

Major deal

FROM PAGE 1
continue to see strong growth performance in the international market with the help of its quality leather products.

The country's leather industry has achieved notable success in environment compliance and waste management, said local Awami League lawmaker Barrister Fazle Noor Taposh, adding, "The deal will surely help the sector improve its performance."

The new industrial area for the tanneries will attract more foreign buyers who want to increase their sourcing from Bangladesh, Taposh said.

The delay in relocation had been affecting the city's environment and was a threat to the country's leather and leather goods sector, said Shaheen Ahmed, president of the BTA.

Compliance is important for boosting exports of leather and leather goods, as international buyers want to pay compliant factories for their products, he said, adding that most of the factories in Hazaribagh are not fully compliant.

The sector exported products worth \$980.67 million in 2012-13, up 28.2 percent from the previous year, according to the data from the Export Promotion Bureau.

"We can expect the \$1-billion industry to be one of \$5 billion in future if we can relocate the industry soon enough to Savar, where most of the factories will be compliant," the BTA president said.

The industries ministry has already allocated more than 205 plots on 200 acres of land in Savar to the 155 tanneries, but there is no plot for the chemical suppliers of the tanneries, he noted.

Abdul Hye, general secretary of the BTA, said, "A policy should be formed to help us complete the relocation process by solving the issues related to the mortgages we have so far taken."

"The government should arrange soft loans for us to complete the relocation process smoothly."

The tanneries in Hazaribagh emit daily about 21,600 cubic metres of environmentally hazardous toxic waste, including chromium, sulphur and ammonium, according to the Department of Environment.

EC hopeful

FROM PAGE 16
the constitution, the election is supposed to be held between October 27 and January 24 next year.

Rakibuddin said the commission has made all preparations for the election, and would announce the election date keeping adequate time in hand for holding it.

"We have completed all technical preparations. Voter lists and transparent ballot boxes are being sent to districts. Now only one thing remains [unresolved]-polls-time government," he said.

"People of the country want peace; they want hand-over of power peacefully."

The CEC also said if no consensus (among political parties) is reached, code of conduct for them would have to be amended. But the commission is fully prepared (to do its job) whatever decision is made on how the election would be held, he added.

VOTER LIST

The EC yesterday claimed that the voters' database prepared by it across the country is right and clear-cut.

It made the claim in a statement issued through the government's press information department. It clarified that any Bangladeshi national, who became 18-year-old by January 1 this year or before, would be able to get their names registered in the voter list till announcement of election schedule.

In the wake of media reports over the voters' database recently, the EC defended its position and said there is no scope to question the database, as it was prepared by maintaining a defined procedure regarding the presence of voters and scrutinising their forms in automatic finger print identification system.

Forced into migration

FROM PAGE 1
dockyard at Jaymani village in Mongla.

Encouraged by the government move, private companies have so far purchased around 3,000 acres of land in that area, mostly through using unfair means, locals say.

"We gave permission [to industrialists] to buy land. But we did not monitor how much land they had bought or if they had bought it at all," said Shukur Ali, deputy commissioner of Bagerhat.

Rampal and Mongla were called "Moger Mulluk" [an anarchic state] in the 17th century because of the Portuguese pirates' frequent attacks through the Pashur river.

Instead of pirates, big industrialists encouraged by the government are now ravaging the life of people. Their presence is seen everywhere on signboards claiming ownership of almost every patch of land.

Villagers say the buyers follow a certain process to get their land. First they are offered a price for a piece of land. They face immense pressure if they turn down the offer. If they still do not give in, they face harassment as all political people, including former and present Union Parishad chairmen, work for these

buyers.

"They had offered us a good price, but we refused to sell our 50-decimal land. Then they increased the price and finally forced us to sell it. Now they have filled up the cropland that once belonged to us with sand," said Bishnu Roy of Digraj village.

Bishnu's land was purchased by Sikder Group.

"I do not want to leave this land," said elderly Anil Roy at Sundartala village. He has been facing severe pressure from the land brokers.

As Anil was talking to these correspondents, he was gloomily looking at his neighbours, who were busy getting ready to move away after giving up their resistance.

Anil's neighbours Subhash and Jyotish have sold their land to Sun Marine Shipyard and Saif Shipyard.

"The company people are mainly targeting the Hindus, who are selling out their land in fear that otherwise they will not be able to protect it," Anil added.

The buyers are also cashing in on the financial conditions of the poor landowners.

Rina Roy's brother-in-law has sold his one-bigha home to Saif Shipyard for Tk 17 lakh for his kidney

treatment. Her family also has been facing a serious crisis for four years as their farmland has become infertile due to invasive salinity. She apprehends that she too will be forced to move away, the last option left for her family.

