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Local textile producers face impending crisis

RMG sector wooed to buy Indian fabrics

By Inam Ahmed

As the government gave a go-ahead to the EU's GSP provision for goods made with raw materials from the region, Indian textile manufacturers are now in the city, visiting different garment factories and trying to convince them to buy fabrics from the neighbouring country.

According to garments sector sources, the Indians are arguing that if the ready-made garments (RMG) exporters buy fabrics from their country, they would not lose anything, rather gain because of price competitiveness of Indian textile industry.

For the RMG exporters, the choice is now wide open. Earlier, many of them preferred local fabrics despite the textile industry's very limited capability to meet the huge demand, for many reasons.

Indian fabrics are generally cheaper than Bangladeshi ones

— about 20 per cent on an average — which acted as the main pull for local RMG exporters. But then they had to bear about 10 per cent costs as banking charges for import of Indian fabrics. On the other hand, they would get 12.5 per cent duty exemption from the EU countries.

So, after balancing the costs and savings, RMG exporters found that using local fabrics saved them about 2.5 per cent on an average. But may be more than that, exporters found comfort in the fact that local fabrics are of finer quality than Indian products, which are made with old machinery, local cotton and dyes. On top of that, exporters could directly monitor the production of fabrics in local mills and they could save a lot of lead-time to export punctually.

But with the adaptation of the SAARC cumulation, the exporters find the arithmetic different. Even after paying a 10

per cent bank charge, they find that using Indian fabrics provides them 10 per cent additional income as they could still avail the 12.5 per cent duty-free facility because of the SAARC cumulation provision.

Simple sense of economics says any RMG exporter should fall for this and the Indian textile industry also knows that. Finding it a good opportunity, they are now visiting garment offices in Dhaka.

The commerce ministry however now finds a different situation once it gave nod to the changed GSP provision. The Bangladesh Textile Manufacturers Association (BTMA) has already fired its salvos saying that the agreement has sealed the fate for the essential backward integration industry.

While officially maintaining that the new provision to allow GSP for goods made with raw materials from the region

would increase the country's RMG exports, the commerce ministry is now studying the effect of the SAARC cumulation.

"We have to decide whether to protect an inefficient local textile industry or to boost our export earnings," said a high official of commerce ministry, explaining the government position. "If it is desirable that we should save the local industry even at the cost of a lower export growth, we will do that."

Meantime, the government has very little options left to reverse its position, if it wants to. According to industry sources, the only and one way out is to issue a circular saying that textile goods will not come under the SAARC cumulation provision.

Sources concerned said the ministry is already weighing this option in case of a fall back and the textile lobby has also

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Remarks on judiciary

Move to file contempt case against PM

By Special Correspondent

There is a move by a group of lawyers to file a complaint against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina with the High Court for her comments on the judiciary last week.

The move follows the Prime Minister's rebuttal of a statement by 11 prominent lawyers in this regard.

The Prime Minister in an interview with BBC on July 26 said that criminals committed crimes after getting bail and that the judiciary should have accountability.

The 11 lawyers in a joint statement on August 3 said that her remarks violated the Constitution and fundamental rights, and was tantamount to contempt of court. Signatories to the statement included Syed Ishtiaque Ahmed, Dr Kamal Hossain, Khandaker Mahbubuddin Ahmed, Rafiqul Huq, Nazmul Huda and Shafiq Ahmed.

After the lawyers' statement, the Prime Minister at a press conference on Friday stood by

her earlier comments, which sparked off a row with the lawyers again.

Sources among the lawyers said yesterday they hoped that after their statement, the Prime Minister would realise her 'folly'. But her remarks at the press conference hurt them.

There should not be any blanket criticism against judges, who can not issue any statement in their defence, the sources said.

Dr Kamal Hossain told The Daily Star last night that they were yet to take any follow-up move. "After the statement and your (Daily Star) editorial on Sunday, we thought that the matter would be set to rest. If there is any complaint by the government on the bail issue, it can seek remedy from higher court," he said.

Barrister Mainul Hossain, President of Supreme Court Bar Association, said that he did not think it was necessary to file a complaint against the

Prime Minister after the lawyers' statement. "But if there is a general move by all irrespective of party affiliation and opinion, then there can be a petition," he added.

The Ainjibi Oikkya Parishad, a forum of pro-opposition lawyers, will bring out a procession in the city today to protest the Prime Minister's comments. The procession will start from the Supreme Court premises at 4 pm.

