

78pc workers lose ability to work after accidents: survey

GAZI TOWHID AHMED

Workplace injuries bring paramount miseries to the lives of workers, as 78 percent workers lose their ability to work after accidents, a recent survey found.

A total of 80 percent of the workers surveyed were suffering from spinal cord injuries, according to the survey conducted by Safety and Rights Society, a local nongovernment organisation that works to improve workplace safety in Bangladesh.

The empirical study was carried out to measure the socio-economic impacts of severe workplace injuries in Bangladesh. The study took 100 seriously injured workers, who suffered accidents in their workplaces between 2010 and 2014, as a sample.

Injured workers are facing difficulties in performing basic day-to-day activities, such as walking, eating and getting dressed, said Md Mahamudul Haque, a journalist, while presenting a keynote paper on the survey results at the National Press Club. Khushi Kabir, chairperson of Safety and Rights Society, moderated the programme.

A total of 95 percent respondents borne their own treatment costs, which ranged between Tk 1 lakh and more than Tk 4 lakh; 50 percent of workers had sold land and other valuables to bear expenses, Haque said.

Employers had borne the total treatment cost of four workers out of the 100 surveyed, while the hospital had borne the cost of one worker, he added. The survey also revealed that 95 percent of workers did not take any legal action against the employer to realise compensation or treatment costs.

The impact of accidents was not only on the workers but on their families as well; 34 percent of the workers' children stopped going to school, while the rest continued on an irregular basis, Haque said.

Emphasising proper safety measures and training, he suggested ensuring proper treatment facilities for workplace injured workers, developing specific standards of compensation, establishing more labour courts in worker-dense areas and at district levels.

He also suggested increasing the amount of financial assistance from

the labour welfare fund to Tk 5 lakh from the existing Tk 1.25 lakh.

Twenty-six year-old construction worker Taslim Uddin suffered an accident at a shipyard in Chittagong. He lost one of his legs and did not receive any financial assistance from the owner of the shipyard either.

"I want my leg back. My father sold all his lands for my treatment. I want better treatment. Please help me."

Obaidul Islam, a carpenter from Pirojpur, broke his backbone for carrying heavy weights on his shoulder in 2012. "I can't walk now. My wife started begging to maintain my four-member family. I want help."

Islam has two school-going sons. Owners are reluctant to pay Tk 1 lakh as compensation, said Mikail Shipar, secretary of labour and employment ministry.

The owners of the factories housed in Rana Plaza, which collapsed and took the lives of 1,135 workers, did not pay any compensation to the workers, he said.

The association of owners, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, only gave Tk 2 crore to the prime

minister's welfare fund, he added.

The government will consider all the recommendations from the seminar for the welfare of injured workers, he said.

The government should fix the amount of compensation based on the loss in working years and inflation, said Wajedul Islam Khan, general secretary of Bangladesh Trade Union Kendra. The amount should be revaluated every six months, he suggested. The government should also take action to rehabilitate injured workers, he said.

The amount of compensation should increase, said Sara Hossain, honorary executive director of Bangladesh Legal Aid Services Trust.

"We are thinking about becoming a middle-income country by 2021, but not thinking about the workers," she added.

"The benchmark for compensation is yet to be fixed. I want to know when it will be fixed."

Safety and Rights Society has conducted another survey based on reports printed in daily newspapers from January to October 2014, which found that workplace accidents killed 260 workers and injured 363.



Azam J Chowdhury, chairman of Prime Bank, presents blankets to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina as donation to the Prime Minister's Relief and Welfare Fund, for distribution among the cold affected poor in the country, at a programme in Dhaka recently.

Make New Mooring terminal operational soon: port users

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Stakeholders and users of Chittagong port yesterday demanded the New Mooring Container Terminal to be made fully operational soon to increase the port's efficiency and capacity.

They made the call at the ninth meeting of Chittagong port advisory committee at the Chittagong Port Training Institute in Chittagong.

Every previous meeting of the committee set

a time frame by which the terminal was supposed to be made operational; but nothing happened so far, said Nasir Uddin Chowdhury, former first vice president of BGMEA.

A committee has been formed to resolve the issue soon, said Shahjahan Khan, shipping minister and convener of the committee. ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury, president of Awami League Chittagong city unit, and Mahbul Alam, president of Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry, were also present.