"My younger brother-in-law went to Khulna and rented a house in a slum. I will join him when the company comes to evict me. I do not know how to earn my living there. I definitely do not want to be a day labourer. I come from a respectable family," she said.

Land brokers frequently visit the village, she added. Many of her neighbours are also giving in to their persuasion, being unable to do otherwise.

Echoing Rina, her neighbour Poshudeb Roy's wife said the brokers had repeatedly been asking her husband to sell his land.

Anirban Halder, chairman of Digraj UP, said, "The government power plant and grain silo projects are giving signals to infrastructural development in the area. This is attracting big companies."

"Around 2,200 families have lost their arable land and around 400 have already moved away because of the government's Rampal project. Scores of people also await

eviction," said Sushanto Kumar Das of Krishi Jomi Suraksha Sangram Committee [Arable Land Protection Movement].

Sushanto himself lost 65 bighas of arable land due to acquisition of around 1,834 acres by the government for the power plant and 82 acres occupied by an under-construction navy dock and grainsilo.

Land broker Siraj recently posted online advertisements on bikroy.com and olx.com announcing the availability of 1,550 acres of "industrial land" in Mongla being eligible for "shipyard, ship-breaking yard, oil tanker, cement factory and LPG unit".

Contacted, Siraj told The Daily Star over phone, "I have been working closely with the villagers in finding suitable land for sale for the past three years."

A government land zoning map initiated in 2010 gives no provision for any industrial scheme in the area, not even the Rampal power plant.

The draft amendment of the Bangladesh Environment Policy, 2013 restricts improper land use, especially in coastal areas, which are already vulnerable to climate change.

Hajj today

FROM PAGE 1
garment that rituals require, the women covered up except for their faces and hands.

In Mina, a small site with 45,000 fire-resistant tents that can accommodate two million people, they will pray and rest before moving on to Mount Arafat today.

The recently constructed electric railway is scheduled to carry 400,000 of the pilgrims.

Saudi Arabia has deployed more than 100,000 troops to ensure the safety of the pilgrims and has warned it will tolerate no demonstrations or disturbances.

Interior ministry spokesman General Mansur al-Turki told a news conference on Saturday that the kingdom "will not allow any action that may subject the pilgrims' safety to risk".

Security forces are monitoring the holy sites in and around Makkah with 4,200 hi-tech cameras, some of which are so advanced that can cover a distance of 60 kilometres.

Authorities said more than 20,000 buses are ferrying the pilgrims to Mina using 58 tunnels under Makkah's high mountains.

But some pilgrims, like Egyptian Mustafa Abu el-Wafa, decided to walk the 10-kilometre distance despite the heat and humidity.

"I am so excited that I finally managed to perform the hajj and come to the areas that the Prophet (Mohammed) had once been to," Wafa said as he walked towards Mina.

From Mina, pilgrims will head to nearby Mount Arafat,

where they spend today in prayer until sunset.

The oil-rich kingdom has also mobilised huge medical and civil defence resources to ensure the smooth movement of the pilgrims, around 1.4 million of whom come from abroad.

That figure is sharply down on last year's 1.75 million.

Riyadh has imposed a 20-percent cut this year on the quota for pilgrims coming from abroad.

It has also slashed the number of domestic pilgrims by half because of MERS virus fears and reduced capacity resulting from multi-billion-dollar construction work.

The hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam that every capable Muslim must perform at least once.

Bijoya Dashami

FROM PAGE 16
(pushpanjali) and pray for her blessings.

Bijoya Dashami is the special ceremony of reaffirming peace and good relations among people.

On this day, families visit each other to share sweetmeats. Married Hindu women put sindoor on each other's forehead on the occasion.

In the capital, thousands of people will today throng the Buriganga to observe the final

phase of the festival -- the immersion of the goddess Durga.

Shouldering the idol of the goddess Durga, devotees will go into waist-deep water into the river and immerse the mother deity.

Durga Puja, the annual Hindu festival also known as Sharadiya (autumnal) Durga Utsav, is the worship of "Shakti" [divine force] embodied in goddess Durga.

It symbolises the battle

between good and evil where the dark forces eventually succumb to the divine.

The state-run and private television channels and radios will air special programmes while newspapers will publish special supplements marking the significance of Bijoya Dashami.

A total of 28,000 puja pandals had been erected across the country to observe the Durga puja festival this year.

Muhith irked

FROM PAGE 1
report, as he needs to show the commission's recommendations as the basis of the bill on the proposed Grameen Bank Act 2013 he is about to place in parliament.

The cabinet has already approved the draft of the act without getting the commission's final report. The draft is now at the law ministry for vetting.

Muhith had pressed Mamun Ur Rashid, the chairman of the government-sponsored commission, to submit the report before taking the draft law to the cabinet on October 3.

As Muhith couldn't get the report, he then asked Rashid to submit it at least before the bill on the proposed act is placed in the House.

