

Mixed reaction to 16-pt textiles sector plan

Star Report

The Textiles Ministry's 16-point plan to revamp the sector unveiled Saturday evoked immediate reactions, both in favour and against, Sunday.

The Bangladesh Specialised Textiles Mills and Powerloom Industries Association (BSTMPIA) which represents the weaving industries, has hailed the proposals and said this long cherished programme to revitalise the textiles sector must be implemented immediately.

However, the Bangladesh Textiles Mills Association (BTMA) representing the spinners, condemned the State Minister's plans saying these would cripple both the spinning and weaving sub-sectors.

Col (Retd) Kazi Selimuddin, president of BSTMPIA, talking to The Daily Star last night said the recommendations of the 16-point proposals to withdraw all duties from raw materials, including yarn, would give a fillip to the weaving sector.

"The spinners had always kept the prices of local yarn higher by influencing the government to impose high duties on imported yarn," Selim said. "This only helped the profits of the local yarn manufacturers," he said.

However, Waltul Islam, the chairman of BTMA, said withdrawal of duty on yarn would render the local spinners uncompetitive since India has been dumping yarn. "They can afford to dump because they procure cotton at 40 per cent less than the international price," he added.

Waltul Islam also said if duty on yarn were withdrawn, there would still remain a 3.75 per cent duty on cotton import which would unjustly affect the spinners.

But Kazi Selim pointed out that although there had been no duty on cotton from 1985 till

1990 yet the price of yarn never came down because of what he called the rent-seeking attitude of the spinners.

He said about 120 crore meters of cloth is smuggled into the country annually, mostly from India. "If our weaving sector can stand on its feet, this smuggling could be stopped," he said quite confidently.

Selim also hailed the government proposal for BMRE of the textile units and regretted that the banks are still dilly-dallying regarding fresh loans for this purpose. He demanded specific and clear directives from the government to the banks.

On the other hand, Waltul Islam of BTMA argued the 16-point government programme has been based on erroneous figures and facts.

"We had pointed this out to the Textiles Minister two months ago and the minister had then agreed to our objections. But the report that he presented to the Prime Minister Saturday at the special briefing surprisingly still carries the original mistaken figures," Waltul Islam claimed.

He said the proposal to import duty free grey cloth would, eventually, destroy the weaving sector as well as make the country dependent on imported fabrics.

The 16-point proposals suggested by State Minister Maj (Retd) Abdul Mannan include BMRE of old mills, setting up 137 new cotton mills, 2000 new garments and 1000 new knitting and hosiery industries in the country to create 31 lakh additional jobs.

The minister's report envisages that this would raise the country's export earnings to Taka 30000 crore in 1995-96 from the present Tk 6800 crore.



Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia signed "The Proclamation for Equal Rights of Disabled" at the International Conference Centre in the city yesterday. Post and Telecommunications Minister Tariqul Islam and State Minister for Women's Affairs Sarwari Rahman are seen on the right of the Prime Minister and State Minister for Social Welfare Md Fazlur Rahman on her left.

Proclamation

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implementation of immunisation programme and ensuring pure drinking water to the rural areas.

Further detailing her government's steps implemented for the welfare of the disabled the Prime Minister said a special training centre had been set up in Mirpur area of the capital for the disabled. A separate department has been opened in the Dhaka University for training of the teachers for disabled.

Begum Zia said a national trust would be constituted for the welfare of the disabled and a fund had already been created for the purpose.

Signing ceremony over, the Prime Minister met the disabled persons who were present on the occasion and enquired about their welfare.

The function was addressed by Telecommunications Minister Tariqul Islam, State Minister for Social Welfare Mohammad Fazlur Rahman and Social Welfare Secretary Prof K M Fariduddin. State Minister for Women's Affairs Mrs Sarwari Rahman was present.

Ministers, Members of Parliament and members of different organisations for disabled were present on the occasion.

PM asks officials to gear up dev activities in CHT

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday directed the officials concerned to further accelerate the development activities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), reports UNB.

Begum Zia was presiding over a special meeting on CHT which reviewed progress of different programmes aimed at socio-economic development of the area.

Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Mirza Golam Hafiz, Foreign Minister A S M Mostafizur Rahman, Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman, LGD and Cooperatives Minister Barrister Abdus Salam Talukder, Communications Minister Col (Retd) Oli Ahmed, Home Minister Abdul Matin Chowdhury, Chief of Army Staff Lt. Gen Noor Uddin Khan and the concerned high civil and military officials were present at the meeting.

