

Exports to Japan on rise

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With the adoption of the new policy, Japanese importers started outsourcing garment items and other products from Bangladesh and other neighbouring countries, the industry insiders said.

And Bangladeshi exporters want to seize this golden opportunity.

"We can easily double our garment export to Japan within a year. We need proper branding of our country and our products as the Japanese customers are very quality conscious," said Fazlul Hoque, former president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

The Japanese premier's visit will help boost bilateral trades, he hoped.

The Japanese government has already given a lot of trade benefits to Bangladesh. So, now is the time for the private sector entrepreneurs of this country to explore the potentials of the Japanese market, said the former chief of the apex platform of garment makers.

"We should also work to attract more Japanese investment," Hoque added.

The last fiscal year also saw a significant rise in the export of non-garment products to Japan.

In 2013-14 FY, the earning of Bangladesh from exporting leather goods and footwear products to Japan stood at \$138.24 million, 65.35 percent higher from a year back.

Saiful Islam, managing director of

Picard Bangladesh that makes shoes and leather accessories, said the export rise was largely because of the relaxation of rules of origin by the Japan government. "Japan might be our next export destination for leather goods and footwear items," Islam said.

Expressing similar hopes, Akhtaruzzaman, managing director of Pacific Quality Control Co Ltd that inspects the quality of garment and other items meant for exporting to Japan, suggested some ways to make this a reality.

"We should reduce lead-time [shipment deadline] to increase export to Japan. Or else, our competitor countries like Vietnam and Indonesia, which are geographically close to Japan, will have an edge over us," he said.

Meanwhile, many Japanese investors are interested in trying their luck in automobile, garment and fabrics, electronics and fast-moving consumer goods sectors in Bangladesh, according to an official of Japan External Trade Organisation (JETRO).

Investment proposals worth \$1.2 billion from Japan are pending with the Board of Investment in Bangladesh for a long time, said the JETRO official.

Besides the surge in export earnings, the import picture too gives a reason to cheer. In 2012-13 FY, Bangladesh imported goods worth \$1.19 billion from Japan while the amount was \$1.45 billion the previous year, according to Bangladesh Bank.



Saplings of Aman paddy being sold at Durakuti of Lalmonirhat yesterday. Those who lost their crops in the flood are now paying an even heavier price.

PHOTO: STAR

Scrap broadcast policy

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rights abuses, among many other issues," Brad Adams, Asia director at HRW, said in the report published on Wednesday.

"It empowers an increasingly authoritarian state with tools to go after critics. It needs to be revoked if the government is serious about its commitment to freedom."

"This policy exemplifies how little appreciation the government has for free speech," Adams said.

In the report, the HRW high official said the "vague policy" would allow the Bangladesh government to take arbitrary action against those it sees as its political opponents.

The policy, which was published in the official government gazette on August 6, contains overly broad language and imprecise definitions that appear aimed at significantly curtailing critical reporting, according to the report.

Donors should make it clear to the Bangladesh government that limits on freedom of expression that violate

international law are unacceptable, it said.

The report added Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's veiled threats in defence of the media policy are of particular concern.

Speaking with reporters on August 28, she warned journalists not to "cross the line" set down in the new guidelines, said the New York-based rights organisation, quoting local media.

She was quoted as saying: "[D]on't try to cut off the branch you are sitting on. You too will fall. I think a hint is enough for the intelligent."

In its introductory paragraph the policy states that it is necessary for the government to create a framework for determining whether broadcasts are consistent with the history, ideology, and spirit of the country's 1971 Liberation War and Bangladesh's social, cultural, geographical, and political tradition and values.

The clause restricting the reporting of "anarchy, rebellion, or violence"

seems aimed at limiting reporting of opposition protests, according to the rights body.

Hasina claimed the media policy was modeled on the BBC media policy guidelines. But the foundations underlining the BBC policy are absent from the Bangladeshi policy, it observed.