Rashid didn't turn in the report as of yesterday. He, however, emailed Muhith on October 7, hours before the minister left for Washington to attend the annual meeting of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

In the correspondence, the former bureaucrat said he would submit the final report

after making some minor changes to the interim report that the commission turned in to the ministry in February, said a finance ministry official, preferring anonymity.

A set of recommendations on Grameen Bank's 48 associated organisations would be the only new inclusion in the report, said the official.

It might take about a month to finalise the report with the recommendations, said the official.

However, the minister told reporters on October 7 that he could take action on the basis of the recommendations he had received so far from the commission.

The minister even sent an official to Rashid's house in Dhaka recently, but the official was told that he was out of the country.

Though the commission's tenure expired on July 20, the finance ministry continued to provide it with manpower and other assistance ever after the period.

The chairman used his Dhanmondi house as his office to prepare the final

report.

Several officials at the Banking Division said they were unaware of the commission's activities after its office was closed on July 20.

There have been lapses in coordination among the commission members. Ajmalul Hossain QC, a member of the commission, submitted his own part of the report to the finance ministry on August 23.

Initially, the minister couldn't determine whether it was the final report or not. Later, it emerged that Ajmalul submitted only his part of the report, which dealt with legal issues.

The government last year set up the commission to review the operation of Grameen Bank and the associated organisations founded by Nobel laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus, and to make recommendations about their future structures.

The commission has faced criticism at home and abroad for its recommendations, particularly the one for splitting Grameen Bank into 19 units.

Govt to take back control

FROM PAGE 1
ordinance, as the government added a new provision allowing Bangladesh Bank to take steps to remove barriers to implementing the new law.

The government has also brought in changes in some other areas, giving the central bank more control over Grameen Bank.

Bangladesh Bank has been given some responsibility concerning the microlender so that it doesn't suffer in the absence of its founder Prof Muhammad Yunus, said a senior official of the Banking Division.

Experts, however, have opposed the changes.

Akbar Ali Khan, former chairman of Grameen Bank, said if any law concerning Grameen Bank is to be made, it should be done in consultation with the bank's borrowers, who own 75 percent of its shares.

The nine elected directors, who represent the bank's 84 lakh borrower members in the board,

and its more than 26,000 employees vehemently oppose the proposed changes to the ordinance.

Under existing rules, Grameen Bank is obliged to send returns, reports and statements to the government. But the new law says those documents have to be sent to the central bank as well.

In line with the ordinance, the microlender sends statements of audited accounts to the government within three months after the end of a financial year. But the new act makes it mandatory for Grameen Bank to send the statements to Bangladesh Bank.

The new act will curtail the power of the Grameen Bank Ordinance that gets around all other laws to give the microlender tax exemption, said the Grameen Bank official.

The bank will have to depend on the government to get tax exemption, as the issue will be decided in line with the Income Tax Act 1984, said the

official.

Grameen Bank has always enjoyed tax exemption since its inception in 1983 through a regular extension of the privilege by the National Board of Revenue. The microlender's tax exemption privilege has recently been extended up to 2015.

The new act retains the board's power to make regulations without the need for government's permission.

It also says the bank's managing director has to be below 60 years whereas no mention of such age limit was made in the ordinance.

Following a court order, the government is turning into law the GB ordinance, along with more than 500 ordinances promulgated during the military rule between 1982 and 1986.

Meanwhile, the finance ministry has sent the draft of the Grameen Bank (Election of Directors) Rules, 2013 to the law ministry for vetting.

The draft says

Bangladesh Bank will appoint a three-member commission to oversee the election of the nine directors.

The commission will be comprised of a Grameen Bank representative nominated by its chairman, and a representative each from Bangladesh Bank and Microcredit Regulatory Authority. The BB representative will act as the chief election commissioner.

Under existing rules, the Grameen Bank board appoints one of its officials as the election commissioner, and the bank's officials serve as returning officers.

According to draft rules, the commission will appoint central bank officials as returning officers, while officials from scheduled banks will act as assistant returning officers.

The election commission will be given power to instantly suspend and initiate departmental action against officials if they refuse to act on its instructions, says the draft.

115 killed in India

FROM PAGE 16
at the Ratangarh temple was triggered by rumours the bridge might collapse after being struck by a heavy vehicle around lunchtime.

Other police sources said that some 20,000 people were on the bridge over the River Sindh when the stampede broke out.

Large crowds began converging on the site from early morning, according to witnesses, to celebrate the end of the Navaratri festival.

The festival is dedicated to the worship of the Hindu goddess Durga, which draws millions of worshippers to temples, especially in northern and central India.

Up to 400,000 devotees were already inside or around the temple in Datia district, which is about 350 kilometres north of the state capital Bhopal, when the stampede took place.