Awami League education and cultural affairs secretary Obaidul Qader, Noakhali district AL president Mohammad Hanif and Noakhali pourashava chairman Rafiqul Hossain Kochi also spoke on the occasion.

For inheritors only

The fees for transferring the telephones of the dead subscribers to their inheritors (husband, wife, son and daughter) have been fixed at Tk 500 instead of previous amount of Tk 7,500, an official handout said here yesterday, reports BSS.

The inheritors of the dead telephone subscribers have to submit applications to the concerned officials along with court affidavits in favour of their inheritance for transferring the telephones to their names.

Two passport size photographs attested by first class government officers would also have to be attached with the applications for signing the new agreements.

Sandinistas free 14 hostages

MANAGUA, Aug 22: Leftist guerrillas holding hostage Nicaragua's vice president and more than 30 other opposition politicians released 14 prisoners on Saturday, but the vice president was not among those released, negotiators said, reports Reuter.

Meanwhile, the left-wing guerrillas seized Sunday a number of journalists who had been allowed inside the building, local radio reported.

A group of journalists had been allowed Saturday inside the United National Opposition (UNO) headquarters where the hostages were being held to report on the hostage-taking, but early today the Sandinista guerrilla leader told them they were also hostages, the radio said.

Saifur on reforms

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nations are moving ahead. "Political self-seeking and self-indulgence is predominant in the economic arena," he said.

Lack of social cohesion and unity of purpose, he said, is pushing the nation towards a breakdown in the social equilibrium, he warned.

Terming hartal as a 'suicidal measure, the Finance Minister lamented "hartal remains a persistent disease even in a democracy".

He cautioned that the international aid climate is not very promising and donors are increasingly asking for mobilisation of internal resources.

Characterised by deficiencies, the Finance Minister said, good governance had been lacking in the past and it remains so at the present. He added that the need of the hour is an administration which is enterprising and believes in the basic elements of good governance.

Resistance to economic reforms also arises from conflicts among sectional interest groups and the business community when it does not suit their purpose, he said.

During the Q&A session, Maj General (ret'd) Anjad Khan Choudhury, a businessman, observed that implementation of government policies remains a problem and that the economic initiatives lack thrust sectors. He identified possible thrust areas as the agro-business and housing sectors. He also complained about the existing tariff anomalies on imported items.

The Finance Minister acknowledged the need to activate the housing sector to boost employment and assured that necessary government steps would be taken soon. He also said a committee headed by the Planning Minister is currently reviewing the existing tariff anomalies.

Saying that the achievements in the country's macro-economic sector had been 'impressive and splendid', president of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Bangladesh Jamaluddin Ahmed noted that the economic progress is losing ground due to a lack of support at the macro-economic level. He stressed on the need to enhance public sector spending which, he said, has been declining in real terms.

Saifur Rahman said that public sector spending declined from 1525 million US dollar in 1982 to around one billion dollars in the mid-80s. "We need lot of public sector investment on infrastructure to

overcome stagnation," he added. He noted that the annual development plan outlay during the last fiscal was 1.9 billion dollars while it has been projected at 2.5 billion dollars during the current fiscal.

Claiming that the implementation process has also improved in recent years, he acknowledged that much more can be done.

However, the Finance Minister was baffled about how to activate the micro-sector. "We are trying to encourage and motivate the private sector to come forward," he said.

S H Kabir, Managing Director of Pfizer, observed that a thorough investigation of the micro-sector is necessary because it may not be true that the private sector is not responding to the economic stimuli.

The Pfizer executive also expressed his disappointment with the slow pace of the reform process of the commercial laws. "If the commercial courts are not functioning then even the banking system cannot function properly. This is a serious problem and the government does not seem to be aware of it at all."

Agreeing with the assessment, the Finance Minister said "Even revenue cases of the government are pending in the courts for long and we cannot get a hearing."

Such legal blockades are causing a lot of frustrations, he added. However, he pointed out that all laws are being reviewed by a legal reform committee.

Lynden Krause, of the Mennonite Central Committee, asked when the currency would be made fully convertible since it would help handicraft manufacturers and exporters to fetch a higher price.

The minister said the government has set October 1 as the tentative date to make the Taka fully convertible.

Responding to a complaint about Statutory Regulatory Orders (SROs), from Anwarul Huq, a businessman, the Finance Minister reiterated the commitment he made to Parliament earlier that the government would stop issuing SROs in the middle of the financial year unless there is an extremely extenuating situation.

Earlier, Forrest Cookson, in his introductory address, noted the successful economic progress achieved in the last 30 months and termed it as a 'dramatic change'.