HRW noted: "Slippery slope allowed by the media policy could have broad-ranging effects and that no media area is exempt from its reach."

"The new media policy appears to be little more than an attempt to establish a state ideology and set a trap for critics," Adams said in the report.

"It's almost like the government is living in a bygone era when it could tell people what to think, watch, and read."

Meanwhile, PM Sheikh Hasina, in parliament yesterday, claimed the National Broadcast Policy was formulated in a "very transparent way" after discussions with all stakeholders.

The policy was formulated recently.

FUND FOR OUSTING GOVT US embassy rejects news agency report

Staff Correspondent

The American Embassy in Dhaka has outright rejected a news agency report that the US funded a move to topple the Sheikh Hasina-led government in Bangladesh.

"There is absolutely no truth to this story," an embassy spokesperson, Monica Shie, told The Daily Star yesterday when asked to comment on the report.

The United States and Bangladesh have a strong friendship and close cooperation between them on a wide range of issues, including countering extremism, building a trade relationship by improving workers safety, and enhancing regional economic engagement, she said.

"Just this week, the United States was proud to announce that we

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Impeachment bill

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the chief justice-led Supreme Judicial Council.

Law Minister Anisul Haque who will pilot the bill said the existing system was against article 7 of the constitution, according to which all powers of the state should belong to the people.

The constitution empowers parliament to impeach the president, Speaker and Deputy Speaker and even to bring an end to the government by passing a no-confidence motion, he said in a scripted statement tagged with the copy of the bill. Therefore, the parliament elected by the people should also have the power to impeach SC judges, he added.

According to the law minister, the 1972 constitution had empowered the House with the authority but the provision was abolished through the martial law proclamation in 1978 and then the Supreme Judicial Council was introduced.

However, the fact is that the Awami

League-led government in early 1975 abolished the parliament's power to impeach judges through the fourth constitutional amendment and conferred the authority on the president. Through the fourth amendment the country switched to the presidential form of government.

During the martial law regime, Gen Ziaur Rahman amended the constitution through a proclamation and introduced the Supreme Judicial Council to strip the president of the impeachment power.

Meanwhile, the ruling party chief whip ASM Feroz convened an emergency meeting after the parliament session on Sunday at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban, requesting all Awami League MPs to attend it, according to a press release by the Parliament Secretariat.

The meeting will discuss, among other issues, the 16th amendment seeking to restore the parliament's authority to impeach SC judges and the latest political situation, a number of AL MPs told The Daily Star.

Online media to get similar policy

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imposing restrictions on broadcasting news, discussions and advertisements.

A sub-committee prepared a draft online policy, which was supposed to be finalised by another committee headed by the principal information officer (PIO), for placing it before the cabinet.

If the draft is approved, all contents of the online media will come under government monitoring.

"The online policy is similar to the broadcast policy. We are waiting for the formation of a broadcast commission and will move ahead with it in line with the commission's guidelines," said the PIO, Tasir Ahmed.

Like the broadcast policy, the draft online policy seeks a ban on publishing inconsistent and misleading information and data. No information and data can be published or broadcast demeaning the armed forces, law enforcement agencies and government officials who can sentence people for criminal offences, it says.

The online media cannot publish information and data that may spark separatism and unrest or create hatred among people of different castes, creeds and religions, or may satirise national ideals, undermine people and harm the unity and soli-

arity of the country, intrude on privacy, impede state security and hurt religious values and non-communal spirit.

The draft seeks a ban on publishing anything indecent that might affect children's psyche or something that might encourage harassment and violence against women and children.

The online media is not allowed to publish photographs and footage of murders and dead bodies that hurt human feelings. Besides, there will be a ban on publishing abusive and terrorising photographs and videos of local and foreign films which militate against the culture of the country, according to the draft.

Each online media organisation must obtain a licence from the authorities concerned, while the existing ones will get licences upon fulfilling the required conditions.

