

Jobs disaster looms large

UK aid group warns

AFB, London

Millions of desperately poor workers, particularly women, will lose their jobs next year following the lifting of a global system of textile and clothing tariffs, a leading aid agency warned yesterday.

Bangladesh's fledgling textile industry will be especially hit by the scrapping of the Multi-Fibre Agreement (MFA) on January 1, meaning many female workers will be forced into the sex trade instead, ChristianAid said.

"We are deeply concerned that the new year will spell misery for huge numbers of garment workers," said Andrew Pendleton, ChristianAid's director of international affairs.

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Knit garment exporters ready for quota-free era

Industrial term loans see a 62pc rise in Q1 mainly to help RMG exporters prepare for MFA phaseout

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Industrial term loans soared by a staggering 62 percent in the first quarter of the current fiscal year, with the garment sector drawing the bulk of the lending to set up backward linkage and export-oriented units to face the quota-free regime. Banking sources say in the con-

text of the post-MFA, quota-free era that demands Bangladesh invest more in the export-oriented garment sector, garment exporters have drawn the vast bulk of this Tk 2,212 crore lending in July-September, keeping up with the up-trend of the previous fiscal year. In FY2003-04, industrial term loans marked a massive 68 percent

jump from the previous year to stand at Tk6,675 crore. Based on the lending trend, a top banker says the knitting sector has 'all-out preparations' to face the post-MFA (multi-fibre agreement) era, but the woven sector may be in for some problems. "Investors have taken this loan [of Tk 2,212 crore] mainly to install

backward linkage industries to tackle the post-MFA situation," notes Janata Bank Managing Director SM Aminur Rahman. "Banks have provided maximum loans to help set up backward linkage industries in the knitting sector. We believe the knitting sector will not face any difficulty in the post-MFA era."

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Mahathir touches down today on high-profile visit

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Mahathir Mohamad, the former prime minister of Malaysia and the architect of its rapid rise as an Asian economic power, touches down in Dhaka this afternoon with a 50-member delegation to attend the inaugural session of the Bangladesh-Malaysia Business Forum (BMBF) 2004.

The world-renowned figure will meet with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia tomorrow and later address the



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PROFILE Spokesman for New Asia

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Mahathir Mohamad's pragmatic policies at home won him huge popular support and helped transform Malaysia into an Asian economic tiger. Mahathir became the fourth Prime Minister of Malaysia on July 16, 1981. During the process, he turned himself into one of Asia's longest-serving leaders and when he retired in October 2003 he had been in office for 22 years.

An outspoken critic of western government policies, he projected himself as a moderate spokesman for the Muslim world. He has also been a strong supporter of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and was the last Chairman of the NAM summit in Malaysia in 2003.

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Resist attempts to foil progress, PM tells rally

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday urged the countrymen to forge unity to face the evil attempt of those who will try to stand in the way of the ongoing nation-building efforts.

"A peaceful struggle is going on to protect the country's independence and make it meaningful. In the present perspective, those who will try to stand against this effort are the opponents of independence," she said.

The prime minister was addressing a rally of children and juveniles at Bangabandhu National Stadium in the morning, marking the Victory Day.

"Our fight is to eliminate terrorism and corruption, give democracy a strong footing, alleviate poverty and hunger, remove ill-health, illiteracy and malnutrition and advance the process of development and production," she told the rally.

"We'll have to win the struggle because this is the extended form of our great Liberation War."

"After 33 years of the country's independence, the perspective of pro and opponent sides has changed. Similarly, the character of struggle has also changed," she said, adding that the government is taking the struggle to that end.

The prime minister said: "If we'll not be able to pay proper respect to the martyrs of the Liberation War the spirit of independence cannot be consolidated."

She said two major responsibilities have been bestowed upon the nation after achieving the

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Govt subduing spirit of victory, says Hasina

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina yesterday accused the government of undermining the spirit of victory by distorting the history of Independence War.

Hasina, also the main opposition Awami League (AL) chief, was addressing a gathering of wounded freedom fighters and artists of the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra at the AL's Dhanmondi office on the occasion of the 34th Victory Day.

"The four-party alliance government is trying to terminate the glory of the hard-won victory the people achieved under the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib," she said.

Hasina recalled the steps the AL took while in power for the freedom fighters that include burial in state honour and 30 percent quota in government jobs for their children.

She alleged the BNP-Jamaat-led alliance is firing the freedom fighters' children from jobs since it came to power.

She blasted the government for its politics of double standards - establishing the Ministry of Liberation War Affairs and appointing war criminals and Rajakars as ministers at the same time.

"The BNP came to power with the help of Jamaat-e-Islami, who opposed the Liberation War and was involved in the killings of innocent people and intellectuals," she added.

Artists Abdul Jabbar, Moloy Ganguli and Fakir Alamgir, among others, were present.

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President Iajuddin Ahmed and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, left, stand in solemn silence after placing wreaths at the National Memorial in Savar on the 34th Victory Day yesterday, and thousands of people, right, throng the memorial to pay homage to the martyrs of the War of Independence.

VICTORY DAY CELEBRATED

Fresh vows to work for a prosperous nation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The nation yesterday celebrated the 34th Victory Day paying glowing tributes to the heroes of the Liberation War and taking fresh vows to work for a prosperous future.

"Our fight is to eliminate terrorism and corruption, give democracy a strong footing, alleviate poverty and hunger, remove ill-health, illiteracy and malnutrition, and advance the process of development and production," Prime Minister Khaleda Zia told a chil-

dren's rally organised to mark the day.

"For this we need a stable environment. We will have to win this battle, because this struggle is the extended form of our great Liberation War," she said.

