

## RMG makers seek one month more to re-fix minimum wage

### Workers oppose time extension plan

#### STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Country's garments factory owners have urged the government for allowing them another one month time to reach a decision on a minimum wage for the garment workers as the tenure of the Wage Commission, assigned for re-fixation of the minimum wage, ends this month.

On the other hand, the workers are opposed to such a time extension move saying that any undue delay will lead to unrest in the RMG sector.

The two sides voiced their stand on the issue at a roundtable in Dhaka yesterday.

The roundtable on Prevailing Labour Situation and Future of the RMG Sector was organised by Gonoatnric Garments Sramik-

Karmachary Federation at its office. Annisul Huq, a former president of the Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), said, "The process to fix the minimum wage is on. It's hard to exactly say right now what would be the amount."

Annisul, also a member of the Wage Commission, went on, "It is tough to settle the actual wage for the workers, so it may take one more month. We have already asked the government for the time extension."

Opposing the proposal for such time extension, Jafrul Hasan Khan, a labour leader, said, "We can consider 15 more days after the deadline for settling the minimum wage. But it is not possible to extend one more month to reach a decision on it as because all other matters of

the deal except minimum wage have already been determined."

"If the minimum wage issue is not settled within the timeframe, another spate of unrest may occur in the sector," he said, cautioning that uncertainty over the issue might loom large after passing off the deadline of three months to settle the minimum wage by the Wage Commission on August 31.

Nazma Akter, workers' representative in the six-member Wage Commission, lamented that no headway was made till yesterday as the owners stuck to their guns to offer Tk 1,300 as the minimum wage.

She also voiced a note of warning that the Wage Commission would be another failure as like the previous one if the minimum wage issue not settled during the tenure of

this government.

Minimum wage for the workers is now Tk 950, which was set 12 years back.

The labour organisations demanded Tk 4850 as minimum monthly wage, including Tk 3000 as basic salary, Tk 1050 house rent, Tk 300 medical allowance and Tk 400 conveyance.

Alamgir Rony, president of Gonoatnric Garments Sramik Kormochary Federation, presided over the meeting while Abul Hossain, a labour leader, presented a keynote paper on the prevailing situation in the RMG sector.

Shauddin Ahmed, Abdul Kader Hawladar, Moinuddin Mondol and Sardar Khorsheed were among other leaders of 15 workers federation present at the roundtable.

## Hamdard celebrates 100 years of operations

### STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Hamdard Laboratories (Waqf) Limited, a herbal medicine manufacturer, yesterday celebrated its hundred years of operations.

Hamdard was established in Delhi, India in 1906 and later spread its wings across the Indian subcontinent including Bangladesh and Pakistan. On August 1, 2006 it completed hundred years of its operations.

Hamdard Bangladesh, established in 1953, organised a seminar in the capital yesterday to mark the 100th founding anniversary.

Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Moudud Ahmed was present as the chief guest at the seminar titled 'Hundred Years of Humdard in the Fields of Health, Education, Research, and Philanthropic Activities'. Justice Md Abdur Rouf, chairman of Hamdard Board of Trustees Bangladesh, chaired the seminar.

Law minister lauded the role of Hamdard for its contribution to herbal medicine. He also stressed the need for further development of herbal medicines.

Justice Md Abdur Rouf said Hamdard is working to establish a university for herbal education in the country.

## China businesses urged to invest in Bangladesh

Bangladesh business delegation, now on a visit to Beijing, has urged the Chinese entrepreneurs to explore the potential sectors of Bangladesh for investment.

They made the call at a workshop on Trade and Investment in Bangladesh organised Thursday in the Chinese capital by China Council for Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT).

The 10-member Bangladesh delegation is being led by DCCI President MA Momen, according to a press release.

Among others, Ambassador of Bangladesh to China Ashfaqur Rahman, Commercial Counsellor Aminul Islam and CCPIT Secretary General Wang Jinzhen addressed the workshop facilitated by the Embassy of Bangladesh in Beijing.

The delegation of the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and

Industry highlighted the potential sectors for investment before the Chinese entrepreneurs, proposing for joint ventures especially in the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) sector. They urged the Chinese business people to invest in different sectors like pharmaceuticals, textile, glass and ceramics, agro-processing, light engineering, information and communication technology, telecom, steel, energy and power and infrastructure etc.

The workshop was attended by a number of Chinese business people and investment consultants. They made some queries about the existing investment environment of relevant sectors in Bangladesh, which include power generation, textile and agro-processing. They showed keen interest in forging business ties with the Bangladeshi

business people.

The DCCI delegation also held separate meetings with the officials of CCPIT, Ministry of Commerce of China, Commercial Bureau of the Beijing Municipal Government, China Chamber of Commerce for Import and Export of Textiles, China National Textiles and Apparel Council and China Renewable Energy Industry Association. The delegation exchanged views with their Chinese counterparts on further intensifying bilateral cooperation in trade and investment.

