybe on the outskirts of the capital. This newspaper, not long ago, had pointed out the need for a plastic hub in the country in order that attempts for improvement of the sector could be taken up in a planned manner beside providing opportunities for the factories to operate hazard-free and attract overseas investment. Industry leaders have also been demanding for a dedicated location which, beside providing hazard-free production process, will also help meet various compliance needs of overseas buyers. Concerned quarters feel that a plastic hub with modern recycling plant, waste management facility, properly trained workers and necessary infrastructure will be able to manufacture products at competitive prices for exports even after a reasonable raise in the present wage structure.

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NEW AGE FEBRUARY 13, 2019,

26.77 lakh unemployed in Bangladesh: minister tells JS

Staff Correspondent

STATE minister for labour and employment Begum Munnujan Sufian on Tuesday told Jatiya Sangsad that a total of 26.77 lakh people are unemployed in the country in 2016-17 fiscal year according to the recently published manpower survey of Bangladesh Statistics Bureau.

The state minister disclosed the figure in the parliament in a scripted answer replying to a question of Rustam Ali Faraji of Jatiya Party, saying that out of the total unemployment, 10.43 lakh are educated youth males and females unemployed who completed higher secondary or graduation or post-graduation.

The number of educated unemployed is nearly 40 per cent of the total population, she added.

The minister said the present government has been working to make the society's unemployed youth self-reliant through employment and other facilities.

Munnujan Sufian mentioned about the activities carried out by the labour and employment ministry in the last 10 years including an increase in manpower to 2,137 from 1353 at the labour and employment ministry and under its departments and directorates during the last two tenures of the present government, of which 569 were placed in the revenue sector.

She said the government formed National Skill Development Council to turn this huge population into a skilled and employment-oriented manpower through imparting skilled-based training.

The state minister said executive committee of National Skill Development Council was formed comprising persons concerned with government and private sectors for extending cooperation to the council.

Munnujan Sufian said scopes for employment were generated for 9,099 young women by imparting training in the garment industry sector under Northern Areas Reduction of Poverty Initiative project run by the labour and employment ministry for generating employment.

She said the present government in its two terms had trained 46,874 people in 1401 courses which included workers and management authorities of various factories and industries through four industry related education centres and 32 labour welfare centres of the labour and employment ministry.

The Financial Express Tuesday | February 12, 2019

BGMEA wants foreign missions to uphold industry image abroad

FE Report

Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) on Monday urged the country's foreign missions to work for upholding the image of the readymade garment (RMG) industry abroad.

BGMEA President Md Siddiqur Rahman made the call at a view exchange meeting with the newly appointed officials of different foreign missions, including the ones in Switzerland, China, Germany, Japan, Russia, Spain, USA and India, at its headquarters in the city, according to a statement.

BGMEA Vice President Mohammed Nasir and Director Munir Hossain, among others, were present.

"Though the compliant and modern RMG factories of Bangladesh produce quality products of international standard, the industry has been facing obstacles at one area. And this is propaganda against the industry abroad," said the BGMEA president.

He requested the foreign missions' officials to take necessary publicity measures of the good practices done in the industry and branding the image of the country.

During the meeting, the trade body made a presentation, explaining the export potentials and challenges in exporting apparel items.

Investment in private sector and its growth is a must to achieve the targeted 40 per cent industrial growth by 2021, the paper said.

It listed challenges like declining trend in the prices of locally made apparels, stable appreciation of local currency against competitors' currency depreciation, rising production costs and huge investment for workplace safety issues.

The BMGEA requested the officials to tell the international community about the improved workplace safety condition, workers' rights situation and environment-friendly factories.

Terming Russia's customs and duty structures 'complex', The BGMEA demanded establishing network with their financial institutions.

Regarding USA, it called for measures to regain the suspended GSP facility, saying Bangladesh has met most of the 16 conditions in this regard.

Due to the trade war between US and China, many buyers are looking for alternative sourcing destination, said the statement, adding that the officials could work on attracting the buyers to source from Bangladesh.

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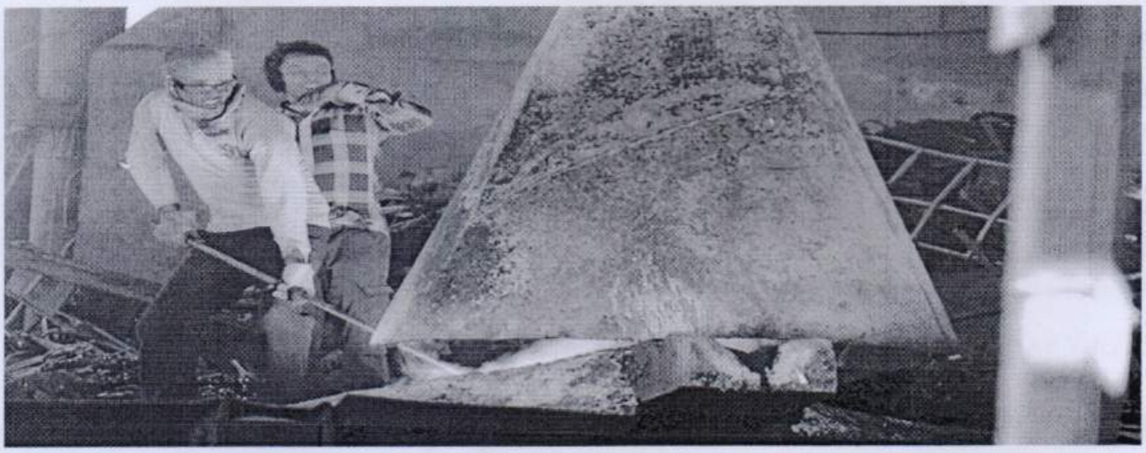
NEW AGE