According to the draft, the main objective of the policy is to ensure free flow of information, and to expand education, encourage patriotism, project government's development activities, provide pure entertainment, uphold the ideals and spirit of the Liberation War, glorify freedom fighters and reflect women's contributions to society.

The conditions and restrictions relating to advertisements in the draft online policy are also similar to

those of the broadcast policy.

It puts restrictions on online publication of any information or advertisements that might hamper friendly relations with foreign countries or may cause conflict with a friendly state.

Moreover, the online media will not be allowed to publish any advertisements, containing language and scenes that may hurt political and religious sentiment. No photographs or video footage of mosques, temples and churches can be used in advertisements for commercial purposes.

The draft proposes mandatory publication of government-provided information on events of national importance. Like the broadcast policy, it also proposes forming an independent commission to implement the policy.

If any content of the online media goes against the policy, the commission will issue a show-cause notice to the media organisation, and submit report to the government with recommendations for action.

At present, anyone can launch a website and put information, photographs, video or audio clips there. Many government officials, especially deputy commissioners (DCs), have been pressing for a policy to impose restrictions on such online media workings.

FILM POLICY

The draft film policy proposes replacing the existing censor board with a certification board for giving clearance to a film.

Under the policy, the government will give soft loans to producers and film-making instruments, and grants for educational and alternative movies.

It proposes improving the atmosphere of cinemas and introducing a separate award for alternative films.

Legal steps will be taken to preserve copyright and intellectual property rights and stop piracy and plagiarism, the draft says.

"If implemented properly, the draft policy will help save the country's dying film industry," said Shafiqul Alam Bhuiyan, professor of film and television studies at Dhaka University.

Shafiqul, who played a key role in preparing the draft, said an independent film commission would be formed to implement the policy. "The commission will promote film-related research and education," he said, adding the policy would encourage production of decent films and help bring back the audience to cinemas.

Contacted recently, Information Secretary Murtaza Ahmed said he didn't receive any of the drafts.

IS controls area

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Mosul, their total cash and assets were \$875 million (£515 million). Afterward, with the money they robbed from banks and the value of the military supplies they looted, they could add another \$1.5 billion to that."

The accounts seized by the Iraqi officials offered detailed documentation of the terror group's rise to power through the rapid growth of its assets. "They had itemised everything - down to the smallest detail," the official said.

Now thought to be worth well over £2 billion, IS's network of oil refineries across northern Iraq and Syria that it has overtaken is where it appears to make the majority of its money.

Luay al-Khateeb, a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution's Doha Centre in Qatar and director of the Iraq Energy Institute, told Buzzfeed that the captured oil fields in Iraq are capable of making 80,000 barrels of oil a day, but appear to only be producing half of that.

He estimates that, while crude is being sold by the barrel on the black market for between \$25 and \$65 (£15 and £40), the terror group is thought to be raking in around \$2 million (£1.2 million) a day. "From Syria they could be making double or even triple that," he added.

While the UK and US do not pay ransoms, many nations do, and many families of captured locals will go to great efforts to gather the money demanded by IS to get their loved ones back.

One of the more surprising sources of revenue for IS is the trading of antiquities, some up to 8,000 years old, from which they are thought to have made around £21.8 million from just one region of Syria.

In addition to this, intelligence agencies believe that IS offers fighters more money than any group in the region - £243 a month - and offers more military equipment, to boot.

But despite this sprawling network of revenues to fund its militant actions, Olsen said: "As formidable as [IS] is as a group, it is not invincible. With a broad coalition of international partners, we have the tools to defeat [IS] based on a determined and comprehensive all-of-government approach."

Air strikes by US warplanes in combination with attacks by Iraqi and Kurdish troops had showed IS was "vulnerable to coordinated and effective military action", he said.

But Olsen warned there were others who could pose a threat to the West: "[IS] has captured our immediate focus, but it is only one of the myriad groups that pose a threat to us as the terrorist landscape evolves."

