

MINIMUM WAGES FOR UNSKILLED INDUSTRIAL WORKERS

Employers ask govt not to accept proposed pay rise

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh Employers' Federation (BEF) has urged the government not to accept the increased wages recommended by the Minimum Wage Board (MWB) for unskilled and juvenile workers in all privately-owned enterprises.

"The recommended wages involve more than 100 percent pay rise, which will have a disastrous effect on job creating efforts," said M Anis Ud Dowla, BEF president, at a meeting with State Minister for Labour and Employment Aman Ullah Aman yesterday.

He said at present an unskilled worker gets Tk 930 per month including a basic pay of Tk 600, thirty percent house rent and Tk 150 medical allowance.

According to the MWB draft recommendations, an unskilled worker of an industrial unit with 50 or more workers will get a basic pay of Tk 1,350, thirty percent house rent and Tk 300 medical

allowance, totalling Tk 2,055 per month.

Therefore, an employer will have to pay an additional amount of Tk 1,125 per month to each worker, the BEF president told the state minister.

Referring to the relevant provisions of Minimum Wages Ordinance 1961 and ILO (International Labour Organisation) rules, he said the draft recommendations under consideration run contrary to the spirit of both the national and international laws related to the fixation of the minimum wages.

"In addition, the insufficient time given for eliciting opinion of the affected parties also violated the relevant provision of the 1961 ordinance," mentioned the federation chief.

He urged the state minister not to accept the recommendations, circulated through a notification on April 5 this year, considering the legal implications and the adverse

effects on industries, employment situation and the overall national economy.

About the proposed law for allowing trade union rights to the workers in the export processing zones (EPZs), Dowla said the government should discuss the salient features of the law with the employees and workers. "Otherwise it will be a violation of Convention 44 under which the TCC has been set up with a view to having a joint consideration on any labour law."

The BEF president said the Labour Code codifying and updating 26 labour laws should be promulgated as quickly as possible. He also requested for promulgation of an ordinance by amending the Factories Act 1965 to permit night work by women.

Dowla mentioned that the ILO in 1990 adopted a protocol amending its convention prohibiting night work by women. Under the protocol, member countries can frame

national laws or regulations after consulting the organisations of employees and workers to allow the women workers to work after sunset.

The issue was discussed in a tripartite consultative council (TCC) meeting and a decision was taken that the Ministry of Labour and Employment would immediately move for an amendment to the national laws.

"Somehow, the issue was not pursued and as a result, the requisite legal provision is yet to be introduced in our country though countries in Europe, Latin America and the South Asian region have permitted night work of women," Dowla said.

The Labour Code, 2003 has a provision for night work by women subject to fulfillment of certain formalities, he said urging the ministry to make legal amendment to this effect without any further delay.

Govt plans wide area network to better e-governance

UNB, Dhaka

The government plans to establish wide area network in the country to achieve better result and services of the e-governance.

"It is necessary to introduce the system in trade, licence, registration, legislation and other areas," Foreign Minister M Moshed Khan said.

The minister was speaking in a roundtable on implementing e-governance system organised by Board of Investment (BoI) in Dhaka yesterday.

The minister said e-governance is very important for better services, transparency and efficiency in the management at all levels.

He said the present government is sincere to apply information technologies to all sectors. In this regard he mentioned that the government had taken programme to introduce computerisation in land record and registration.

The minister welcomed the BoI for introducing e-governance in the organisation and hoped that foreign investors would be benefited from the system.

BoI has introduced e-governance at its office in order to render better services to the investors and to ensure transparency in the organisation.

Executive Chairman of BoI Mahmudur Rahman, president of different chamber bodies, representatives of development partners and foreign investors spoke at the conference.



Members of a delegation of the Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce and Industry pose with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia when they met the prime minister yesterday.

Govt moves to revive TCB to bridle essentials prices

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

In a bid to bridle the prices of essentials, the government is going to revive TCB (Trading Corporation of Bangladesh).

Established in 1972, TCB is a state-run agency responsible for import of essential consumer goods and industrial raw materials.

The government will make TCB active so that it can be used as an effective arm to check price spiral, a commerce ministry meeting was told in Dhaka yesterday.