Staff Correspondent | Published: 00:00, Feb 12,2019

Govt to review minimum wages for steel re-rolling mill workers



A file photo shows workers working at a steel re-rolling mill in Dhaka. The government has taken an initiative to review the minimum wages for the workers of country's steel re-rolling mills in accordance with the Bangladesh labour act. — New Age photo

The government has taken an initiative to review the minimum wages for the workers of country's steel re-rolling mills in accordance with the Bangladesh labour act.The minimum wages for the workers of the sector were last set in the year of 2011 with minimum monthly pay of Tk 4,600.As per the labour act, the minimum wages for a sector have to be reviewed after each five years.The labour ministry on January 31 issued a gazette notification appointing representatives from owners and workers from the steel re-rolling mills sector to the minimum wage board.The board consists of a chairman, an independent member, a permanent representative from employers and a permanent representative from workers.The labour ministry will appoint one temporary representative from employers and one temporary representative from workers engaged in the sector. Bangladesh Re-Rolling Mills Association vice-president Mohammad Abu Bakar Siddique has been appointed as factory owners' representative while Tofail Ahmed, organising secretary of Jatiya Sramik League, has been appointed as workers' representative to the board.Abu Bakar, however, told New Age on Monday that he was not aware about his appointment to the wageboard as factory owners' representative.Replying to a question, he said that he did not have any statistics on the number of factories and workers in the

Please Turn Over

steel re-rolling mills sector across the country.Bangladesh Re-Rolling Mills Association president Mohammad Ali said that there were around 300 re-rolling steel mills across the country while the number of auto re-rolling steel mills was 40.He said there were approximately 1.5 lakh workers and staff in the sector.Ali said that the sector people had been engaged in discussions with the government over introducing separate wage structures for the workers of re-rolling and auto re-rolling mills.

More about:

NEWAGE

Staff Correspondent | Published: 00:00, Feb 12,2019

FACTORY SAFETY WORKS

Accord submits 281-day plan with conditions for departure

Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh, a platform of European fashion brands and buyers, has submitted a working paper to the government setting a 281-working day plan for handover of the Accord-listed factories to a national body.Following repeated requests from the government for submitting a time-bound transition plan, the Accord on February 7 submitted the paper before a government-set committee to finalise a time-bound transition plan for the retailers' platform.Government officials said although the Accord submitted a timeframe of 281 days to hand over its factories to the remediation coordination cell, the platform tagged with it a number of conditions that might hinder the implementation of the plan.One of the government representatives to the committee said that the proposal was not logical as the implementation of the plan would take up to 14 months to meet the Accord-mentioned conditions.
He said that the labour ministry on Monday sent its reaction on the working paper to the Accord saying that it was possible to reduce the working days to 160 from 281.
The labour ministry has also informed the Accord that the transition plan should not be tagged with any condition, government officials said. 'Accord termed the submitted document as "working paper" not "transition plan" saying that it will merge into an agreed transition plan step by step that means the buyers platform wants to linger finalisation of the transition plan,' the member of the committee said. The Supreme Court will decide the extension of Accord in Bangladesh but the government recently formed a committee comprised of representatives of Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association and Accord signatories to finalise a time-bound transition plan for the retailers' platform as per the instruction of the court, a labour ministry official said.
Following the Rana Plaza building collapse in April 24, 2013, that killed more than 1,100

Please Turn Over

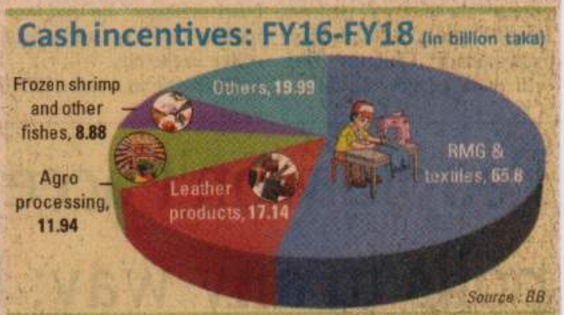
people, mostly garment workers, EU retailers formed the Accord to improve workplace safety in Bangladesh. According to the Accord's statistics, the initiative has so far inspected more than 1,600 factories and completed over 92 per cent of remediation works in the units. The tenure of the platform ended in May, 2018 and the government allowed it a six-month transition period. The extended period of the platform ended on November 30 last year and High Court instructed the government not to extend the timeframe of Accord any more. Later, on January 21 this year, Supreme Court granted four weeks of additional time (up to February 18) to the Accord to continue the ongoing discussions with Bangladesh government and BGMEA over supports for the national body, Remediation Coordination Cell, and transition of Accord works to RCC. Labour ministry officials said that to finalise the transition plan within the four weeks granted by Supreme Court, the working committee proposed Accord representatives sit with it on February 14 but the platform was yet to confirm.

