

DHAKA MONDAY DECEMBER 3, 2012, e-mail:business@thedailystar.net

Firemen ring alarm for RMG owners

GAZI TOWHID AHMED

The Fire Service and Civil Defence on the final day of its inspection drive found 11 of the 69 visited garment factories without sufficient safety mechanisms to fight blazes.

The inspection teams visited factories in Savar area yesterday, and classified 24 in the 'A' or good category, 34 in the 'B' or acceptable category and 11 in the 'C' or poor category.

On Thursday and Saturday, some 163 of Ashulia's 574 garment factories were inspected, and 53 were put in the 'C' category -- due to lack of fire safety licences, adequate fire extinguishers, hose pipes, water reservoirs and trained workers.

"The scenario is a wake-up call for the factory owners, but they hardly showed any interest towards our suggestions," M Abdus Salam, director of Fire Service and Civil Defence, said as he wrapped up yesterday's inspection.

"The factories without fire licences and inadequate fire safety measures will be shut down after one month if they fail to address these issues."

Salam said mobile courts would be set up to conduct random inspections at factories. Upon receiving instructions from the government the next of inspections will start.

"But regular inspections by fire service stations will continue," Salam said, adding that one station usually visits four factories a month -- which he deems to be insufficient.

One of the factories visited by the inspection teams yesterday was that of Lam Mim Associates, which did not have a fire safety licence. When quizzed, Abul Kalam Azad, the factory's manager said: "We will collect it soon."

The team suggested the factory conducts regular fire drills for its workers, along with installations of water reservoirs, fire hydrant and fire detection systems and longer hose pipes.

Most of the workers in the factories were found to have no proper knowledge of fire safety, said Khandoker Shamsuzzoha, another director of Fire Service and Civil Defence.

"Our inspection teams found that factories even in the A and B categories did not hold regular fire drills," he said, adding that funding is not an issue for the factory owners.

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India Show starts today

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Around 100 Indian companies of different sectors will showcase their products at an event at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in Dhaka today.

The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry with the support of India's commerce ministry is organising the event, known as the India Show, Ficci said on the show's website.

The 'Made in India' show would expose India's capabilities and strengths in various sectors to the Bangladeshi business community, to explore joint ventures and cooperation with Indian companies to boost trade and investment between the two countries."

The three-day event will organise an exhibition showcasing the best of India's sectoral pavilions, India-Bangladesh CEOs' roundtable, one to one business meetings, high level sessions on trade and investments, sectoral roundtables, cultural extravaganza and food festival.

A 50-member business delegation, headed by Indian Minister of State for Commerce and Industry D Purandeswari, is expected to interact with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, according to news agency.

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Clockwise from left: A garment worker jumps into a roadside ditch to escape police action yesterday after hundreds of workers clashed with law-enforcement agencies over a deadly fire that killed at least 111 people at Tazreen Fashions in Ashulia. A policeman mounts guard from an armoured vehicle. Workers attack a garment factory. RMG workers flee after police tear-gassed rowdy protests in the industrial belt on the outskirts of Dhaka. Story on page 1.



Trade bodies concerned over industrial unrest

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) yesterday expressed deep concern over the recent untoward incidents in the readymade garment sector.

The apex trade body also said the leather and footwear factories in Ashulia have now become the target of attacks by the miscreants as some unruly people damaged two factories -- Picard and Leatherex -- in the

area on Saturday.

The FBCCI urged law enforcement agencies to be vigilant and take preventive measures in this regard.

In a joint statement, the FBCCI and some other trade bodies also expressed deep shock at the death of 111 workers at Tazreen Fashions in Ashulia on November 24.

The business community appreciated the government for observing a national mourning day for the fire victims and for forming

an inquiry committee to look into the fire incident.

The trade bodies also praised the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association for its assistance to the family members of the fire victims.

Presidents of FBCCI, Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and Bangladesh Chamber of Industries signed the joint statement.

Karnaphuli EPZ set for full-swing run

MINHAJ UDDIN, Ctg

The Karnaphuli Export Processing Zone in Chittagong is expected to begin full-swing operations within this year as necessary development works with adequate infrastructure facilities are almost complete.

