

Against all odds

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too. Eighty percent of these workers are female who have suddenly come out of homes in hordes, started earning on their own and then retiring to a meaningful life setting up small businesses from goat rearing to small trade.

Their consumption pattern has changed, triggering investments in a whole new range of industries such as cosmetics and sandals and cheap clothes. Banks and insurance companies mushroomed. Transport business boomed. A massive backward linkage industry in yarn, clothing and accessories grew. Carton units were set up. Labels are printed in another kind of units.

It is actually very difficult to say which sector of the economy is not touched by the garment sector that is projected by McKinsey & Company to be a \$45 billion export powerhouse in another six years.

The journey that started with a mere 13 million francs equivalent to \$13 million in today's conversion rate has today matured into a major strength for Bangladesh. For every three people in Europe, one is wearing a Bangladeshi's tag. In the US one in every five people is carrying the Made in Bangladesh label.

But this journey was fraught with challenges. The industry had to go through upheavals. First came the quota system from the US in the 1980s. Because of the pressure from American textile lobby, the US restricted the quantity of apparels that each country could export.

Bangladesh then exported only the most basic items starting with flannel shirts (one can still recall the quota category 340). Its handful of factories were merrily shipping shirts.

The US put a restriction that Bangladesh cannot export more than 212,000 dozens of shirts a year. But already Bangladeshi exporters had

shipped more than that quantity.

Bangladesh did not agree to the quota. So a team went to negotiate with the US Trade Representative in January 31, 1986. Finally the quantity was raised to 330,000 dozens.

But that was not good enough. Another negotiation took place and finally the quota was raised to 13 lakh dozens with an annual growth of eight percent.

That was a major breakthrough. Bangladesh got a secured quantity. This helped the industry grow under the quota regime.

Another jolt came when the quota system was abolished in December 2004 as part of the WTO rules. Everybody predicted a doomsday for our garment industry and thought buyers would go to other countries as they would be free to buy from anywhere.

History proved otherwise. Exports since then boomed as our entrepreneurs successfully roped in more buyers with their cheap rates.

Another blow came when the issue of child labour came to the fore with US senator Tom Harkin bringing up a bill. Underage workers then ruled the Bangladeshi garment industry. If they were shed then the factories would close down.

But our entrepreneurs with the help of ILO and the government successfully phased out the child labourers to maintain their foothold on the market.

The industry was also often beset by workers' unrest over a waft of issues relating to wage and safety standards that sometimes peaked to widespread violence. Factories were burned.

But the biggest blow came in two macabre accidents -- the Tazreen Fashions fire that killed 112 workers and more recently the Rana Plaza collapse, killing 1,138.

The whole industry was reeling under the worldwide criticism. Many thought the last nail in the coffin has been ham-

mered.

But once again the united efforts of our entrepreneurs and the government steered the ship. The government appointed factory inspectors. Two international inspection agencies Accord and Alliance came and inspected the factories. They gave an action plan to be implemented in five years.

The entrepreneurs have come to the understanding that they have to implement the plan if they have to stay in the game. Buyers' nerves are also soothed and exports go strong.

In this whole history of garment industry, a special salutation must go to the workers. Millions of workers with little education have shown the world that they are the best tailors. Despite the sporadic unrest, the workers are the best disciplined.

A US entrepreneur who has his own brand in America told me he can never think of any sourcing destination other than Bangladesh.

"I have tried other places -- Cambodia, Pakistan, India and Vietnam. But I have settled for Bangladesh. My conclusion is that Bangladeshi workers are the best," he said.

Another entrepreneur who had ventured into India, Pakistan and Africa also echoed the view.

Even then Bangladeshi garment industry has to think of its future. Its productivity is still low at 40 percent compared to China and Vietnam's 80 percent. This calls for major technological and management changeover.

Energy and infrastructure will be the major challenges. And workers have to be skilled further. And we have to think of where the future workforce will come from because the demographic window of opportunity will not exist long.

