

RMG workers demand Tk 5,000 minimum wage

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Garment workers yesterday demanded at least Tk 5,000 as minimum wage to help them cope with what they said the recent price hike of essentials, and get a better life standard.

They also asked for ensuring safety at workplace and Tk 10 lakh compensation for the family of each worker who died in fire incidents or other accidents that took place inside the factories.

The demands came at a discussion organised by Garment Shramik Sangram Parishad (a platform of garment workers) in Dhaka.

The garment workers also urged the government to bring changes to labour regulations.

Dr Wazedul Islam, coordinator of Shramik Karmachari Oikyo Parishad and general secretary of Bangladesh Trade Union Kendra, said the real wage of the workers must be adjusted to the price hike of essentials and inflation.

He also stressed amendment to Bangladesh Labour Act 2006 in line with ILO (International Labour Organisation) conventions.

The Parishad placed a seven-point demand

including, punishment of non-compliant factory owners, shutting down the factories that lack basic safety measures and ensuring proper supply of gas and electricity to the factories.

Fazlul Hoque, president of Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said there is no doubt that the workers' wage should be increased.

However he said the ability of the industry, productivity and inflation need to be considered.

He said both workers and owners should be patient and work together.

Hoque called upon the workers to leave the labour leaders who exploit them, provoke rampage in the factories and destroy properties.

Manzurul Ahsan Khan, president of Communist Party of Bangladesh, Saiful Haque, general secretary of Biplobi Workers Party, Tipu Bishwash, coordinator of Jatiya Gana Front, Ruhul Amin, general secretary of Bangladesh Garment Shramik Trade Union Kendra, Advocate Farida Yasmin, deputy director of Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust, and Advocate Nesar Ahmed, former chairman of Labour Court Bar Association, also spoke.



Members of Bangladesh Economic Association line up at the auditorium of Engineers' Institution, Bangladesh, in Dhaka yesterday to cast their vote to elect the association's executive committee members for the next two years.



Shirish Apte, chief executive officer for Citibank's Asia Pacific region, hands over a cheque for Tk 17.25 lakh to Dr Sarwar Ali, member trustee of Liberation War Museum, on Citi's 15th anniversary in Bangladesh, at a ceremony in Dhaka recently. Air Vice Marshall (ret'd) AK Khandaker, planning minister and deputy chief of command of the Liberation War Forces of 1971, Yeafesh Osman, a freedom fighter and state minister for science and ICT, Shahidullah Khan Badal, a freedom fighter, and Mamun Rashid, Citi country officer, are also seen.

5 lakh likely to migrate for jobs this year

BSS, Dhaka

The government expects to send five lakh Bangladeshi workers abroad with employment this year with a target of exceeding the 11 billion US dollar mark of remittance.

"We were able to send 4.75 lakh workers abroad last year and this year we aim to make it over five lakh as well as cross the last year's record remittance earning of \$10.72 billion to over \$11 billion," said Dr Zafar Ahmed Khan, acting expatriates' welfare secretary.

The overseas employment sector is becoming the engine of the country's economy as the last year remittance stood at Tk 78,000 crore where the government's total budget was around Tk 1 lakh crore, Khan said.

Presently, the remittance earning contributed to 12 percent of the GDP that is six times bigger than official development assistance and 11 times than foreign direct investment, he added.

"Remittance earnings helped us not to be affected by the global economic recession," he said.

"Seventy six lakh Bangladeshi workers are working in around 100 countries, while the number of total government employees across the

country is over 10 lakh."

The secretary said holistic approaches, in terms of diplomacy, need to be taken for truly turning the expatriate welfare and overseas employment into a thrust sector.

"Our entire diplomatic approach should be towards searching new destinations for labour export along with sustaining the present overseas labour markets, especially in the Middle Eastern countries that contain about 80 percent of Bangladeshi workers," he said.

Zafar Ahmed Khan said they are trying to create manpower market for Bangladeshi in different countries of Eastern Europe including Poland, Romania, Greece and Russia as well as in Africa including South Africa and Namibia.

The government focuses to send more skilled manpower abroad, as presently among the total overseas workforce, only 3 percent (two lakh) are skilled, 31 percent (21 lakh) semi skilled and 50 percent (33 lakh) unskilled, added Khan.

The government has already decided to establish 30 more technical training centres in different districts and build five marine technology institutes in Munshiganj, Faridpur, Chandpur, Sirajganj and Bagerhat districts.

Seminar stresses improvement in farmers' condition

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The condition of farmers has not ameliorated despite advancement in Bangladesh farming, analysts have said.

"Consumers have to buy farm produce at higher price despite the fact that growers are often denied fair price. It indicates that marketing intermediaries are taking a big margin by selling produces," economist Mahabub Hossain told a seminar on food security yesterday.

"We have to pay attention to improve the condition of farmers," he said, recommending devising a mechanism to ensure that farmers to get fair prices of their produces.

Bangladesh Economic Association (BEA) organised the session, marking its 17th biennial conference with a theme, 'Economy of the independence war's golden jubilee: How we want to see Bangladesh.'

Contemporary economic and socio-political issues including the global recession, poverty and inequality, food security and climate change, industrialisation and information technology were focused at the three-day conference ended yesterday.

At the discussion on food security, participants stressed the need for increased crop production to feed the growing population in the backdrop of declining arable land due to the factors such as human settlements and industrialisation.

