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Get businesses back on track

Top entrepreneurs ask commerce minister for initiatives

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Top business leaders, hit hard by months of political unrest, have sought government support to make up for their huge losses. A delegation of around 200 businesspeople from different sectors made the call at a view-exchange meeting with the new commerce minister, Tofail Ahmed, at Ruposhi Bangla Hotel in the capital yesterday.

They urged the government to provide them with financial incentives and policy support, as they go about rebuilding their businesses after a spate of political violence.

"2013 was an unlucky year for Bangladesh. We want to turn things around in 2014," said Atiqul Islam, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

Last year, the country lost 71 days to shutdowns and blockades, up from an average of 46 days a year since 1991.

Apex Group Chairman Syed Manzur Elahi said the country's image has been severely damaged due to political turmoil over the last six months.

There has been a "credibility gap" between foreign buyers and local exporters following negative reports on Bangladesh in the global media, especially in The New York Times.

The business leaders called for forming a special taskforce that would work to rebuild the nation's image with a slogan "Bangladesh is back in business".

"We have to sell our country first by improving the image and then our commodities," Elahi added.

More than Tk 1 lakh crore is lying idle in the banking sector, as political instability held entrepreneurs back from making new investments last year, said AK Azad, ex-president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

He urged the government to immediately improve gas and power supply, complete the construction of two additional lanes on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway and



Fishermen in action with the traditional fishing gear called *polo* in a canal at Monoharganj upazila of Comilla on Monday. Once a popular winter activity for people of all ages, fishing with *polo* is now hardly seen with the number of fishes in water bodies declining fast.
PHOTO: YASMIN REEMA

MALOPARA ATTACK Spearheaded by Jamaat

PINAKI ROY and MOKAMMEL SHUVO

Two pairs of brothers, all involved in Jamaat-Shibir politics, spearheaded the January 5 attack on the Malopara Hindu community, with two locally influential Jamaat leaders allegedly pulling the strings.

Mahfuzur Rahman and Mahmudur Rahman, sons of Avaynagar Upazila Jamaat Ameer Maulana Abdul Aziz, pounced on Hindus from the Chengutia Bazar side of Malopara with a gang of 40 to 50 cadres riding three nosimons (human hauliers).

Two diehard Jamaat members -- Badrul and his



brother Quader -- led another team from another side. They were assisted by two BNP activists, Qashem and Kibria.

Another group came by a trawler through the river Bhairab flowing by Malopara, a village mostly inhabited by fishermen, under Avaynagar upazila, Jessore.

After the polling closed, the duo spread a rumour that Hindus had killed a Shibir activist named Abu Bakar.

Mahsin Hawlader, sub-inspector of Avaynagar Police Station, has filed a case over the assaults on

PM DUE TOMORROW Development after a cost

PINAKI ROY and MOKAMMEL SHUVO, from Jessore

The Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) a few days ago began the construction of a one-and-a-half kilometre road from Malopara to Jessore-Khulna highway.

The workers are busy round-the-clock to finish at least 500 metres to the village as the path is muddy. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is set to visit the area tomorrow.

Yesterday, a unit of Border Guard Bangladesh was working to build some

DRIVE AGAINST ILLEGAL WORKERS KL detains 225 Bangladeshis

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 225 Bangladeshis were detained in Malaysia yesterday on the first day of a nationwide crackdown on illegal migrants.

Malaysian police picked up at least 1,565 illegal expatriates, including them, in the operation aimed at streamlining the country's labour market, reports Bernama, a Malaysian state news agency.

It is the second phase of the crackdown intended to detain and deport those who are working there without any document.

All illegal workers nabbed will be deported to their countries of origin within seven days, said Malaysian Home Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, adding the operation would continue until the end of the year.



The LGED is constructing a road from violence-affected Malopara village to Jessore-Khulna highway. Inset, women helping out BGB members in building new houses for the Hindu victims yesterday.
PHOTO: STAR

MANPOWER CHEATING 14 workers stay trapped in Iraq

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Fear haunts them every moment, for they are under constant threats from the employer. In a labour accommodation facility in the Iraqi city of Najaf, 160 kilometers south of Baghdad, food is available but they do not feel like eating.

"We are falling sick because of the tension and uncertainty over returning home. Some of us often get fever. Some got pain in their hands and legs. One has had his legs and

ANTI-GOVT PROTESTS Emergency declared in Thai capital

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand yesterday declared a 60-day state of emergency in Bangkok and surrounding areas to tackle mass protests aimed at overthrowing the government, but ruled out using force to end the rallies.

The move follows weeks of mass demon-

strations that have paralysed parts of the capital and sparked several bouts of deadly violence, including grenade attacks and shootings.

The last time a state of emergency was imposed in Bangkok, to deal with opposition protests against the previous govern-

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