More about: **The Financial Express** | February 13, 2019

TRACKING SUBSIDY TRAIL-1

RMG grabs the lion's share of incentives

Jasim Uddin Haroon



The country's export-oriented apparel units are bagging the most part of the government's cash incentives, directly and indirectly.

The local export-oriented textile industries receive around 40 per cent of the cash incentives. However, a large portion of it is indirectly enjoyed by the readymade garment (RMG) sub-sector.

The RMG also receives cash incentives at around 8.0 per cent on their exports to non-traditional markets beyond the North American and European destinations, according to the central bank data.

The small and medium enterprise (SME) segment of the textiles sector gets subsidy, at the rate of 3.0 per cent, in the form of an 'additional facility.'

But the RMG sub-sector does also accrue benefit out of that segment, as it uses mostly the local textile products.

The clothing sector consisting of woven and knit wear accounted for more than 83 per cent of the export basket, as the total exports fetched US$ 36.7 billion in the fiscal year (FY) 2017-18.

The subsidy, a benefit either given in cash or in the form of tax reduction, is meant for the exporters so that they have the competitive edge in the global markets.

The government disbursed a total of Tk 44.81 billion (4,481 crore) in subsidy to about 19 export revenue earning sectors

Please Turn Over

RMG grabs the lion's share of incentives

covering 26 products in the last fiscal year ended on June 30, suggest the data prepared by the accounts and budgeting department of the Bangladesh Bank (BB).

In the current fiscal year, nine products have been added to the list of items entitled to subsidies, raising the total number to 35.

The other major sectors incentivised are jute and jute goods, leather, furniture, paper and paper products, frozen fish, agro-processing products and other agricultural goods.

Apart from the incentive amounts from the state coffer, the apparel makers also get other forms of support from the government.

They include a facility from the Duty Exemption and Drawback Office (DEDO), bonded warehousing, and funding from the central bank's Export Development Fund (EDF).

Under the Customs' bonded warehouse facility, industries get the benefit of tax-free import or local purchase of the raw materials for use in manufacturing exportable goods.

Under the duty exemption and drawback system, the exporters can claim from the DEDO the same amount of money as paid in VAT and other taxes.

On the other hand, the Export Development Fund (EDF), a revolving fund now amounting to US$ 3.0 billion, was founded in 1989. It is very much popular among the RMG makers as it is easily available at an interest rate of LIBOR plus 2.5 per cent.

It is intended to facilitate exporters' access to financing in foreign exchanges for input procurement.

The cash incentive regime ranges from 2.0 per cent to 20 per cent depending on the nature of the exportable products and their markets.

Experts and economists familiar with the matter are divided over the existing incentive schemes.

Some believe these are helping the country raise the volume of exports while some others suggest rationalisation of the incentive regime.

Dr Zaidi Sattar, chairman of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh (PRI), a private think-tank in the country, told the FE: "Actually there is no simple yes or no to the question about the cash incentives."

The RMG does not get cash subsidies -- rightly so -- except when they export to new destinations like Japan, China and Australia (4.0 per cent), he said.

Dr Sattar said export subsidies, limited as they are, will not lead to any breakthrough in non-RMG exports, i.e. export diversification.

"What is needed is creating the conditions similar to RMG exports for other sectors," Dr Sattar pointed out, talking about the bonded warehouse facility and others being enjoyed by the RMG sector.

Terming Bangladesh's economy "highly tariff-protected," Dr Sattar said that out of the 3,000 firms that exported 1,373 HS-6 digit products in FY2018, barely 200 will have enjoyed the bonded facility.

"There is scope for malfeasance in such cash subsidies. If there are about 1200-1400 non-RMG export products, how do you justify giving various subsidy rates?"

He suggested one change, a flat rate of subsidy.

Dr Zahid Hussain, lead economist at the Dhaka office of the World Bank (WB), has viewed that as long as the country's tariff policy favours sales in the domestic market more than exports, the cash subsidies on exports are needed to counteract this anti-export bias.

"Obviously, this is a convoluted way of designing a policy regime intended to promote exports," Dr Hussain noted.

He went on: "We need a thorough review of the existing tariff structure with the objective of reducing the effective rate of protection in the domestic market."

"There is a need to reform the tax regimes, including supplementary duties, to increase competitiveness of non-RMG industries," Dr Hussain added.

Dr Nazneen Ahmed, a senior research fellow at the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), a government-run think-tank, told the FE: "We now need to rationalise the subsidy regime."

"Some big firms actually don't need subsidy support now, and this is high time to nurse the small-sized textile units," Dr Ahmed, who has a number of studies to her credit on the country's apparel sector, told the FE.

On the other hand, people in the textile and RMG sectors say these supports are very much necessary for them to remain competitive in the global clothing market.

They argue that the prices often fall and the competition in the international market stiffens. This decline in prices then, coupled with poor infrastructure, dampens profits and competitiveness.

