

Stop misuse of gas, electricity: Hasina

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged people to ensure economic use of gas and electricity and stop misuse of energy for the sake of the country.

She spoke at the inaugural ceremony marking the installation of two million solar home systems and one million improved cooking stoves project by IDCOL, at Ruposhi Bangla Hotel in the city.

The programme took place at the opening of a three-day exhibition -- IDCOL Green Energy Expo 2013 -- organised by Infrastructure Development Company Ltd (IDCOL).

After taking office in 2009, 55 power plants have so far been commissioned with total production capacity of 3,870 megawatts (MW), Hasina said.

At present, the daily average electricity production has reached 6,350 MW, she said, adding that 33 more power plants having production capacity of 5,873 MW are now under construction.

"Tenders are being floated for another 20 power plants with production capacity of 4,699 MW. The process to import 500 MW power from India is also at the final stage."

The government signed a deal with Russia to set up a nuclear power plant to

add 1,000 MW of electricity to the national grid by 2018 and another 1,000 MW by 2020, she said.

In the last four years, the government has supplied electricity to some three million new subscribers, she said, adding: "I hope, we'll be able to increase electricity generation to 7,000 MW by the end of 2013."

"We've decided to install one million improved cooking stoves by 2015."

The government has already formed renewable energy policy and sustainable and renewable energy development authority act, she added.

The government has ordered waiver of duties and taxes on the import of solar accessories and channeling of soft loans and grants through IDCOL, Hasina said.

She said the government has also decided to form an Energy Research Council.

Finance Minister AMA Muhith, PM's Adviser Tawfiq-E-Elahi Chowdhury, State Minister for Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Muhammad Enamul Huq and World Bank Country Director Johannes Zutt were also present.

IDCOL Executive Director and CEO Mahub Malik and IDCOL Chairman and Economic Relations Division Secretary Abul Kalam Azad also attended the event.

Today's youth powered by tech

Yeafesh Osman speaks on technology and innovation at PKSf seminar

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The youth of Bangladesh are doing tremendously all over the world as the country ranked third in global freelance outsourcing work, Science and Technology Minister Yeafesh Osman said yesterday.

"We should our keep trust and hope on them. We cannot dream, if we cannot trust them."

According to a report by oDesk Corp, a United States-based marketplace for companies and online workers, Dhaka ranked third in 2010 among global cities where online jobs are outsourced from the west.

Osman spoke at a seminar on motivation for innovation, organised by Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF) at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre to mark its 23rd anniversary.

Today's youth see technology from the moment they are born; they can develop the country with it, he said.

Technology reduces costs and time so that production increases at every level, he added.

The government wants to work with PKSf to seek young people with potential from the rural level, Osman said.

PKSF's main objective is poverty alleviation through employment generation, said Qazi Kholiqzaman Ahmad, chairman of PKSf.

PKSF started its journey with microcredit operations through its partner organisations, Ahmad said.

Poverty alleviation cannot be achieved with one component alone -- micro-credit; it requires education, training, healthcare, access to finance and equal opportunity for all, Ahmad added.

It should be an integrated development process that involves multiple socio-economic components, he said.

The organisation has initiated family based integrated development programmes to bring the poor and backward people, characterised by economic, social other deprivation, so that they can contribute to their own and national socio-economic progress, he said.

PKSF recently launched a programme, Enhancing Resources and Increasing Capacities of the Poor Households towards Elimination of their Poverty (ENRICH), in 43 selected unions, said Quazi Mesbahuddin Ahmed, former managing director of PKSf.

PKSF undertook this programme to create productive and sustainable employment opportunities for the targeted low income population, said Ahmed.

PKSF presents financing programmes for employment creation for the moderate poor in urban and rural areas, ultra poor, micro entrepreneurs, marginal and small farmers, he said.

At present, PKSf is providing various services to 9 million beneficiaries through more than 6,000 branches of its 203 partner organisation.

Govt teams to start factory inspection in Dhaka Saturday

FROM PAGE B1

The two-member panel will submit a report to the prime minister within three months. Meanwhile, Commerce Minister GM Quader told reporters, in another meeting, that several teams of Bangladesh Fire Service and Civil Defence have visited 797 garment factories since February 7 and found 243 as faulty in terms of fire safety.