Still given the fact Bangladesh has achieved -- from \$13 million to \$25 billion -- we remain hopeful of the future.

Bridge, he mentioned.

Fresh fruits and minerals are among the goods Bhutan exports to Bangladesh while Bangladesh exports limited amounts of readymade garment, ceramic, melamine, medicine and leather goods to Bhutan.

To enhance bilateral trade, Bangladesh has already offered Bhutan to use Chittagong and Mongla seaports as well as Lalmonirhat and Syedpur airports.

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Latif falls ill, taken to hospital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



Sacked minister Abdul Latif Siddique was admitted to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) last afternoon for chest pain and high blood pressure.

The 77-year-old politician is now behind bars in connection with a case for hurting religious sentiment.

Brig Gen (retd) Abdul Majid Bhuiyan, director of BSMMU, said Latif was admitted to the Cabin Block of the hospital around 4:30pm.

Necessary tests have been performed and a medical board will be formed today for his treatment, Majid told The Daily Star.

Farman Ali, senior jail superintendent at Dhaka Central Jail, said they sent the prisoner to BSMMU around 3:30pm for treatment after he had complained of chest pain.

On November 25, a Dhaka court sent expelled Awami League leader Latif to prison after police produced him before it in the case filed for his derogatory remarks on hajj and *Tablighi Jamaat*. He surrendered to Dharmonti Model Police Station around 1:30pm on that day, two days after returning home from India.

If he is found guilty in the case, he could be sentenced to one year's imprisonment or fine, or both.

Latif was accused in around 22 cases filed in 18 districts for offending religious sentiment. There have been multiple arrest warrants for him.

Blue light

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superior reliance on smell when assessing food.

The University of Arkansas research team, led by Han-Seok Seo, said: 'Since naturally blue coloured foods are rare, humans may have a doubt as to whether (such foods) are safe to eat,' the Pacific Standard reported.

The results of the group's study were published in the latest edition of the journal *Appetite*.

The study involved 112 people who were asked to eat the same meals under different coloured lights.

Despite eating differing amounts of pancakes and omelettes, the results of questionnaires conducted afterwards showed participants registered the same levels of satisfaction.

Meanwhile, recent studies show being obese can shorten life by eight years and blight up to two decades with ill-health.

Scientists using a computer model recently warned that diabetes and heart disease are set to deprive an obese person of up to 19 years of healthy living.

For the very obese, with a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 35 or more, between one and eight years of life were likely to be lost.

Overweight people with BMI scores of 25 to 30 were predicted to have their lives shortened by up to three years.

Pal, pioneer

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liquid form of metals like brass and bronze are poured.

At one point, the metals cool down and take the solid shape of the container. The outer layer of solid clay is removed afterwards.

"Finally, we colour and furnish the newly-born art," said Ananda. "Sometimes the fresh metal objects are given antique looks."

"We had no academic knowledge. We learned the technique all by ourselves... only by seeing others," he said.

Even though Mosharraf has passed away, Ananda still like to pass most of his time after his passion.

The sculptor said his items were very popular among the elites and abroad but he could have made more profit in the business had he got proper assistance from the government.

"The main problem is marketing. I have a lot of items in my stock," said a worried Ananda. "I need a helping hand of the government."

Shawon Akand, researcher and art scholar, says despite their massive contributions to the folk art, people like Ananda are never recognised as artists.

He said the mainstream art society and artists were against recognising Ananda as an artist as the sculptor earns his livelihood selling his items.

"The significant aspect of Ananda's work is his adaptation to change in the medium -- from clay to metal -- and his flexibility as an artist," added the researcher.

Tejosh Halder, an emerging sculptor, said many students at Dhaka University's Faculty of Fine Arts often go to Ananda and observe how he casts metal in the unique ancient way.

Up to 147pc hike

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merged to make 15 grades, most likely the ones between 10 and 20, they added.