They also argue that the country is one of the worst performers in the 'Ease of Doing Business' index. So, in such a situation such facilities need to be expanded.

A Matin Chowdhury, former president of Bangladesh Textiles Mills Association (BTMA), told the FE that Bangladesh imports all the raw materials required for manufacturing of clothing and the way they import involves huge costs.

"When we import cotton, it involves transport costs, higher port costs and others which make our imports expensive and in such a situation we need subsidy to be competitive."

Mr Chowdhury, also managing director of the Rahim Textiles Mills, says exploration of new export markets is associated with a number of risk factors.

"Suppose, Russia and Bangladesh have no direct banking transaction, so there is a risk while making shipment," he says. "Considering all these factors, the government provides us cash incentives."

Siddiqur Rahman, president of the apex clothing organisation, told the FE that the cash subsidy was intended to expand the exports.

"Definitely, the incentive is something aimed at helping expansion of the local clothing sector and exports," said the chief of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

The Financial Express | February 13, 2019

Govt to launch database of overseas jobseekers by Mar

Arafat Ara

The government is set to launch a database of overseas jobseekers by March this year, officials said.

Only those who have already decided to go abroad with jobs will be able to include their names on the databank, they said, adding that passports are mandatory for new jobseekers while the options of skills and less-skills will be mentioned in the registration forms.

Besides, they said, the database of workers will be created for all job markets.

Rownaq Jahan, secretary in charge of the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, said they have almost completed necessary works to launch the database of overseas jobseekers.

Candidates for overseas jobs will be enlisted from all over the country so that they can send at least 1,000 workers from each district, she said.

However, the Awami League in its election manifesto announced that minimum 1,000 workers would have to be sent abroad from each district.

"We have already taken a decision that manpower recruiters have to hire all workers from the database after the enlistment programme starts," Ms Jahan added.

Although it is being created focusing on the Malaysian market, she said, workers for all markets will be recruited from the databank.

"We will keep option for skilled and less-skilled workers in the registration forms so that we can categorise the workers and provide necessary training to less-skilled ones."

In reply to a query about the previous database, the secretary said it will not be merged with fresh one. "We have also taken an initiative to make a databank of returnee workers."

Earlier, the ministry created a database of about 1.5 million outbound jobseekers in 2013. But an insignificant number of workers included in the database went abroad. Private recruiters found it inappropriate for hiring workers, insiders said.

Talking to the FE, Nurul Islam, director at Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET), said there are some differences between the previous database and fresh one. It will be a 'clean' databank where only the jobseekers who have decided to go abroad will be enlisted.

Without passport, aspirants will not be allowed to get registration in it, he said, adding that it will be a continuous process where jobseekers can be enlisted round the year.

"There will have another good option that we can refer a required number of workers from the databank and employers can select randomly," he added.

Shakirul Islam, chairman of Ovibashi Karmi Unnayan Programme (OKUP), said the database is necessary to eliminate middlemen.

But it should be a complete and effective database where recruiting agencies can hire their required manpower for any country, he added.

The previous database was made on an ad hoc basis. For this reason, many aspirants were enlisted, but they failed to go abroad. So, the authorities concerned should be careful about this issue, he said.

More than 12 million Bangladeshis went abroad with jobs since 1976. Most of them went to Middle East countries, according to the BMET data.

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The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 13, 2019, *FALGUN 1, 1425 BS*

Untreated industrial effluents spell doom

Make effluent treatment plants mandatory for textile industry

A recent study by Bangladesh University of Engineering & Technology (BUET) paints a gloomy picture of the state of water bodies in the country. Unless steps are taken today, it is estimated that the textile industry will be dumping 20,300 crore litres of untreated wastewater into the country's water bodies every year from 2021. The industrial discharge into rivers and wetlands will also seep through the ground and adversely affect underground water tables.

In and around Dhaka, thousands of textile mills are pumping out untreated wastewater that has been used for washing and dyeing fabrics. Dhaka city's water supply has already paid a very heavy price over the last two decades since Hazaribagh tannery industry was allowed to operate in the heart of the city. Now, we are faced with a problem that is of a much greater magnitude since there are thousands of textile factories. Wastewater generation will only increase as Bangladesh gears up to reach USD 50 billion in exports a year by 2021.

Although we have laws like the Environment Conservation Rules, 1997 that made effluent treatment plants (ETPs) mandatory for factories, these rules have never been seriously implemented. Although ETPs are installed in about 70 percent of factories, a large number of these factories do not use them. Smaller factories, on the other hand, have never installed ETPs to begin with. Factory owners mostly cite the high cost of running chemical-based ETPs for not using them; but our question is: why is the government failing to do its job as the regulator? Why, knowing full well the cost to the environment and public health, doesn't the government implement rules that will make it extremely costly for errant factories to dump untreated effluents into waterways? We cannot afford the large-scale destruction of the environment so that industries can go on producing their goods. A balance has to be struck between profits and safeguarding the environment and that responsibility falls squarely on the authorities concerned and they must implement existing laws.

The Daily Star FEBRUARY 13, 2019

1,000 workers from backward upazilas to be sent abroad per year

Munnujan Sufian tells House

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has planned to send 1,000 workers from the country's less-advanced upazilas abroad per year, State Minister for Labour and Employment Begum Munnujan Sufian told parliament yesterday.