The visit took place in reciprocation to a visit by CCPIT to Bangladesh in May 2006. The DCCI delegation arrived in Beijing on Wednesday from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

## Hotel Sarina gets 5-star status from govt

### STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Hotel Sarina at Banani in the capital has received 5-star status from the government, hotel officials announced yesterday.

The officials at a press conference on the hotel premises, said Hotel Sarina has 201 guest rooms including one imperial suite, 4 royal suites, 6 crown suites, 3 junior suites, 50 premium king rooms, 22 regular rooms and 115 deluxe rooms.

Golam Sarwar, managing director and chief executive officer of the hotel, Sabera Sarwar Nina, sponsor director, and Shahid Hamid, executive director, were present at the press conference.

Replying to a query, Shahid Hamid said, "We received the 5-star status from the government by fulfilling its criteria."

The hotel also houses a cigar bar, lounge bar, elite club, multipurpose banquet hall, executive conference room, health club, steam and sauna and swimming pool.

The other services include 24-hour room service and business centre, live entertainment at the restaurant/bar, extra bed, baby cot, limousine, tours and travel service, 24-hour doctor on call, smoke detector, water sprinkler, basement parking, mail delivery, golf course arrangements, CCTV in all strategic locations, laundry/valet service, airport booth, shuttle bus service, cell phone rental, laptop rental, wi-fi zone and luggage room.

## New DMD of National Bank



Azizur Rahman has recently been promoted to the rank of deputy managing director of National Bank Ltd. Earlier he was the executive vice president of the bank at its head office, says a press release.

Rahman started his banking career in 1968 as an officer of the then United Bank Ltd, Pakistan, (now Janata Bank). He joined National Bank in 1986 and served as manager of different branches.



(From left to right) Sabera Sarwar Nina, sponsor director, Golam Sarwar, managing director and chief executive officer, and Shahid Hamid, executive director of Hotel Sarina, are seen at a press conference in Dhaka yesterday.

## SE Asian neighbours reap gains from Thai crisis

### AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's next government will have to win back foreign investors who have begun to turn to neighboring countries out of concern over months of political turmoil here, experts say.

Malaysia and Vietnam have attracted big new investments during Thailand's crisis, while companies committed to the country are still waiting to see what happens after October 15 elections, the Joint Foreign Chamber of Commerce in Bangkok said.

"Greenfield projects now look to Vietnam or Malaysia, which have been active in investment promotions," the chamber's president Peter van Haren told AFP.

US-based Seagate Technology, the world's largest maker of hard disks, picked Malaysia for its billion-dollar new factory instead of Thailand, even though it already maintains a key global production base.

That followed the announcement by US chip giant Intel in late February that it had picked Vietnam for its new 300-million-dollar plant.

Vietnam has been basking in good economic news, with the economy growing by 8.4 percent

last year, among the highest rates worldwide.

Meanwhile in Thailand, government figures showed that new applications from both foreign and domestic investors plunged by 53 percent in the first half of the year.

The turmoil has also forced the government to trim back its growth forecast for this year, now pegged at 4.0-5.0 percent.

"Confidence of foreign investors has been shaken by political uncertainties in Thailand. Those looking at the long-term are just wait-and-see for the investment climate to be settled," said Van Haren.

The Japanese Chamber of Commerce in Bangkok says Japanese investors are now considering Vietnam, China, Malaysia and Indonesia as alternatives.

"Thailand is the first priority in terms of investment potential among Japanese investors, (but) political problems have reduced their confidence," its president Tetsuji Banno said in the local English-language daily The Nation.

Thailand may lose out to other countries if the political situation isn't settled before mid-2007, he said.

The problems began in January when Prime Minister Thaksin

Shinawatra's family earned 1.9 billion dollars from a tax-free sale of telecom stock.

That angered Bangkok's middle classes, who took to the streets for months to demand Thaksin's resignation over alleged corruption.

Thaksin called the April 2 election to end the protests. His party won but the victory was undermined by an opposition boycott of the polls.

The constitutional court invalidated the results, setting the stage for the new polls on October 15.

"It is critical for Thailand to make sure the new election is neutral and fair for everybody to eliminate chances of any new conflicts," said Van Haren.

"The new prime minister must be able to gain the cooperation of every party involved, with ethics and of course having strong leadership to regain confidence among international business communities," Van Haren said.

Phatra Securities predicts that the new elections will smooth the political waters, but warned that dozens of pending legal cases could still throw the country back into turmoil.

In the most serious case, the Constitutional Court is considering allegations of vote fraud in the April poll against Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai and the opposition Democrat Party. A conviction could see the parties disbanded.

"Dissolution is a very unlikely possibility. Still, the risk is not zero," Phatra economist Supavud Saicheua said.

While Thailand tries to restore political stability, Vietnam will enjoy the global spotlight later this year.

## Brac Bank opens three branches in Sylhet

Brac Bank Ltd opened three branches in greater Sylhet area on Saturday.

Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of the bank Imran Rahman inaugurated the branches in Moulvibazar, at Nabiganj in Hobiganj and at Bishwanath in Sylhet, says a press release.