Also, the factory inspectors under the labour ministry visited 2,400 factories during the period and found 700 as faulty in terms of workplace safety, he said.

Of the faulty factories, 20 were closed. Officials from the labour ministry, however, said 10 of the factories have already been opened after they came up with satisfactory certificates from expert organisations.

The commerce minister also said the government has checklist. "If anybody fails to meet the requirements on the checklist, we give them time to take corrective measures."

Meanwhile, owners of at least 25 garment factories in Ashulia suspended production yesterday fearing a massive labour unrest.

Locals said hundreds of workers started a demonstration in the morning demanding a salary hike and capital punishment to Sohel Rana, the owner of Rana Plaza.

The workers pelted bricks at the law enforcers during the demonstration, SM Badrul Alam, the officer-in-charge of Ashulia Police Station, said.

"The workers went away at 10:30am," he said, adding that nobody was injured during the incident.

"The owners stopped production when the workers started demonstration demanding a salary hike," Atiqul Islam, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said.

The factories will resume production today, he said.

In another incident, a worker of That's It Sports Wear Ltd, a unit of Ashulia-based Ha-Meem Group, committed suicide Saturday morning in a toilet of the factory, the Group said in a statement. "There is no room for misunderstanding," the statement said, adding that she was



OCEAN PARADISE

MN Karim, chairman of Ocean Paradise Hotel, and Abdul Haque, chairman of Banglavision, exchange documents of a corporate deal at a programme recently.



PUBALI BANK

Habibur Rahman, vice chairman of Pubali Bank, attends the second conference of regional and corporate branch managers of the bank for 2013, at its head office in Dhaka yesterday. Helal Ahmed Chowdhury, managing director, was also present.

Leaving Bangladesh? Not an easy choice for brands

FROM PAGE B1

Between 15 and 25 percent of the wholesale cost of a garment is for labour. Unlike raw material costs, which can vary, labour is the only major cost that retailers can control.

"It's a country built for commodity products," said Janet Fox, who arranged garment manufacturing overseas for JC Penney and Under Armour and now works as a consultant. "It's not a highly skilled labour force, but they can make the basics."

Bangladesh has long been a major garment producer, but in recent years its production has soared.

For decades, the global garment trade was controlled with a quota system called the Multi Fibre Arrangement that limited production from developing countries to protect higher-wage workers in developed countries.

When the system ended in 2005, retailers flocked to Bangladesh because of its low wages. Manufacturers scrambled to increase the size of their factories.

Land is scarce in Bangladesh, one of the world's most densely populated countries. It packs 163 million people, about half the population of the US, into an area about the size of the state of Iowa. So the Bangladesh government, desperate to boost employment, looked the other way as companies converted unsuitable buildings into factories or crammed far too many workers and equipment into small spaces, creating fire hazards, labour activists say.

Since 2005, at least 1,800 workers have been killed in the Bangladeshi garment industry in factory fires and building collapses, according to research by the advocacy group International Labour Rights Forum.

In November, 112 workers were killed in a garment factory in Dhaka, the Bangladeshi capital. The factory lacked emergency exits, and its owner said only three floors of the eight-story building were legally built. Clothes destined for Disney, Wal-Mart and Sears were found among the building's remains, though Disney has denied its suppliers used the factory.

But as horrific as that fire was, it wasn't as bad as the April 24 collapse, the garment industry's worst disaster. The nine-storey Rana Plaza building housing five garment factories collapsed 15 miles north of Dhaka at the beginning of a workday.

The building wasn't designed to hold factories, and three stories had been added illegally. Most of the victims were crushed by massive blocks of concrete and mortar falling on them.

Then as the death toll was climbing, a fire broke out at a sweater manufacturer Wednesday in Dhaka killing eight people including a senior police officer, a Bangladeshi politician and a top clothing industrial official.

which owns the Joe Fresh clothing line, have acknowledged that suppliers were making clothes for them at the Rana Plaza site and have promised to compensate workers and their families. Loblaw's CEO said suppliers were making clothes for as many as 30 brands and retailers at the site.