The executive director of the forum, Aftab ul-Islam, also made a speech welcoming the Finance Minister at the meeting.

Immediate steps to save Sandwip ordered

M Majid-ul-Huq, Minister for Irrigation, Water Development and Flood Control, asked the officials of the Bangladesh Water Development Board (WDB) to take immediate steps to save Sandwip which is now being threatened by high waves of the sea, reports BSS.

A high powered committee headed by the Chairman, Water Development Board, was formed yesterday at an inter-ministerial meeting here to monitor the situation of Sandwip and take prompt remedial measures.

The minister directed the WDB official to remain alert and fully prepared for repairing any possible breach anywhere in the hydraulic structures and embankments of the water board. He also asked them to give special attention to town protection work and to the protection of coastal embankment particularly at Moheshkhali and Kutubdia.

The minister was presiding over the meeting in WDB conference room. High ranking officials of the Irrigation Ministry and Water Development Board, representatives of the Planning Commission, Economic Relation Division and Implementation, and Monitoring and Evaluation Division attended the meeting.

The minister called upon the water board to follow the observations made at different meetings of the ECNEC and the Cabinet and work with efficiency and drive to achieve hundred per cent success this year. Last year, 100 per cent physical success was achieved by completing all the 15 projects.

Biman-NY

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Khan Menon, MP who brought charges of corruption against the ministry regarding installation of a proposed boarding bridge at Zia International Airport.

The tender was awarded to a more experienced American company rather than the lowest bidder, a South Korean company in June, ministry sources said.

The construction work of the six-crore taka boarding bridge project is expected to start within a couple of months after the committee submits its final report to the Speaker and Parliament.

According to sources who attended the parliamentary committee's meeting, Menon insisted that the tender should have gone to the lowest bidder. In case of any necessary changes to the tender schedule expert opinion should be taken, Menon said.

The minister reportedly replied that the lowest bidder had no working experience and the decision to award the contract to the US company was taken on the suggestion of experts.

Menon was reportedly convinced by the minister's answer and the matter would now be settled at the next meeting of the committee on September 4, the source said.

Ganatantri Party

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The issue of joining hands with Dr Kamal to launch a new party was the main agenda of the council on which discussions were held until late last night.

A majority of the councillors spoke in favour of maintaining the separate entity of the party and to go for united programmes along with like-minded forces.

Some councillors, however, supported the idea of joining the new party. But they said the manifesto, programmes and the activities of the new organisation should be studied first.

Mohammad Afzal, general secretary of the council, placed a report before the council and also move the resolutions.

When contacted, Suranjit Sengupta, MP, who is a president member of the GP, told The Daily Star last night that a definite role in national politics.

"Our party is not for dividing the pro-liberation forces — rather we will strive for strengthening their unity," he said.

Nirmul body

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ported police action, were forced to alter their original plans.

A top leader of the committee told this correspondent, the altered programmes would include gheraoing the Jatya Sangsad building late in September. A nationwide dawn-to-dusk hartal is also likely to be announced during the Sangsad gherao programme.

The committee chief Jahanara Imam and other central leaders met Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina at her Minto Road residence last night and discussed at length the planned programmes, sources said.

The Midnight File

Egypt to open trial of 8 militants today

CAIRO, Aug 22: A closed military trial has been set for Monday for eight Muslim extremists accused of killing two people during the failed assassination of an army general. A news blackout has been imposed on the investigation of the July 19 shooting at the motorcade of Maj. Gen. Osman Shaheen. Military sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Sunday the trial would be closed to observers as in other cases involving security matters, reports AP.

Nigerians offer prayers to avert civil war

LAGOS, Aug 22: Nigerians offered prayers in many churches today to avert a clash between the military government and pro-democracy groups. One group marched barefoot through Lagos singing "Jesus save the nation." But strikes and civil disobedience are certain to engulf the country this week if President Ibrahim Babangida hangs onto power beyond his own Friday deadline, reports Reuter.

6 US troops hurt in blast

Aideed to welcome Carter's mediation

LONDON, Aug 22: Somali warlord Mohamed Farah Aideed has said he would welcome mediation in the Somali conflict by former US President Jimmy Carter, in a statement monitored by the BBC, reports AFP.

The statement from Aideed's office, broadcast on the pro-Aideed radio Mogadishu Saturday, said the Somali National Alliance (SNA) had heard that Carter had volunteered to act as mediator to help bring about peace.

"We welcome such a move by (former) President Jimmy Carter, while believing that the only solution is through dialogue and peaceful talks on the situation prevailing in Somalia," the statement said.