In reply to a question from Awami League MP Anwarul Abedin Khan, she said the government took the decision for development of the upazilas.

The state minister said Bangladesh is now exporting workers to 168 countries. The government has initiated a database on expatriate workers, while steps are being taken to prepare a database on returnee workers.

Munnujan said no district quota system is being followed to send manpower to foreign countries, and people of all districts have the scope to go abroad with jobs.

In reply to another query, she informed the House that the government is working to construct 91 more technical training centres to increase efficiency and productivity

The Financial Express

February 20, 2019

Tariff, NTBs impede RMG's access to Indian market

Recent WB report says

Monira Munni

Various types of tariffs and non-tariff barriers (NTBs) imposed by both India and Bangladesh impede the growth of bilateral trade and textile and clothing (TC) value chain engagement between the two countries, according to a latest World Bank report.

"Both the countries put a number of NTBs on TC products despite the agreement of cooperation between the Indian Bureau of Standards (BIS) and Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI)," the report said.

The report titled 'The Textile-Clothing Value Chain in India and Bangladesh: How Appropriate Policies Can Promote (or Inhibit) Trade and Investment' was launched early this month.

India specialises in the upstream segment, supplying such intermediate inputs as silk, cotton, yarn and fabrics to Bangladesh while Bangladesh specialises in the downstream final apparel segment, exporting worldwide as well as to India, it said.

Please Turn Over

Tariff, NTBs impede RMG's access to Indian market

"Tariffs and non-tariff barriers in both the countries inhibit the growth of value chain linkages."

Citing example, the report said that India has imposed a testing requirement for RMG products which is very complex due to the divergent testing procedures for specific ingredients of the product at the laboratory level in each country.

Furthermore, India also imposes a CVD (Countervailing Duty) of 16 per cent on RMG exports from Bangladesh to protect its domestic garment industry, it added.

Due to this, Bangladesh RMG (readymade garment) is yet to get effective access to Indian market, the report said.

In addition to this, India has also amended the registration rules for importing raw jute and jute products, making it mandatory for all importers to obtain a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the Jute Commissioner of India for each consignment, said the report.

"The entire procedure of obtaining NOC is fraught with complexities and uncertainty, thus restricting the import of raw jute and jute products from Bangladesh."

Para-tariff barriers in India also affect the import of inputs for the export-oriented RMG industry of Bangladesh, the report said, adding that the prevalence of disguised trade barriers between the two countries inhibits the capacity of textile and clothing firms to engage efficiently in bilateral value chains.

Frequent changes in regulations, procedural issues, lack of regulatory convergence and information asymmetry act as major barriers for the textile and clothing manufactures on both sides, it pointed out.

Both the countries need to put due emphasis on promoting the convergence of trade and technical standards, certification requirements, and testing requirements through mutual recognition agreement (MRA), the report suggested.

"This can help both the countries assuage the high cost of compliance and can improve the cost competitiveness of small textile and clothing manufacturers.

"Reforms in trade policy (including rules of origin), trade facilitation, trade-related standards, and institutions could help both the countries better take advantage of value chain linkages."

The report also said India and Bangladesh introduced various schemes that have enabled them to eliminate, reduce or refund tariffs for exporters and duty drawback schemes perform better in Bangladesh than India.

Traders in India experienced a cumbersome and time-consuming procedure of duty drawback schemes, it added.

The report stressed the need for gradual reduction of tariffs through necessary reforms in the trade policy of Bangladesh, saying that the prevailing tariff on the import of inputs, such as yarn and fabric in Bangladesh, is high and impacts forward linkages of Bangladeshi RMG firms.

It recommended that Bangladesh should undertake policy measures to strengthen its specialisation in clothing, taking advantage from India's specialisation in textiles.

On the other hand, it said, India should undertake policy reforms to gradually eliminate incentives and subsidies, and remove NTBs gradually to improve efficiency and reduce distortions in the TC value chain.

Both the governments should explore all possible measures for trade and transport facilitation-related reforms for easy clearance of goods and seamless cross-border movement of cargo, said the report.

India and Bangladesh also should encourage the movement of goods through other cheaper modes of transportation, such as Inland Waterway and Sea, the report suggested, saying that the cost of road transportation is very high in both the countries.

The current Rules of Origin (RoO) under the South Asian Free Trade Area does not place any restriction on sourcing TC intermediate inputs from non-member countries, it said and suggested modification of the existing RoO.

Terming the procedures of opening the letter of credit 'cumbersome' for Bangladeshi TC exporters, the report said Bangladesh should allow the banks to open L/Cs for exporters without receiving the export order.

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Financial Express Tuesday | February 19, 2019

Battery industry leaders demand special industrial zone

FE Report

Battery industry leaders demanded a special industrial zone for battery manufacturing and recycling in order to promote a parallel market for local entrepreneurs.

Battery manufacturers and exporters' association leaders made the demand during a meeting with Industries Minister Nurul Majid Mahmud Humayun at the latter's office in the city on Monday.