On December 16, 1971, the Pakistani occupation forces surrendered to the joint command of Indian Army and Bangladeshi freedom fighters at the then Race Course (now Suhrawardy Udyan) Maidan in Dhaka after a nine-month bloody war for independence of the country.

The day commenced with a 31-gun salute to the Liberation War heroes fired from the old airport ground. National flags were hoisted atop all government, semi-government and other important establishments.

Most of the government buildings, hotels and high-rise structures were illuminated with lights while the main streets of the capital wore a festive look with national flags flying at almost all the corners.

Thousands of people from different walks of life assembled at the

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Ruling coalition activists attack opponents in dists: 32 hurt

STAR REPORT

The ruling coalition activists injured at least 32 people in Barisal and Rangamati while chased off Khulna University teachers and students in Khulna and barred Sylhet Mayor Badar Uddin Ahmed Kamran from laying wreath in Sylhet during the Victory Day celebration yesterday.

Witnesses said BNP men with sticks and bricks attacked an AL procession as it reached Agailjhara Degree College in Agailjhara upazila of Barisal at around 10:00am. While the attackers chased the AL men, police stood as mere onlookers.

At least 20 AL leaders and activists were injured in the attack. And

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Height ceiling eased in Gulshan, Uttara

Ministry decision to allow 8-storey structures criticised by utility agencies, experts

MORSHED ALI KHAN

A decision by the Ministry of Housing and Public Works to ease height restrictions on all six-storey buildings along streets in Gulshan and Uttara has been criticised by the utility agencies and town planners.

The waiving of height restrictions is set to pave the way for millions of square feet of additional commercial and residential floor space in areas already highly congested with

traffic and lacking in services such as gas, water, electricity and telephone lines.

Officials at Wata (Water and Sewerage Authority), Titas Gas,

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Miscreants kill Pak national, take away car

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Comilla

Unknown miscreants carjacked a Pakistani national and beat and doped him to death in the early hours yesterday on Dhaka-Chittagong Highway at Choudhogram in Comilla.

Nasser Abdullah, 45, was the manager of National Bank of Pakistan's Chittagong Branch. His car driver Monir too was beaten and drugged but he survived. He was undergoing treatment at Choudhogram Hospital yesterday.

Relatives said Nasser left Chittagong at about 6:00pm Wednesday to go to see his brother in Dhaka. As his car reached in front of Madina Filling Station adjacent to, Comilla Cantonment, a blockade stopped his car.

"A gang of up to five dragged us from our seats and beat us bad before taking control of the car," Monir told reporters.

They forced the two to take some toxic substance and bundled them

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JS team starts CHT visit today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

The parliamentary team formed to review the post-peace accord situation in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) districts arrives here in Khagrachhari today on a three-day visit to the hill districts, officials sources said.

"The team would invite the local residents' opinions as to what should the government do for the betterment of the people living in the hill districts," said a Khagrachhari official seeking anonymity yesterday.

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Chittagong Test starts today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cg

Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar was looking for inspiration and would be trying to inject some confidence into his teammates ahead of the second and final Test against India that starts here today.

The match will start at 9:30 am at the MA Aziz Stadium. Bangladesh Television and ESPN will telecast the match live.

Beaten by one innings and 140

runs in Dhaka, Bashar was still worried about the team's batting.

"Continuous poor batting has long been a headache for us. And more importantly, early collapses remain to be the number one worry. So we would like to play with a strategy here so that we can avoid a repeat of that," Bashar told reporters yesterday after a two-and-a-half-hour practice session at the country's second Test venue.

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Spirit of '71 still burning bright at DU

CHRISTINE WANNER

In 1971, students at Dhaka University would take to politics to serve the nation, risking their very lives. But the present generation of students is not so committed to the cause of the nation, regrets Arun Kumar Dey, owner of Madhu's Canteen.

"The liberation movement was driven by the hope for a new country - a free, secular land. Nowadays, students do not commit themselves in such ways to the nation," Arun points out, adding, "What we need now is another strong movement to unite the country."

Arun holds out to day the legacy of over 150 patriots killed on the campus during the Liberation War, including his mother and father Madhu, the founder of the canteen. Outside the canteen, a plaque names the martyrs to remind the students that the victory for the nation did not come easy.

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2 of the 4 Tanore rapists held on ministerial orders

Victim, her son in safe custody

ANWAR ALI, Rajshahi

Police yesterday arrested two of the four BNP men accused of gang-raping a woman 17 years ago in Tanore, while the victim, now 34, has found safe custody with Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association (BNWLA).

Acting on a home ministry directive, police nabbed Yaad Ali and Omar Ali, both allegedly ruling BNP adherents, at their homes in the early hours yesterday, said Nurul Amin, officer-in-charge (OC) of Tanore Police Station (PS). A magistrate's court sent the two arrestees to jail later in the day.

The ministerial directive signed by Khairuzzaman, personal secretary to the state minister for home affairs, was faxed to the office of Rajshahi superintendent of police (SP), attached with a copy of The

Daily Star report dated December 13 that made the anomalies and injustice public.

The Daily Star report headlined 'Raped 17yr back, on the run for her life' described the plight of the gang-rape victim, who was then on the run receiving threats to her life if she did not drop her court action against the men she accused of rape.

The men include a senior politician in the local area.

The threats came after the trial of her rape case was set to re-start after a nine-year gap.

Speaking from hiding, the woman told journalists that in April 1988, three men, Mofiz Uddin, the current Tanore upazila BNP vice president and Chanduria union parishad chairman, and his accomplices Omar Ali and Yaad Ali, bribed her uncle Sayed Ali Satari and

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