Recommendations would be made for providing public servants with various benefits and allowances like life, health, and accident insurances and education allowance for children of the government service holders.

For the first time, parents were being considered as members of the family of public servants while calculating expenditures of a single family unit.

A member of the commission observed that the government staff were ill-paid and this, they think, was one of the main reasons behind rampant corruption in the country.

Moreover, the existing poor salary structure failed to attract meritorious jobseekers and resulted in deterioration in the quality of government services, the member added.

Another member of the commission said they were going to suggest a salary structure in line with the pay scales of government staff in neighbouring countries, especially India.

In India, the highest salary of a government service holder is Rs 80,000. However, in some selective posts including that of the cabinet secretary it is Rs 90,000. If other facilities enjoyed by them are taken into account, the highest salary amounts to around Rs 2 lakh in India.

However, if rupee was converted to taka and the purchasing power was taken into consideration, salary in Indian civil service was much higher.

Talking to The Daily Star, another member of the commission said it was not expected that corruption would drop and quality of government services would improve overnight. However, to make that happen, the first step was to increase the salary followed by other overdue reforms in the civil service, the member added.

Available statistics show total GDP

was Tk 2,73,200 crore in 2001-02 fiscal year, whereas the amount was Tk 13,50,920 crore in the last fiscal year.

Though the country's economy has seen much progress in the last two decades, the civil servants did not benefit from it, observed another member of the commission.

The member added that they considered the fact while making the recommendations, but how much the government could agree to it would depend on the government's economic capability.

In the budget for the current fiscal year, Tk 28,709 crore had been allotted for around 13 lakh government staff.

In August 2008, the then military-backed caretaker government formed a 13-member pay commission headed by former secretary M Mustafizur Rahman.

The Seventh Pay Commission took 14 months to submit its recommendations and the subsequent Awami League-led government implemented the pay rise retrospective from July 2009.

The Sixth Pay Commission was formed in July 2004, the fifth in September 1996, the fourth in July 1989, the third in 1984, the second in February 1976 and the first in July 1972.

The pay scale that came into effect in 1973 had 10 grades and the highest salary was Tk 2,000 and the lowest Tk 130. In 1977 the grades were converted to 20.

Teacher shot dead

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shifted to Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH).

Quoting Mosajai, Shafiqul Islam, officer-in-charge of Manikchhari Police Station, said about seven to eight men entered Mosajai's house around 7:45pm, shot the two and left the area.

Locals sent the injured to Manikchhari Upazila Health Complex where doctors declared Chingamong dead.

No case was filed in this connection till 1:00am today.

Hunt on for 4 JMB leaders

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Indian police believe he is linked to a plot to assassinate Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and stage a coup in Bangladesh, Reuters reported.

India's National Investigation Agency (NIA) along with police and central security agencies arrested Sahanur, one of the 12 Burdwan blast suspects with bounties on their head, from his brother-in-law's house in Assam, reports our New Delhi correspondent.

Later, a court in Assam's Kamrup ordered Sahanur to be held for 14 days for questioning after he was produced before the court yesterday.

So far 10 people, including Sahanur, his wife Sujana Begum and brother Zakaria, have been arrested in connection with the blast.

PRIME JMB TARGETS

So, what puts Sohel, Boma Mizan, Salehin and Tariqul on top of the manhunt list?

"We have been trying to arrest all those who are involved in militancy activities but these four persons have become our main focus as they are dangerous for both the countries," a lead investigator of Bangladesh told The Daily Star recently.

The four names were common on the lists of militants and criminals exchanged by Dhaka and Delhi last month, said the investigator who was among the seven-member delegation that visited Kolkata to share information on militancy and probe the blast.

Another person, Sohag Gazi, was also on both the lists. But he was one of the two people killed in the Burdwan blast, he said.

Boma Mizan, an explosives expert of the JMB, was arrested in 2009. But he along with Salehin escaped after armed JMB men ambushed a prison van in Mymensingh's Trishal on February 23. They later crossed the border and were operating