It is not desirable that few importers or traders will control the prices and make money, observed the meeting, chaired by Commerce Minister Altaf Hossain Choudhury.

The meeting also decided that a task force led by the commerce minister will monitor the market situation and suggest steps to put an end to monopoly business.

The meeting reviewed market prices, supply and stock situation of essentials. Officials from agriculture, food, industries, home affairs, fisheries and livestock ministries, Export Promotion Bureau and the controller of Export and Import were present at the meeting.

As the commerce ministry does not have a mechanism to assess the actual demand for essential items, and amount of domestic production and possible shortfall of essential goods, it is very difficult to take timely steps to check prices, said the officials who

attended the meeting.

The ministry needs an arm to look after the interest of consumers, the meeting observed admitting that prices of sugar and flour (ata) could not have gone up if the government had sufficient stock.

It is not possible for the government to cut duties on most of essential items now imported from other countries as there is no other way to compensate such revenue loss, the officials said.

"We are taking steps now keeping in mind that prices usually go up in the month of Ramadan. We will do everything possible to keep the prices under control during the month of fasting," the commerce minister told reporters after the meeting.

Italian restaurant opens in Dhanmondi

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An Italian restaurant, Villa Vista, was launched at Dhanmondi in Dhaka on Friday.

Pietro Ballero, Italian ambassador in Dhaka, inaugurated the restaurant.

Villa Vista offers some traditional Italian foods, besides other fast foods, said Saidul Alam Tito, owner of the restaurant.

The Italian envoy said although Bangladesh food is delicious, Italian cuisine would bring a different taste for local and foreign customers.

A weeklong Italian food festival has also begun to mark the opening of Villa Vista.

Adopt modern tech to boost RMG

Italian textile machinery makers urge local entrepreneurs

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Italian textile machinery manufacturers urged Bangladeshi entrepreneurs to adopt modern technology to increase productivity and competitiveness to face challenges of quota-free trade regime.

As Italy is the world's second largest manufacturer of textile machinery, adoption of Italian machinery and technology can improve Bangladesh's apparels, Mauro Badanelli, secretary of Italian Association of Textile Machinery Producers (ACIMIT), said yesterday in Dhaka.

The workshop was organised by

Italian Trade Commission in collaboration with the Embassy of Italy in Bangladesh, Italian Association of Textile Machinery Producers and Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA).

Badanelli said Asian countries are the largest buyers of Italian textile machinery, which accounted for 38 percent of total export worth 2.3 billion euro in 2003. Until 2002 China was the single largest importing country of Italian textile machinery but in 2003 Turkey (412 million euro) overtook China (396 million euro).

Addressing the opening of the two-day workshop, Italian

Ambassador in Dhaka Pietro Ballero said Bangladesh garment sector has showed immense progress in the last two decades and it has opportunity to expand further.

"Introduction of Italian high-tech machinery can boost Bangladesh garment sector," the envoy said.

BTMA President MA Awal acknowledged the contribution of the Italian machinery to Bangladesh's textile sector.

Leading manufacturers of Italian textile machinery, representatives of Italian Trade Commission and officials of local textile mills attended the workshop.

New Thai food restaurant in Dhanmondi

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Sukho Thai, a restaurant offering the food lovers of Dhaka some delicious Thai cuisine, has been opened in Dhanmondi area.

Thailand Ambassador to Bangladesh Phithak Phrombubpha formally inaugurated the restaurant on Friday evening.

Thai chef U Thin who has 20 years' experience will work in the restaurant where 150 Thai food items will be available.

All the spices and ingredients of the items are imported from Thailand for giving a real taste of Thai food, said Arman Islam, owner of the restaurant.

The restaurant, financed by Bay Leasing and Investment Ltd, will try to keep prices within the customers' affordability, he added.

Farzana Arman Munni, co-owner of the restaurant, and Thai embassy officials were present at the inaugural function.

BASIC Bank declares 50pc stock, 10pc cash dividends

Bangladesh Small Industries and Commerce Bank Limited (BASIC Bank) has declared a 50 percent stock dividend and 10 percent cash dividend for its lone shareholder, the government of Bangladesh, for the year 2003.

The dividend was approved at the 15th annual general meeting of the bank held at its head office in Dhaka on Wednesday, says a press release.