They recommended full use of farmland and bringing fallow land under cultivation to meet domestic demand without depending on global markets.

The discussants also said the stress-tolerant

crop seeds should be developed enabling farmers in adapting with the impact of climate change.

They also suggested developing strong market linkage to allow farmers to get fair price of their produces.

"Our goal should be to attain and sustain sufficiency in food production so that we can ensure food for all, including the new faces joining every year," said Mahabub, also BEA's executive director.

He said the market for tenancy is rising as middle and large farmers are giving up farming as a profession.

"Tenancy market is growing while there is a shift from share-cropping pattern to fixed-rent system," he said, "Under such fixed-rent system, rent rises every year."

Mahabub, referring to the change, recommended reforms in policies relating to tenancy system.

Bangladesh Agricultural University Vice Chancellor Prof MA Sattar Mandal stressed disseminating information on farm input and output among farmers.

He said the government has formed a committee seeking suggestions for strengthening the Department of Agricultural Marketing to allow farmers to get information on both local and global markets, crop production forecasts etc.

Citing a better wheat output in the immediate past season, Mandal said farmers could have been allocated more of their lands for wheat farming if they were informed about the weather in advance.

"Early warning system should be introduced to help farmers take a decision," he said.

BEA conference comes to a close

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The 17th biennial conference of Bangladesh Economic Association (BEA) ended yesterday.

The meeting called for taking steps to reduce inequalities through participatory development.

The three-day programme focused on the economy, regional cooperation in energy and how to attain and sustain self-sufficiency in food production and ensure fair price for farmers.

Different sessions of the conference discussed a series of contemporary economic and socio-political issues to set visions for celebrating the golden jubilee of Bangladesh's liberation.

Stressing the need to form cooperatives to cut disparity, Abul Barkat, immediate-past general secretary of BEA, said development means a reduction in inequality and a cooperative movement could be one of the main instruments to fight discrimination.

On the issue of regional cooperation areas such as water sharing and energy, participants observed that the country's negotiating capacity should be enhanced to benefit from regional cooperation.

Discussants suggested focusing on education and health for development and emphasised technical and higher education.

Greece gets EU-IMF help in its dark hour

AFP, Athens

The European Union told Greece it stands ready with a debt lifeline in its hour of need on Friday amid a market conviction that a crescendo is near.

"The Greek government is courageous and is breaking with the past. We would be ready to intervene if the Greeks ask us to," EU President Herman van Rompuy told interviewers from Le Monde, the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, El Pais and De Standaard.

"This aid plan will only be credible once it is put into operation," he said, two weeks after European leaders agreed to

secure EU and IMF funding for Greece if it is unable to borrow at a low enough rate on the open market.

Germany also said that the EU-IMF rescue scheme could be activated quickly, but government spokesman Michael Offer again stressed that Greece could solve its problem by focusing on budget cutbacks.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy said that the EU was ready to activate its rescue scheme "at any time to come to Greece's aid" in remarks after talks with Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi.

Analysts said that the way the crisis has evolved, and

culmination in a rescue, could have profound implications for the credibility of the European Central Bank and by ricochet for the fundamental nature of the eurozone it underpins.

Meanwhile, the deadly squeeze on Greek borrowing costs eased slightly from a record high point above 7.5 percent on Thursday, which Greek newspapers described as "Black Thursday".

The pro-government newspaper Ta Nea said: "Black Thursday on the markets and pressure for an approach to the IMF (International Monetary Fund)."

The paper said in a headline: "Lifeline from (ECB head) Trichet against the tsunami of the spreads," in a reference to a big increase in the gap between how much Germany pays to borrow funds and the rate Greece must now offer.

The liberal newspaper Kathimerini said: "The situation is particularly critical, the government must weigh up making use of the EU-IMF support mechanism."

The EU-IMF scheme has been highly contentious from the outset, and so far vague on detail, mainly because of reticence by Germany to bail Greece out.

Banglabandha land port to have full-fledged operations

Minister says trade and jobs will rise

BSS, Tentulia

The government will take necessary measures to turn Banglabandha land port, the country's extreme northern gateway, into a full-fledged land port.

A meeting will be held at the shipping ministry soon to undertake all preparations for customs, immigration and other activities.

Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan made the announcement at a function

organised during his visit to the port yesterday.

Acting Shipping Secretary Abdul Mannan Hawlader presided over the function that was also attended by lawmaker Md Mozul Haque Prodhan, Banglabandha Land Port Authority Chairman AKM Yeahya Chowdhury, Panchagargh Chamber President Iqbal Kawser Minto and the port authority's Managing Director Syed Abu Naser.

Shajahan said the zone's socio-economic situation would improve if the

land port gets a full-fledged form. "This will expand trade and commerce and generate employment."

This will have a tremendous impact on the country's trade and tourism with its neighbouring countries such as Nepal, Bhutan and India, he said. At present, the land port runs on a build-operate-transfer basis.

Later, the minister visited the port site and attended a reception by Motor Owners Workers Association.



Jerry Mobbs, chief executive officer of Augere Wireless Broadband Bangladesh Ltd, and SM Khorshed Alam, deputy managing director of Bank Asia Ltd, exchange documents after signing a deal in Dhaka recently. Qubee subscribers now can pay their monthly bills through the bank.