The association leaders said that most local factory owners have been operating environment-friendly industries in the country.

But they alleged that some foreign factories (China) run their units in Bangladesh illegally and an unplanned way which are creating unequal competition for local entrepreneurs.

They demanded immediate actions against the foreign factories operating in Bangladesh illegally to create a healthy business environment.

Bangladesh Accumulator & Battery Manufacturers' Association President Munawar Misbah Moin and General Secretary M. Shahjahan Kabir addressed the meeting, among other leaders where officials of the industries ministry were also present.

Possibilities and challenges of the sector was also discusses at the meeting.

Currently there are 24 local battery factories in the country and after meeting domestic demand, the factories are exporting their products to about 69 countries, the association leaders said.

They noted that the industry is making a steady progress for several years.

The sector earns US $60 million by exporting the goods every year, they mentioned.

They stressed the need for a creating certain policy for development of the sector to ensure that the progresses they have made for years will continue smoothly in the future.

Assuring the businesses leaders, the industries minister said that the government will extend necessary support to the sector to establish environment-friendly factories. He said the sector is enjoying a 15-per cent cash incentive.

Besides, concerned authorities of the government are deploying mobile court against illegal battery businesses and conducting drives against unauthorised factories.

The minister urged the association leaders to submit specific proposals to the government over their demand to set up special industrial zone.

He said that the government will cordially consider their demands.

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The Daily Star
FEBRUARY 24, 2019, FALGUN 12, 1425 BS

Skilled workforce a must to attain SDGs

Speakers say at CPD dialogues in Rangpur, Gaibandha

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Dinajpur*

Bangladesh will not be able to attain the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) without strengthening youth development organisations and creating jobs for the unemployed young people, speakers said at a dialogue on Friday.

The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), the Nagorik Uddyog and the Jago Foundation jointly organised the discussion titled "Electoral pledges and youth agenda" at a hotel in Rangpur city.

A large number of young people from Rangpur and other districts were present.

CPD

Debapriya Bhattacharya, a distinguished fellow of the CPD, speaks at a discussion on SDG implementation in Gaibandha yesterday. Mustafizur Rahman, *extreme right*, another distinguished fellow, was present.

Mostafizar Rahman Mostafa, mayor of the Rangpur City Corporation, urged the youth to develop technical skills alongside receiving general education.

"One type of education is not enough for an individual to qualify in the competitive job market," he said, urging the government to create jobs for the unemployed youth.

Debapriya Bhattacharya, a distinguished fellow of the CPD, said the proposed special economic zone in Rangpur can create jobs for a large number of unemployed youth in the region.

Alongside government initiatives, entrepreneurs are needed to achieve the SDGs, he said, adding that the SDGs cannot be attained leaving a single individual behind.

Moloy Kishore Bhattyachariya, a former professor of Carmichael College in Rangpur, and Zakir Hossain, chief executive of the Nagorik Uddyog, also spoke.

NEWAGE
FEBRUARY 20, 2019

Workers allowed to migrate to Qatar with no certainty of getting jobs

Md Owasim Uddin Bhuyan

BEGINNING this month, the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training allowed over 1,000 workers to migrate to Qatar amid uncertainties that they would get jobs there.

BMET officials said that the process of allowing workers to migrate to Qatar with visas not attested by Bangladesh embassy in Doha was on.

They said that the Bangladesh embassy does not attest visas for jobs carrying monthly wage below the minimum of Qatari Riyal 750 equivalent to $195 set by labour ministry of Qatar in November 2017.

And the government of Qatar does not approve contracts of jobs carrying wage below the minimum.

BMET director for immigration Mohammad Ataur Rahman told New Age that they started allowing workers with unattested job visas to migrate to Qatar as desired by the higher authorities to show that the number of workers going abroad was rising.

Migrant rights activists expressed concern over the government allowing workers to migrate to Qatar with unattested job visas.

WARBE Development foundation director Jasiya Khaton said that these workers might become undocumented in Qatar and trafficking victims.

She called for ensuring safe, orderly and regular migration as the Global Compact for Migration requires.

Ovibashi Karmi Unnayan Program chairman Shakirul Islam Shakil said that allowing workers with unattested job visas to migrate would make them victims of irregularities.

Shakil said that some Bangladeshi brokers in collaboration with Qatari counterparts devise traps to deceive the needy workers.

BRAC migration program head Shariful Islam Hasan said that Bangladeshi workers incur the highest migration expense to get jobs with the lowest wage. In 2018, over 76,000 Bangladeshi workers migrated to Qatar, according to BMET data.

The Daily Star
DHAKA TUESDAY FEBRUARY 26, 2019,

ICC chair praises MDG success of Bangladesh

ICCB

From left, **Mahbubur Rahman, president of the International Chamber of Commerce Bangladesh; Paul Polman, chairman of the ICC; Mashiur Rahman, economic affairs adviser to the prime minister; and Shehzad Munim, president of the Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce & Industry, attend a reception accorded to Polman, at a hotel in Dhaka on Sunday.**

STAR BUSINESS DESK

INTERNATIONAL Chamber of Commerce's Chairman Paul Polman has praised Bangladesh for the country's major role in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) globally.