Witnesses said the situation was exacerbated by police charging at the crowds with heavy wooden sticks.

However Arya insisted "there was no baton-charge" by the police.

The Times of India reported that crowds could be seen pelting police with

stones as frustration grew over the rescue operation.

Efforts to reach the injured and ferry them to hospital were being hampered by the huge volume of traffic in the area.

A team of around 20 medics had however managed to reach the scene of the tragedy, and the casualty wards of nearby hospitals were being emptied to cope with the influx of victims, the newspaper added on its website.

The state's chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan announced payouts of 150,000 rupees to the families of those killed, and 50,000 rupees to the injured.

India has a long history of deadly stampedes at religious festivals, with at least 36 people trampled to death in February as pilgrims headed home from the Kumbh Mela religious festival on the banks of the river Ganges.

Some 102 Hindu devotees were killed in a stampede in January 2011 in the state of Kerala, while 224 pilgrims died in September 2008 as thousands of worshippers rushed to reach a 15th-century hill-top temple in Jodhpur.

Traders happy

FROM PAGE 16
"Even we warned the law enforcers that if there is any extortion, whether by police or others, the local police unit will be held responsible."

The government's stern move came after the leaders of transport owners and workers early last month threatened to go on a 72-hour country-wide strike from September 23 to press home their eight-point demand, including putting an end to police extortion.

To appease the aggrieved transport leaders, Home Minister Muhiuddin Khan Alamgir, along with Communications Minister Obaidul Quader and Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan, held a meeting with the leaders on September 18 at his secretariat office.

The home minister, said meeting sources, advised the transport leaders to lodge complaints with his office instead of the police, who have been lax in taking action to stop extortion.

Several transport leaders alleged that police halt trucks at 10 to 12 points in the capital and extort Tk 500 from each of them at every point.

The home minister

instructed the commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) to hold another meeting in the last week of September to find a way on how to cut the number of police checkposts.

However, the DMP commissioner failed to hold the scheduled meeting and deferred it for a date after the Eid. In the meantime, an unscrupulous section of police continued with their ill practice, prompting transport leaders to seek help from the shipping minister.

Transport leaders went to Shajahan's parliament office on Tuesday night immediately after police halted several hundred trucks carrying sacrificial animals on the capital's outskirts Tongi.

Mohammad Joynal Abedin, president of Dhaka District Truck Sramik Union, said, "We went to the minister just to inform him that if the government fails to stop police extortion and harassment, we would enforce a strike before the Eid. The minister assured us of taking immediate steps."

"Since Wednesday, we have almost had no police harassment," he added.

Inventor of applicator awarded

FROM PAGE 16
crest, a certificate and \$2500 during a board meeting at its Alabama headquarters on September 22. Ishrat Jahan, its resident representative in Bangladesh, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Invented by IFDC Scientist Dr Ray B Diamond, Gutti (granular) urea has been used in Bangladesh since the 1980s for increased yield and low production costs. However, the fertiliser entailed increased labour costs and farmers suffered back pain since they had to

bend down when applying it.

The new injector-type applicator is aimed at addressing the issues.

The 1.5kg plastic applicator has the capacity of accommodating some 60 Gutti urea briquettes at a time, allowing a farmer to apply the briquettes on a 10-decimal paddy field in an hour.

Bangladesh Agriculture Research Institute (BARI) and Bangladesh Rice Research Institute had earlier developed push-type applicators, while Bangladesh Agricultural University developed an

injector-type one. Those were, however, not handy enough for the farmers.

Ishrat Jahan said the IFDC President's Outstanding Outposted Staff Member Award is given in recognition of excellence in support of IFDC and its mission.

In his reaction to the award, Wahab, a BARI scientist now working with IFDC on lien, said, "I am extremely happy and inspired by the award. The technology of Gutti urea has a huge impact on food security and the environment."

No slouching!

FROM PAGE 16
meticulously checking the spine and legs for straight backs.

Wooden crosses were strapped to their backs so that their shoulders were pulled back and their necks were aligned.

Cards were placed under their chins and the soldiers had to remain stock still to keep it in place.

The card measured the exact distance of where their chin should be, so that they would all have

their heads at the same angle.

Their legs were tied together so that they would learn how to stand up straight without bending their knees and strengthen their joints.

Their hands have to be so firmly pressed against their sides that officers slip a card between their hands and legs -- if the soldiers shift position or don't keep their hands pressed down, the card slips.

Good posture is

believed to have a number of benefits.

Not only does it improve physical appearance, it has been praised as changing mental attitudes, curing neurotic tendencies, reducing depression and high blood pressure.

It also apparently helps symptoms of rheumatism and arthritis, improves circulation and heart function, reduces migraine attacks, improves digestion, corrects insomnia and reduces stress.