The cumulative cash dividend so far paid to the government is Tk 30.50 crore and the cumulative corporate tax to the national exchequer is Tk 119.90 crore.

The bank earned an operating profit Tk 65.04 crore during the year 2003.

The classified loan was 4.25 percent as against 5.12 percent in the preceding year with 100 percent provision made.

The bank also handled import of Tk 893.05 crore and export Tk 652.30 crore during the year of 2003.

Rabeya Flour recommends 10pc dividend

Rabeya Flour Mills Limited, a sister concern of Ejab Group, recommended a 10 percent dividend for the year 2003 for shareholders, says a press release.

The dividend was approved at a meeting of the board of directors of the company on Tuesday.

The 27th annual general meeting (AGM) of the company will be held at the corporate office of the company on June 16.

Lafarge Surma Cement holds AGM

The sixth annual general meeting of Lafarge Surma Cement Limited was held in Dhaka on Thursday.

Jean Desazars, regional president for Asia-Pacific operations of Lafarge, presided over the meeting, says a press release.

Managing Director of the company Yong Ngai Chan, directors Manzurul Islam and Anisur Rahman Sinha were also present.

In the meeting, the election of Abu Haniff Khan, president and managing director of Arab Bangladesh Bank Limited, and Manzurul Rahman, chairman of Delta Life Insurance Company Limited, were confirmed as directors of the company.

The meeting also re-elected Jean Desazars, Pierre Saint-Hillier and Enrique De Bobes Pellicer as directors.

Qatar denies oil shortage at root of price hike

AFP, Doha

Qatar's Energy Minister Abdullah al-Attiya said Friday that "political and psychological factors" were behind soaring oil prices rather than shortages.

He said that the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), of which Qatar is a member, had "never implemented" its decision to cut production by one million barrels a day from April 1.

"This is clear evidence that the price rises are due to political, psychological and other factors, unconnected to supplying the world market with oil," Attiya said.

He was speaking as he left to attend the World Economic Forum meeting opening in Jordan on Saturday.

New York's main crude oil contract hit a record high of 41.50 dollars a barrel Friday, pressured by fears resulting from attacks on oil facilities in Iraq and Saudi Arabia, as well as soaring demand and low US stocks, experts said.

It shattered the previous record of 41.15 dollars set in October 1990 after Iraqi invaded Kuwait.



A delegation of Bangladesh Employers' Federation (BEF) led by its President M Anis Ud Dowla met State Minister for Labour and Employment Aman Ullah Aman in Dhaka yesterday. Ali Imam Mazumder, secretary of Labour and Employment, and other high officials of the ministry were also present.

Reform makes banking sector sound, efficient

ERF workshop observes

BSS, Dhaka

A gradual rational change in banking sector took place during the last two and a half years that made the country's financial institutions more sound, efficient, competitive and transparent.

Besides strengthening supervision of the central bank by improving its capabilities, restructuring supervision portfolio, introduction of modern techniques and providing training to the bankers ultimately gave the country's overall development a shaking momentum.

This was observed at a workshop on "Financial Sector Issues" organised by Economic Reporters' Forum (ERF) with support from Bangladesh Bank (BB) at Bangladesh Bank Training Academy (BTA) here yesterday.

BB Governor Fakhruddin Ahmed addressed as the chief guest the opening session of the two-day workshop.

With President of ERF Monowar Hossain in the chair, the session was also addressed by Executive Director of BB Muzharul Haque, General Secretary of ERF Nurul Hasan Khan. Chief instructor of BTA Mahbubul Haque was present.

A total of 30 economic reporters from national dailies are taking part in the workshop.

Describing efficient, systematic and transparent banking sector as the key factor for the country's development, Fakhruddin Ahmed said reforms of financial sector has gained speed aiming at updating, adjusting and operating environment in the sector.

"A number of reforms in the financial sector have been taken since October 2001, which started keeping positive impact on the country's development," he said and added that the banking sector has been subjected to major reforms compared to other financial sectors.

Giving a brief description of the major areas of reform programme and its impact on the sector, he called upon the newsmen to use the latest statistics in their news items.

He said reforms are a continuous process and this process will be kept going in future to resolve the problems coming and also for the betterment of the exiting situation.