He spoke while addressing the guests at a reception hosted by the ICC Bangladesh at a city hotel in Dhaka on Sunday, according to a statement.

Polman said the MDGs had achieved notable progress on many global issues and given the hope to create a new world within existing means.

"That's why the 2030 Agenda for SDGs has also offered a set of bold, ambitious and innovative package to transform the world," he said in the statement.

"I believe Bangladesh's businesses will be able to understand what the individual SDGs are actually about, how their own activity contributes towards the achievement of each one and the action and investment required."

Polman also said that Bangladesh is consistently cited as one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world. Long-term impacts from a rise in sea level and global temperature could displace millions of people.

Improving the country's resilience to immediate and future climate risks is essential to the continuing development of Bangladesh, he added.

He highly praised the various activities of the ICC Bangladesh and its President Mahbubur Rahman.

Rahman said the global economy enjoyed a mini-boom between the end of 2016 and early 2018, when growth picked up in most major economies.

However, this phase is now over and the global economy looks poised to slow moderately from 3.8 percent in 2018 to 3.5 percent in 2019, led by deceleration in the US and further softening in China.

Mashiur Rahman, economic affairs adviser to the prime minister, drew attention to various electoral pledges of the Awami League on unemployment, poverty, and climate change.

He said the government is working on reducing the non-performing loans, improving doing business index, customs modernisation and other issues to attract more investment from both local and foreign investors.

Shehzad Munim, president of the Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce & Industry, said Bangladesh is now ideally poised for attracting foreign investments.

Prof Rehman Sobhan, chairman of the Centre for Policy Dialogue; Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, founder and chairperson of Brac; KM Hasan and Md Tafazzul Islam, former chief justices; Mohammed Farashuddin and Salehuddin Ahmed, former governors of the Bangladesh Bank; Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, and leaders of various trade bodies were present.

The Financial Express February 26, 2019

Govt to shift chemical godowns from city in six months: Minister

FE Report

The government has decided to relocate chemical warehouses and godowns from Old Dhaka within the next six months, Industries Minister Nurul Majid Mahmud Humayun said on Monday.

"We have decided to shift the chemical godowns from the capital to other places outside the city within the next six months."

He said these after a meeting on finding out ways to relocate the chemical godowns from the capital's old part after the deadly fire incident at Chawkbazar on February 20.

The businessmen concerned have assured the government to help relocate the chemical godowns from the capital to other places outside Dhaka, he told media.

"There will be no chemical godowns in the residential areas of the capital."

The minister further said the government will review and coordinate all the suggestions given by the businessmen and the stakeholders at Monday's meeting regarding the planned relocation.

He requested all not to involve in blame-game, but to come forward for resolving the problem together.

DSCC special drive on Feb 28 - April 01, says Mayor

State Minister for Industries Kamal Ahmed Majumder said the businessmen can sell chemicals from their existing trading shops (in Old Dhaka). But they must keep the chemicals in the planned godowns (outside the capital).

He said apart from relocating the chemical godowns outside the capital, the government will also provide plots to plastic products manufacturing units at the Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC) industrial estate.

The state minister alleged that a section of government officials helped to renew chemical goods trading licenses without conducting practical inquiry.

He called upon all the departments concerned to work sincerely and honestly for benefits of the people and the country.

Industries Secretary (in-charge) Md Abdul Halim said the Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC), departments of explosives, environment and Fire Service and Civil Defense (FSCD) and other agencies concerned started relocating chemical godowns on ad-interim basis.

He said the government has urged the deputy commissioner (DC) of Dhaka to find out appropriate places for relocating the chemical godowns.

The secretary opined that initially, chemicals, which are used in the leather sector, can be shifted to a place near Savar Tannery Park.

The probable places for relocation of chemical godowns can be Keraniganj or Nawabganj or somewhere else like these.

Representatives of different government agencies, including environment department, FSCD, Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI) and Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), and Bangladesh Chemical Importers and Merchants Association, among others, were present.

Meanwhile, DSCC Mayor Mohammad Sayeed Khokon on Monday said all chemical inventories from the capital's residential areas will be (temporarily) shifted within a month.

After a meeting with the stakeholders following the deadly fire incident, the DSCC mayor said a special drive in this regard will be started from February 28 that will continue until April 1.

Mr. Khokon said they have identified some 15 wards as the most vulnerable as far as presence of chemical inventories is concerned.

"We will conduct the drive in two or three wards altogether. We'll make Old Dhaka free from deadly chemicals by April 1," he added.

To execute the decision taken at the meeting, the DSCC will form two separate taskforces. The first one, involving high-ups of the relevant state-agencies, will make plan and give directives, while the other will implement the first committee's decision in the field level.

Calling upon the chiefs of the utility service providing agencies, the mayor asked them to disconnect power, gas, water and telephone connections, if dangerous chemicals are found in any house or business outlet (in Old Dhaka).

Lawmaker Haji Selim, Inspector General of Police (IGP) Mohammad Javed Patwari, Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Commissioner Asaduzzaman Mia, FSCD Director General Brigadier General Ali Ahmed Khan, Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) Chairman Abdur Rahman, and Managing Director of Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) Taksim A Khan, among others, were present at the meeting.