Benetton labels were found at the site, and the Italian fashion brand acknowledged that one of its suppliers had used one of the factories. The company said that before the collapse, the factory had been removed from its list of approved factories.

Mango, whose production documents were found in the ruins, has said it was planning to produce there but hadn't started.

Clothing retailers often depend on a web of contractors and sub-contractors to produce goods for them. Fabric will be made at one factory, buttons at another, and the item will be sewn together somewhere else. Large orders are often placed with one contractor who then farms out the work to several smaller factories.

Retailers said they have strict standards that they require their suppliers to follow, but they know little or nothing about conditions at individual factories that make their clothes because there are so many of them.

But retailers are very familiar with the general conditions in the countries where they do business, and their importance to local economies means they can push for improvements. Labour groups and other activists have said last month's tragedy is just the most extreme evidence that brands haven't done nearly enough to protect workers.

The retail industry hasn't released estimates on how much it would cost to upgrade Bangladeshi factories to Western standards. But the Worker Rights Consortium puts the cost at \$1.5 billion to \$3 billion. If the money was spent over five years, it would be 1.5 to 3 percent of the \$95 billion expected to be spent on clothes manufacturing over that time. Put another way, it's 10 cents added onto the cost of a T-shirt.

There are limits to what companies can do to improve conditions, though, said Matthew Amengual, a professor at the MIT Sloan School of Management who studies labour regulation and enforcement in developing countries. "Companies have a very important role to play, but they can't do it just by auditing their supply chain," he said.

The collapse of the factory in Bangladesh showed how safety issues in the country are in some ways too ingrained and complex for companies to monitor and change. It is much easier for a company to push for more fire extinguishers or make sure fire exits aren't locked than to judge the structural integrity of thousands of factories.

Experts said if big retailers and the Bangladeshi government don't work together to improve standards and enforce them, more production will gradually move out of the country.

Powering the Asian century

FROM PAGE B4

The harsh truth is that there is no magic pill -- Asia must act now if it is to successfully power inclusive, sustainable growth this century.

Containing burgeoning energy demand is critical. Replacing inefficient general fuel subsidies with targeted subsidies, as pioneered by Indonesia, should be the first step.

Consumer fuel subsidies impose a tremendous burden on public budgets, exceeding 4 percent of GDP in Bangladesh and Pakistan, and 2 percent in India, Indonesia and Vietnam.

Those who benefit from subsidies -- and invariably resist scrapping them -- are rarely the poor.

We should not underestimate the importance of behavioural change in managing demand. After the Fukushima nuclear accident in 2011, Japan succeeded in curbing electricity demand through the Setsuden ("saving electricity") movement, lowering peak usage by 15 percent during the summer of 2012.

Delivering cleaner energy is also the key. In less than a decade, generating capacity rose from negligible to 82 gigawatts (GW) for wind and to 20 GW for solar, with great potential to further expand both.

But many experts predict that it will take decades for them to be commercially cost competitive. Asia can't and shouldn't wait, however. The only way forward is to make conventional energy cleaner and more efficient now.

One increasingly feasible possibility is for Asia to utilise its substantial reserves of shale gas to offset coal use.

Asia's geology is incompletely investigated, but indications are that China has the world's largest shale gas resources -- nearly 20 percent of the total.

With India and Pakistan also possessing

sizeable shale gas reserves, unconventional gas could provide a cleaner bridge to a future that is less dependent on fossil fuels.

Asia faces a dilemma over nuclear power. The Fukushima disaster powerfully underscored the risks, and reminds us of the three remaining challenges to viable nuclear power: proliferation, waste management, and safety.

But if nuclear were phased out and replaced by current energy mix, CO2 emissions from Asia's power sector would rocket, rising to 8-13 percent higher by 2035.

More than anything else, regional integration of energy markets can have greater benefits. Connecting electricity and gas grids across borders can create economies of scale that improve efficiency.

Integrating power transmission in the Greater Mekong Subregion, for example, would save \$14 billion over 20 years by allowing the substitution of hydropower for fossil fuels, reducing CO2 emissions by 14 million tonnes per year by 2020.