Rahman, on the occasion of opening the branches said, "Brac Bank will continue to be the fastest growing bank providing the best and innovative banking services for the clients within the fastest possible time."

## Pak fruit exporters team due Wednesday

An eight-member delegation of fruits and vegetables exporters of Baluchistan, Pakistan is arriving in Bangladesh on Wednesday on a four-day tour, says a press release.

The delegates will visit fruit processing units around Dhaka for potential joint ventures and meet importers, distributors, cold storage owners and fruit processors in Bangladesh.

The Pakistani entrepreneurs deal with all kinds of fruits and vegetables such as apples, pomegranates, grapes, dates and dry fruits produced and exported from Baluchistan province.

## Ethiad Airways flies to Khartoum

Ethiad Airways, the national airline of the UAE, has launched its second international destination in a week with the inaugural flight reaching Sudanese capital Khartoum from Abu Dhabi International Airport, says a press release.

The Khartoum service joins Ethiad's growing network of international destinations, including the new route to Kuwait that was launched on July 1.

"Ethiad is experiencing a period of rapid expansion with the launch of these exciting new destinations, and the arrival of our new purpose-built fleet of aircraft," said HH Dr Sheikh Ahmed Bin Saif Al Nahyan, chairman at Ethiad Airways.

## Manila for collective efforts to save WTO talks

### ANN/ PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Worried about the total collapse of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) round of negotiations in Doha, Qatar, Philippines President Gloria Arroyo called for "a collective response" from the country's counterparts.

The suspension of the Doha talks was recommended by Director-General Pascal Lamy, chair of the Trade Negotiations Committee, to the General Council on July 27 after talks on market access and domestic support between six major members - Australia, Brazil, the European Union, India, Japan and the United States -- broke down four days earlier.

A third topic, non-agricultural market access, was not even discussed.

Arroyo said the Doha round will be part of the agenda at the East

Asia Summit in December, noting the suspension of the talks has "profound implications" on the Philippines and other countries.

"Another development that has profound implications on all participants to the East Asia Summit and one that requires us to draw up a collective response is the suspension of the Doha round of negotiations and the increasing likelihood that it will end in failure," Arroyo said in her keynote speech at the 10th APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) Business Advisory Council (ABAC) anniversary at the Shangri-La Resort here.

"The economy makes the world go round; politics increasingly makes the world stop, as the WTO debacle has shown, and as a possible escalation of the Middle East crisis might likewise demonstrate," she added.

"The people in this room will do more for peace by tearing down

economic barriers through the dynamism of the marketplace," Arroyo said.

Roberto Romulo, ABAC Philippines chairman and Arroyo's adviser on competitiveness, said that because of the political considerations of some of the major WTO members, other economies would suffer.

However, he said affected countries, such as the Philippines, could lessen the blow of the Doha round's failure by crafting more trade agreements with other nations or, in the case of members of the Association of South-East Asian Nations, draw up their own regional free trade agreement.

"Personally I feel that the more agreements, the better," he said.

"If the rest of the world does not want common rules, let's have common rules and let the rest of the world respond to us," he added.



Imran Rahman, managing director and CEO of Brac Bank Ltd, inaugurates a branch of the bank in Sylhet on Saturday. The bank also opened two other branches in greater Sylhet on the same day. Senior officials of the bank were also present.

## Terror threat raises risks for airline industry

### AFP, Paris

The global airline industry can recover from the turbulence of a foiled terror plot in Britain last week, but it is not clear skies ahead as the sector faces higher security costs and passengers face even more hassle, analysts said.

Airport security will need new technology after British authorities Thursday uncovered an alleged plot to blow up transatlantic flights between Britain and the United States using liquid explosives smuggled onto planes in hand luggage.

A possible explosive in a soft drink can or bottle of perfume has once again changed the nature of the terrorist threat and increased the

risks facing the airline industry.

"Unfortunately, the risk of terrorist attacks has joined recessions and fuel price volatility as an ongoing industry risk factor for airlines, particularly those in the US and Western Europe," said Philip Baggeley, airlines analyst at Standard and Poor's.

And demand may drop if airline travellers get too discouraged by stricter security rules. The United States and other countries have banned all liquids from being taken into the plane's cabin, while Britain has barred all hand luggage - meaning no handbags, laptops, mobile phones or MP3 players - except for travel documents and medications carried in see-through bags.

## Honda to build new motorbike plant in India

### AFP, Tokyo

Japan's Honda Motor Co. will build a new motorcycle plant in India through a joint venture in an attempt to expand its already dominant share of the fast-growing subcontinental market, a report said Sunday.

A total of 19 billion rupees (420 million dollars) will be invested by 2010 in the factory which will have an annual production capacity of 1.5 million motorbikes, the leading business daily Nihon Keizai Shimbun said.

The new plant will be built by Hero Honda Motors, in which the Japanese firm has a 26 percent stake, the report said. It will be located at Haridwar in Uttaranchal state, 200 kilometers northwest of New Delhi.