The decision was taken at its meeting on Saturday. Chaired by Khandaker Mahbubuddin Ahmed, the meeting was attended by, among others, Justice TH Khan, barristers Maudud Ahmed, Najmul Huda, Mohammad Aminul Huq, Rafiqul Islam Mia and Abdor Razzak and advocates Zainul Abedin, Kazi Firoze Rashid, Sirajul Islam, Shafiqul Islam Babul, Sheikh Ansar Ali, and Nurul Huq Majumder, says a press release.

Nab, try killers of Shipu, Phul, orders Hasina

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday issued directive for immediate arrest of the killers of businessman Iftikhar Hossain Shipu and college girl Bushra Rushida Phul, reports UNB.

"The killers must be nabbed and put to trial," she said asserting that terrorists have no party and they would not be spared whatever party they belong to.

The prime minister gave the arrest orders when the aggrieved relatives of Phul and Shipu met her at her office. She assured the bereaved families that stern action would be taken against all culprits.

Parents Shipu, his widow and two minor children, brother and his wife, parents of Bushra — retired police officer Sirajul Islam and his wife — came to the PM with an appeal for justice.

Additional IGP Fazlul Huq, DMP Commissioner Matlur Rahman, DC (Detective Branch) Abdul Hannan and other senior police officers engaged in investigation of the deadly murders were also present.

Shipu was shot dead by three gunmen in a busy market place in the city's Banani area on May 24.

None of the accused in the

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A bolt from the blue: Men and women tumble on each other in their attempt to escape the wrath of marauding policemen who clubbed and teargassed activists at a rally of the opposition alliance in front of BNP's central office at Naya Paltan in the city yesterday. The sudden attack left scores of activists wounded, some seriously. — Star photo

Police attack on rally leaves scores hurt

Opposition calls seven-hour hartal tomorrow

By Staff Correspondent

The BNP-led opposition alliance has called a countrywide hartal from 6 am to 1 pm tomorrow to protest 'police attack' on its leaders and activists without any provocation and 'folling' its scheduled joint public rally and procession in the city yesterday.

Witnesses said around 25 people were seriously injured in the incident and many more received minor injuries.

The alliance however claimed more than 100 of its activists were injured in police attack and over 50 were arrested. Police however confirmed arrest of 29 activists.

The hartal programme was announced from a hurriedly called meeting of top leaders of the four component parties of the alliance at 29 Minto Road with BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan in the chair.

Bhuiyan said without any provocation, police suddenly attacked peaceful gathering of the alliance, resorted to lathi charge and fired tear gas shells

and rubber bullets. The opposition parties will stage demonstrations at all thana headquarters today in support of the hartal.

The alliance comprising BNP, Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote had earlier withdrawn its scheduled hartal yesterday due to spread of dengue fever in the capital and other parts of the country. Instead, it decided to hold a joint rally at Muktangan and bring out a procession to press for, among other things, urgent steps to check dengue.

The alliance then shifted the rally venue to Naya Paltan because of a pre-scheduled programme of 11-party alliance at Muktangan.

As per the revised schedule, hundreds of activists started gathering in front of the BNP central office from 3 pm and the alliance began its pre-procession rally at 5:10 pm.

Earlier, huge contingents of riot police were deployed around the BNP office and in lanes and by-lanes in the areas

from Kakrail to Fakirerpool crossing. Police first tried to obstruct holding of the rally but alliance activists defied police order and assembled there.

Police all of a sudden gheraoed the gathering from three sides and resorted to lathi charge at 5:35 pm to disperse them. Leaders and activists ran for shelter as police fired tear gas shells and rubber bullets indiscriminately.

Police stormed the gathering when Jagpa President Shafiqul Alam Prodhan was bitterly criticising the home minister for lawlessness in the country. Earlier, IOJ leader Abdur Rab Yusufi, Jamaat leader ATM Azharul Islam and JP leader Saifur Rahman addressed the rally.

BNP leader Mannan Bhuiyan and Jamaat Secretary General Matur Rahman Nizami and some other top leaders of the alliance were present during the police attack.

JP Secretary General Nazim Rahman Manjur and IOJ Secretary

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73 more dengue patients hospitalised

By Staff Correspondent

Seventy-three more people with dengue fever were admitted to different hospitals and clinics in the city yesterday.