ACC finds no illegal wealth of Aslamul

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Similarly, lawmaker Aslamul in an affidavit claimed his income tax adviser mistakenly put his land at 141 acres instead of 1.41 acres.

The ACC has accepted their explanations and decided to give them a clean chit, sources said.

Contacted, ACC Commissioner Shahabuddin yesterday said they dropped Aslamul's matter as they found the lawmaker did not amass any wealth illegally and that he had no assets beyond his known sources of income.

"We sent him a letter in this connection today [yesterday]," he said.

Aslamul confirmed receiving the letter.

ACC sources said Ruhul Haque is likely to be officially cleared in two weeks, even though the commission in

its own investigation found a discrepancy of about Tk 2.5 crore between his wealth statement and tax return.

ACC investigators sought some documents from him to explain this mismatch, but he is likely to be cleared anyway.

"I've applied to the Election Commission through an affidavit seeking correction of the error in my wife's wealth statement. The commission has accepted the application," Ruhul said.

He had no answers when asked how one could confuse between Tk 45.17 lakh and Tk 7.53 crore.

On Wednesday, the ACC cleared all the accused in the Padma bridge corruption conspiracy case though the World Bank gave the ACC primary evidence.

The ACC also exonerated ex-communications minister Syed Abul

Hossain and ex-state minister for foreign affairs Abul Hasan Chowdhury of alleged involvement in the graft conspiracy.

The ACC concluded its probe at a time when two officials of Canadian firm SNC Lavalin are being tried in a Canadian court for conspiring to bribe Abul Hossain and several officials and individuals in Bangladesh to get the project's consultancy job.

Earlier, Election Commissioner Abdul Mobarak told The Daily Star that it was not possible for the EC to make corrections in someone's wealth statement based on an affidavit.

ACC investigating officer Mirza Zahidul Alam, who was investigating Ruhul Haque, in his probe report claimed there was no major difference between his wealth statement and tax

return.

Aslamul Haque was being investigated by ACC Deputy Director Sheikh Mesbah Uddin. In his report submitted to the commission on Tuesday, he recommended concluding the inquiry as he did not find any discrepancy in the lawmaker's wealth statement and income tax return.

Quoting the probe report, a top ACC official said the inquiry officer found that Aslamul owned some land that is not shown in the statement submitted to the EC. But they cannot sue him based on the findings, as there are controversies regarding the ownership of the land.

Regarding Ruhul, the ACC official said the former minister inherited vast ancestral properties and he himself amassed huge wealth as an eminent

physician.

According to the wealth statement submitted to the EC in 2008, Ruhul had property worth Tk 4.99 crore and his wife worth around Tk 97 lakh, which soared to Tk 9 crore and Tk 7.53 crore in last five years respectively.

Of the seven the ACC was investigating for amassing illegal wealth, three were sued last month. They are AL lawmaker Abdul Rahman Bodi, former state minister for water resources Mahbubur Rahman and ex-state minister for housing and public works Abdul Mannan Khan.

Investigations against lawmakers Enamul Haque and Abdul Zabbar are at the final stage.

If found guilty, the accused could face up to seven years in prison, fines of unspecified amount of money and

confiscation of their properties.

ASLAMUL'S WEALTH

In his 2014 wealth statement submitted to the EC, the Mirpur lawmaker showed undervalued rates for his 14,567 decimals of land (more than 145 acres) and claimed that he and his wife had net assets worth Tk 4.94 crore after deducting their bank liabilities of Tk 4.7 crore.

According to his statement ahead of the 2008 election, the net value of their assets was Tk 1.44 crore.

The couple now owns two cars worth around Tk 1 crore, a flat of Tk 1.43 crore, shares worth just under Tk 1 crore, 83 tolas of gold, and Tk 2.71 crore in cash, according to his statement submitted to the EC.

In 2008, he claimed he had 120 tolas of gold.