Aideed, whose SNA forces control much of southern Somalia, has been declared a wanted man by the United Nations. It has put a 25,000-dollar price on Aideed's head, blaming him for attacks on peacekeeping troops, particularly the killing of 24 Pakistani soldiers June 5.

The "crisis" between Somalis and the UN peacekeeping force, UNOSOM II, which began June 5, was "deepening day by day," the statement said.

"We urge, encourage and officially appeal to the (former) President to involve himself and spare his precious time as soon as is practicable."

The statement also urged Carter to involve other bodies, such as the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the Arab League and the European Community in the search for a solution to the conflict.

Meanwhile, six American soldiers with the UN peacekeeping force in Somalia were injured when an American military vehicle hit a landmine in southern Mogadishu today.

Murtaza Bhutto

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declaration makes it clear that even the government is not in favour of an amnesty because one for Murtaza Bhutto would make it necessary for the authorities to pardon also the MQM chief. However, Murtaza can contest even without being present in the country.

Whether or when Murtaza comes back may be a matter of speculation but there seems to be no uncertainty that he will take part in the elections as a candidate.

One report published today quoted Mrs Bhutto as saying that her son would contest from six National and 18 Provincial Assembly seats, all from Sindh, thus making him the only person in recent history to contest from so many seats in one province. Only a couple of weeks earlier she had said that Murtaza would be candidate from only two constituencies.

The exact position, however, will be known after August 29 and 30, last dates for filing nomination papers for NA and PA seats respectively. The final list will be published on September 14 and 15.

Meanwhile, Murtaza's campaign has got going. Two election offices have been set up for the conduct of his campaign. One is in Karachi, at 70 Clifton, the house Murtaza's grandfather Sir Shah Nawaz Bhutto had built and presently occupied by his mother. The other office is at Al Murtaza, at Larkana, which stands in Murtaza's name. Mrs Bhutto formally inaugurated the office, designated as the central election office of Mir Murtaza Bhutto, the other day.

Ms Benazir Bhutto had originally planned to run her campaign from Al Murtaza but she has now shifted her headquarters to Naudero where there is another older Bhutto house which is in her name.

In Karachi Murtaza has nominated a childhood friend, Subook Majid, to be his spokesman. Majid's appointment has caused consternation and surprise to many people, sympathisers, supporters and independent observers.

Majid is a businessman of dubious background. He has admitted that he has undergone jail term in Britain for drug running which, he said, was the result of a conspiracy, the details of which he did not disclose.

He is also a close family (almost a member) friend of the Jam Sadiq family. The former Chief Minister of Sindh who died last year was at one time an ardent disciple of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto but later became a sworn enemy of his daughter when she was Prime Minister.

During his chief ministership, the Bhutto family and the PPP greatly suffered at his hands.

Rains relent in Ctg

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Aug 22: The flood situation remained unchanged in most of the low-lying areas of Chittagong and Cox's Bazar following onrush of hill waters, sources said.

District administration sources claimed flood waters had begun to recede from some affected parts of the two districts with rainfall abating to some extent today.

The Met office recorded 24 mm of rainfall here in the past 24 hours upto 6 pm.

However, the Chittagong-Rangamati and Chittagong-Cox's Bazar road links were yet to be restored because flood waters were still flowing over some portions of the two highways, sources informed.

Thousands of people rendered homeless by the flood moved to different places for shelter while their houses still remained submerged, sources also informed.

The worst affected thanas of Chittagong include Sandwip, Raozan, Hathazari, Fatikchhari, Rangunia, Anwara, Banshkali and Patiya.

About 25 lakh people were severely affected by the floods both in Chittagong and Cox's Bazar districts while over three thousand kutcha houses were damaged, according to unofficial reports. The rain-triggered floods also devastated vast tracts of farmlands including seedbeds and shrimp projects.

Chittagong district administration officials said two lakh taka in cash and 200 metric tons of rice were allocated for the flood victims today.

Meanwhile, in Chittagong city, life returned to normal with the skies letting up for a change.

Bonded warehouse

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mounting pressure upon the NBR for reintroducing it, and especially the garments industries had been repeatedly requesting for the facility.

The garments industries had been insisting that since they have to use 30 per cent of their raw materials from domestic producers, the absence of the facility to the deemed exporters was adversely affecting their pricing of apparel.

The NBR source said its main problem was a lack of adequate manpower to monitor the pilferage from such warehouses.

It is now estimated that the reintroduction of the bonded warehouse facility would save the country about Taka 500 crore annually because the direct exporters will now once again use local products instead of imported raw materials.

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