Dhaka Medical College Hospital admitted 28 patients, Mitford Hospital in Old Dhaka three, Dhaka Shishu Hospital in Agargaon eight, BIRDEM five, Suhrawardi Hospital in Agargaon and National Hospital in Old Dhaka one each. Red Crescent Holy Family Hospital one and Bangladesh Medical College Hospital four.

Central Hospital at Green Road and Mowara Hospital in Siddheshwari admitted two persons each with dengue fever. Al-Raji Hospital in Farmgate five, Ibn Sina Hospital in Dhanmondi one, Samarita Hospital on Panthapath three and Dhaka Community Hospital five.

Meanwhile, Doctors for Health and Environment, a private organisation, in view of rising incidence of dengue infection in the city, has launched a Dengue Consultation Centre to provide free advice on dengue-related matters.

The centre would start functioning from today at 21/1 Khilji Road in Mohanmadpur

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Militants want tripartite talks on Kashmir

Hizbul chief threatens to withdraw ceasefire

MUZAFFARABAD, Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, Aug 6: The chief of Kashmir's biggest militant group, Hizbul Mujahideen, on Sunday said India had three days to agree to tripartite talks with the Kashmiris and Pakistan, reports AFP.

Confirming a deadline set earlier, Hizbul Mujahideen commander Syed Salahuddin said the group's ceasefire would expire at 5 pm (1200 GMT) Tuesday unless India sat down for unconditional three-way talks.

He rejected reports that Hizbul negotiators on the Indian side of the divided Himalayan territory had described the deadline as a

"misunderstanding." "We have given the deadline by keeping in view the obduracy and delaying tactics which India has been employing for the last 52 years," Salahuddin said in a statement.

"India must prepare for tripartite talks without further delay of time, otherwise the situation will deteriorate and she will be responsible for that."

Kashmiri separatist veteran Fazal-Haq Qureshi, who is mediating between the Hizbul and Indian forces over the ceasefire arrangements, has reportedly said the deadline was a "misunderstanding" and could be extended.

But Salahuddin insisted the

Hizbul troops were still in their trenches and ready to start fighting again on Tuesday unless India met its demands for talks.

"Talks held by ignoring any of the three parties cannot make any headway," he said. "Such two-sided talks... have always proved fruitless."

Indian security officials and Hizbul representatives have begun discussions on the ceasefire, the first direct talks between a separatist group and India since the bloody Muslim uprising began in 1989.

The Hizbul Mujahideen announced a unilateral ceasefire

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8-hr hartal in Ctg today

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Aug 6: Security has been tightened in the port city today with deployment of large number of police force ahead of tomorrow's eight-hour hartal.

All-Party Action Committee (APAC), Chittagong unit, called the hartal till 2 pm in greater Chittagong tomorrow to protest attack on Jatiya Party city unit president Jahangir Alam.

Police started searching suspected vehicles particularly autorickshaws and their passengers at different points in the city.

Police arrested two people and recovered a revolver and a pistol from their possession while they were travelling by an autorickshaw on Dewanbazar Road at 3 pm today.

Meanwhile, APAC activists organised rallies and processions here today in support of tomorrow's hartal.

JP leader Jahangir was shot by some terrorists on Saturday.

EC sees no scope to entertain BNP plea

By Nazmul Ashraf

The Election Commission has found no legal scope to oblige BNP with their demand to extend the time limit for public suggestions concerning changes in the draft voter list.

"We desperately searched for a way to extend the process of seeking objections and suggestions to the draft voter list as demanded by BNP, but found no scope within the legal framework for extension," Election Commissioner Moshtaq Ahmed Choudhury told the Daily Star last night following an emergency meeting held yesterday.

The law pertaining to the issue allows only a 15-day period for the people to come up with their suggestions on a draft voter list after it is made public.

The issue of time extension was the lone agenda in yesterday's meeting, which was

presided over by Election Commissioner Abidur Rahman in the absence of Chief Election Commissioner M A Syed.

Published on July 18, the draft list of 4.47 crore voters was posted at designated places across the country until August 3.

On the day of closure, BNP demanded an extension by at least three weeks on the grounds of inclement weather, prevalence of dengue fever and inadequate display of the voter lists, which denied many the opportunity to come up with suggestions—inclusion and/or exclusion of names and correction of other facts.

The following day, BNP cast doubt on the authenticity of the draft voter list 16 days after it was published, and demanded an independent probe into

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