

## Major deal

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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 Shaeen 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

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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 handover 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

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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.

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 land owners.

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

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 Digraville.

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.

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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 Digraville, 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 Surakha 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 grain silo.

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 gas 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.

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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.

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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, 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.

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