Earlier, the Karnaphuli EPZ authorities handed over 255 plots to 52 companies, said an official of Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (Bepza) at the Karnaphuli EPZ.

Most of the new enterprises would make products, including readymade garments, footwear and camping materials, and they would invest around \$118 million creating employment for about 22,000 people, the official said, asking not to be named.



The entrance of the Karnaphuli Export Processing Zone in Chittagong. The EPZ is expected to go into full operations within this December as all infrastructure work has been completed.

With an aim of creating direct employment for about 50,000 people, the EPZ started partial operations on about 222.42 acres of lands in North

Patenga and Halishahar area -- about six kilometres from Chittagong Port -- in September 2006.

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Labour leaders demand punishment to Tazreen culprits

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The leaders of different labour organisations and students yesterday demanded an immediate arrest of all responsible for a fatal fire that killed at least 111 workers at Tazreen Fashions Ltd.

In separate programmes, the labour leaders also demanded compensation to the victims and necessary treatment for the injured.

Garment Sramik Trade Union Kendra held a sit-in programme in front of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association demanding punishment to culprits and at least Tk 10 lakh in compensation to the family of each victim.

They also demanded all pending salaries, including service benefit to the workers and staff who survived.

The leaders of the Trade Union Kendra demanded that owners set up generators, warehouses, broilers and power substations away from the factory building for safety and keeping all factory doors open during workhours.

The students of East West University also formed a human chain demanding safety at all garment factories.

IT freelancing booms in Bangladesh

ABDULLAH MAMUN

IT freelancing has taken off in a big way in Bangladesh, with around 200 percent growth observed this year already.

Around 30,000 freelancers are now working from their homes in Bangladesh for different global companies, said AKM Fahim Masroor, president of Bangladesh Association of Software & Information Services (BASIS).

"But how much money they [freelancers] are earning from abroad each year is tough to measure as their income is not included in the software export data," said Masroor, while suggesting a sum of around \$20-\$25 million.

IT and IT-enabled service firms, as per Masroor, raked in \$70 million last fiscal year.

Between January and September of this year, some 3,064 freelancers from Bangladesh found employment through the global online employment platform Elance, which is a 142 percent growth year-on-year.

Of the freelancers, 43 percent were for IT and programming, 24 percent for designs and multimedia, 16 percent for sales and marketing, 10 percent for administration support, 5 percent writing and translation and 2 percent for miscellaneous jobs.

The countries which hired the Bangladeshi freelancers were: United States of America, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia and Singapore.

Masroor said at least 70 percent of the freelancers from Bangladesh find work through oDesk, a global job marketplace for remote workers.

"Bangladesh is competing with India, Pakistan and some eastern European countries for freelance work, which definitely speaks of the high calibre of Bangladeshi IT professionals," Matt Cooper, vice-president of oDesk, told The Daily Star.

Of the Bangladeshi contractors to have found employment via oDesk, 30 percent were for search engine optimisation, 12 percent for data entry, 8 percent for software development and 6 percent for web research.

Freelancers earn \$15 to \$20 per hour on average for technical work, and \$5 to \$10 for administrative or non-technical work.

To further boost the sector, BASIS, Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the information and communication technology ministry, Bangladesh Association of Call Centre and Outsourcing have organised a series of discussions from December 5-8.

GermanBangla signs \$90m bicycle making deal

STAR BUSINESS DESK

GermanBangla Bicycle Ltd signed a deal worth \$90 million last week to make bicycles for a supplier to the mass market in the European Union for the next five years.

In the first year, starting from February next year, the company will produce 1.5 lakh bicycles, and the number will be increased to 5 lakh in the third year, said Sazed Alam, chief executive officer of ZA Group LLC, California, the sales and marketing partner of GermanBangla.

A partnership between Germany's Panther Bike and Bangladesh's Power Trade Group, GermanBangla started its journey in 2008 anticipating a growing demand depending on the rising labour costs and instability in China.

Labour rates in Bangladesh are around 23 to 25 cents per hour, roughly one-third of the costs in China, according to a statement of ZA Group yesterday.

The new order brings some life to the country's bicycle business, as earlier this year Panther had stopped using its Bangladesh factory for entry-level bikes, and later also shifted its remaining production from Löhne in Germany to a plant in Lithuania.