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NEW AGE THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2019

RMMRU releases paper on social cost of migration

Staff Correspondent

THE government, the civil society as well as the NGOs failed to include the issue of migrants family members in their policies and activities, says a research paper released by Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit of Dhaka University on Wednesday.

The research paper on 'The Social Cost of Migration on Left Behind Migrants' Spouses and Children in Bangladesh' RMMRU recommended extending support services to the families of the migrant workers.

RMMRU said it conducted the research in collaboration with Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, better known as SDC.

While unveiling the paper, RMMRU chairperson Tasneem Siddiqui said that the Wage Earners Welfare Board should treat migrants' families as stakeholders In the paper RMMRU advised BMET to prepare the database of migrant workers' family members.

Speaking as the chief guest, state minister of foreign affairs Shahriar Alam said that the government would undertake a comprehensive study of migrants leaving behind their family members and its social cost.

Speaking as the guest of honour, Israfil Alam MP said that remittances were the lifeline of the country's economy.

Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment ministry additional secretary Ahmed Munirus Saleheen said that the left behind children and spouses of migrant workers suffer a lot.

SDC senior adviser Suzanne Mueller said that migration was important to Bangladesh as it contributes to poverty reduction and economic development.

RMMRU executive director CR Abrar chaired the inauguration at CIRDAP auditorium.

NEW AGE WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2019,

Poor wages force RMG workers to skip meals

Oxfam study says

Moinul Haque

MOST of the readymade garment workers in Bangladesh cannot afford three full meals per day and regularly skip meals due to poor wages, according to a research conducted by Oxfam, Australia.

'Nine out of 10 workers interviewed in Bangladesh cannot afford enough food for themselves and their families, forcing them to regularly skip meals and eat inadequately, or go into debt,' the research report said.

Oxfam, Australia, together with Bangladesh Institute for Labour Studies and Institute for Workers and Trade Unions in Vietnam, interviewed more than 470 workers across Bangladesh and Vietnam and prepared the report titled 'Made in poverty: The true price of fashion'.

All the interviewees were part of Australian clothing supply chains at the time of interview, employed in garment factories that supplied at least one iconic Australian clothing brand.

Oxfam, Australia revealed the findings of the study recently.

Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association president Md Siddiqur Rahman, however, differed with the study report saying not a single person in Bangladesh went without food.

'Garment is an international trade and surveys are done to undermine the local industry and damage the business,' he told reporters.

Siddiq said 470 workers did not represent the whole industry that employed more than four million workers.

According to the study report, Bangladesh and Vietnam made up almost 10 per cent of the clothing imported into Australia, and their share of the market is growing but the people making the clothes are trapped in poverty through the wages they are paid.

The study revealed that workers faced unjust and intolerable struggles due to poor wages while the Australian fashion industry was getting bigger.

'Since 2015, returns to the shareholders of the five major clothing companies in Australia have increased by 81 per cent per year on an average... Brands like Kmart and Cotton On have increased their annual revenue intake by more than $1 billion each since 2014. These companies have the power and the resources to help change this unfair system,' report said.

The study found that 72 per cent of the workers interviewed in Bangladesh factories supplying to major brands in Australia and 53 per cent in Vietnam could not afford medical treatment when they got sick or injured.

It revealed that 76 per cent of the workers interviewed in Bangladesh had no running water inside their home, and more than 40 per cent in Vietnam reported worrying about having to use well or rain water.

In Bangladesh, one in three workers interviewed are separated from their children, with nearly 80 per cent of those cases due to a lack of adequate income.

The report said that 100 per cent of interviewed garment workers in Bangladesh earned below the living wages while the percentage was 74 in Vietnam.

In Bangladesh, 91 per cent of the garment workers said that their income was not enough to feed themselves and their family for the entire month and they survived only on pulses, rice and potatoes — and sometimes eating a sickly mix of old, fermented rice with chilli in order to feel fuller throughout the day.

The research also examined the pressures placed on factory operators and owners by Australian-based brands to keep costs low — and in turn, keep wages at levels that deny workers and their family members decent life.

The research report said that aggressive price negotiation by brands had an impact on manufacturers' ability to pay wages to their workers.

The report cited a number of case studies regarding the workers' hardship.

Chameli, mother of three, who worked in a garment factory that supplied clothing to Australian department store Big W, earned $165 a month. Chameli, her husband and their three daughters lived in a stuffy single room measuring less than nine square metres and two of the girls had to sleep on the floor.

The family had often been saddled with debt, forced to borrow money after Chameli's four-year-old son tragically drowned and her husband had a heart attack, the study report said.

'Battling to afford the basics, the family cannot afford any of their daughters — aged 5, 12 and 14 — to attend school. Recently, Chameli and her husband were forced to make a painful decision to ensure the family could better meet their needs. They sent their teenage daughter to follow the path of her mother and work in a garment factory,' the report said.

This is not a one-off story of hardship, but a systemic exploitation of people — mostly women — who are simply trying to make ends meet, it said.

The study found that in Bangladesh 99 per cent of garment workers regularly worked overtime, 55 per cent worked more than three hours of overtime regularly and 84 per cent felt that they could not say no to overtime or night duty.