The region must strive to establish a pan-Asian energy market by 2030, aspiring to the degree of regional cooperation that currently prevails in Europe.

There's an imperative here to share information and harmonise regulations, standards, and pricing policies. What can be achieved in Europe can be equalled, if not surpassed, in Asia.

The reality is that Asia is on an unsustainable path where growth trumps environmental costs. But eventually -- perhaps sooner than most are willing to accept -- this imbalance will erode Asia's gains.

Action is needed on all fronts if the "Clean Asian Century" is to be more than just a slogan.

The writer is the chief economist at the Asian Development Bank.



ACE AUTOS

Azharul Islam, chief executive of ACE AUTOS, exclusive distributor of Great Wall Motors (GWM) in Bangladesh, poses with the Best Sales Manager Award 2012 and Service Improvement Award 2012, at the annual dealers conference of GWM in China recently. Ariful Azim, executive director, was also present.

ADP may go up 23pc next fiscal year

FROM PAGE B1

The Local Government Division may get the highest allocation at Tk 10,151 crore, according to the proposal.

The planning ministry officials said, if more allocations are given for local roads, bridges and culverts, the money could be spent quickly and it would attract voters.

A review of the spending in the current fiscal year shows that the Local Government Division has utilised more money than other divisions and ministries.

The Power Division may get the second highest allocation at Tk 8,559 crore, followed by Tk 5,291 crore for the Bridges Division, which got Tk 1,134 crore in the current fiscal year.

However, the allocation for the Padma bridge project has been cut from the government's initial plan.

Finance Minister AMA Muhith on several occasions said the Padma bridge project will be given Tk 6,852 crore in the next fiscal year, but in the proposed allocation the amount has been cut by more than Tk 1,500 crore.

A finance ministry official said still there are various uncertainties regarding the implementation of the Padma bridge project.

If the work of the project progresses in line with the preliminary implementation schedule in the revised budget, the allocation may go up, he added.

Revenue target may be lowered: Muhith

FROM PAGE B1

Moazzem Hossain, editor of The Financial Express, said the revenue generation target should be realistic.

Kazi Akram Uddin Ahmed, president of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, said the tax net should be expanded instead of raising taxes for the existing taxpayers.

Tapan Chowdhury, a former caretaker government adviser, said the government would have to provide tax incentives so new companies go public.

"Otherwise, the pressures for funding on the banks will continue to deepen, as major companies are only borrowing from the banking system," he said.

Anis Ud Dowla, a former president of MCCI, said taxes should be imposed after taking into account the vitality of the industry. Nihad Kabir, former vice president of MCCI, moderated the programme.

BRAC to produce sunflower oil to promote its farming

FROM PAGE B1

During the current harvesting season, some 3,200 farmers, under the guidance of BRAC, have grown the oilseed on 4,000 acres of land, a 100 percent rise year-on-year.

The NGO provides buy-back guarantee in a bid to encourage farmers grow the oilseed, and has plans to bring 16,000 acres of land under sunflower cultivation by next season.

Hossain shared the information at a briefing on BRAC's initiatives to expand the use of climate change adaptive technologies to ensure food security for the growing population of Bangladesh, dubbed to be one of the worst victims of the global phenomenon.

As part of the initiative, the NGO also aims to expand cultivation of salt, submergence tolerance and short duration rice crops.

Green energy fair takes off

FROM PAGE B1

IDCOL aims to finance four million home systems by 2015 and has recently undertaken a project to finance one million stoves by 2017. For the first time, IDCOL will finance the improved stoves, said Rasel Ahmed, investment officer (marketing) of the company.

Depending on designs, the stoves may cost between Tk 800 to Tk 1,000, which is affordable for most households, Ahmed said. The fair will remain open from 10am to 8pm for all without any entry fee.

Employment Notice

Six Seasons Hotel Ltd invites application for General Manager, Chef, and Spa & Health Center Therapist. Applicants are requested to send their resume with one copy of photograph and a photocopy of National ID Card or Passport to the following address within 3 days of publishing this circular.

Road # 96, House # 19, Gulshan 2, Dhaka-1212 or amuntasir@sixseasonshotel.com

The position applied for must be mentioned on the envelop or subject line.