Farasath Ali, chairman of NRB Commercial Bank, opens the bank's 24th branch at Chatkhal in Noakhali on Monday. Dewan Mujibur Rahman, managing director, was also present.

Work on Dhaka-Ctg dual gauge railroads in full steam

Govt approves Tk 6,504cr for Akhaura-Laksham portion of the route

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The government yesterday gave the go-ahead to the construction of the Akhaura-Laksham portion of the dual gauge Dhaka-Chittagong railway, expected to transform the country into the transshipment hub for Nepal, Bhutan and the seven sister states of India.

"The Dhaka-Chittagong railway will soon become the main corridor of the Trans-Asian Railway," Planning Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal told reporters after the meeting of the Executive Committee of National Economic Council chaired by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Once the railway is up and running,

the country will be able to provide transshipment facilities to neighbouring countries through the port.

Furthermore, transport of consignment to and from Chittagong, where the country's main port is located, will become faster and smoother, much to the business community's relief. "This will attract investors from home and abroad."

Work on the Tongi-Bhairab Bazar and Laksham-Chinki Astana portions of the route is expected to be complete by 2015.

When the Akhaura-Laksham line is done, the whole Dhaka-Chittagong rail line will become dual gauge, Kamal said.

Dual gauging the Akhaura-

Laksham line, which is expected to be complete by 2020, will cost Tk 6,504 crore. The Asian Development Bank will provide \$505 million and the European Investment Bank \$175 million.

The planning minister said the government from now on will put the highest emphasis on railway and waterway for transportation of commodities as they are "economically sound". The road ways will be relied upon for passenger transport.

Seven other projects costing a total of Tk 4,121 crore were also approved at yesterday's meeting. Among them were the Tk 982 crore Moheshkhali-Anwara Gas Transmission pipeline project.

The government has decided to build a liquefied natural gas terminal in the deep sea near Moheshkhali Island in Cox's Bazar. Around 500 million cubic feet of gas would be supplied to the national gas grid from there.

A Tk 299 crore project to set up computer and language training labs in educational institutions in 64 districts also received the approval yesterday.

Under the project, 2,000 computer labs will be set up in 2,000 educational institutions. Each computer lab will have at least 17 laptops, one printer, one scanner, one LED multimedia projector, a headphone and a 3G router.

Stocks fall in thin trade

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

A day after experiencing a slight recovery, stocks declined yesterday due to thin participation of investors.

DSEX, the benchmark index of Dhaka Stock Exchange, dropped 29.83 points or 0.61 percent before closing the day at 4,838.63 points.

The shariah index—DSES—slid to 1,142.93 points after declining 5.93 points or 0.51 percent.

The investors continued pursuing a meticulous strategy due to lack of a perfect confirmation of a rise ahead of the yearend. IDLC Investments said in its regular analysis.

"Besides, investors remained focused more on short-term returns than long- or mid-term gains amid sluggishness and increased volatility."

On the macroeconomic front, it said Bangladesh Bank cut the maximum lending rate for agricultural and rural loans to 11 percent from 13 percent and directed banks to implement Basel-III, starting in January 2015.

LankaBangla Securities said investors are still unsure about any particular market direction in near-term reflected by low turnover.

Large-cap stocks suffered some losses, pulling the index into the red territory.

Total turnover, an important gauge for the market, fell 24 percent to Tk 202.53 crore from the previous day's Tk 266.97 crore.

Losers took a strong lead over the gainers, as 186 securities declined and 88 advanced with 35 remaining unchanged on the premier bourse.

A total of 0.65 lakh trades were executed with 5.38 crore shares and mutual fund units changing hands on the DSE.

Lafarge Surma Cement featured in the most traded stocks' chart with 9.39 lakh shares worth Tk 11.27 crore changing hands, followed by Brac Bank, Desco, Beximco Pharma and Grameenphone.

Exim Bank 1st Mutual Fund was the biggest gainer of the day, posting a 10 percent rise, while Hamid Fabrics was the worst loser, slumping by 12.17 percent.

The Chittagong Stock Exchange closed in the negative territory yesterday with its selective categories index, CSCX, declining by 46.02 points to close the day at 9,052.92 points.

Losers beat the gainers 144 to 65 with 32 remaining unchanged on the port city bourse that traded 71.63 lakh shares and mutual fund units worth Tk 70.60 crore.

Business interest piqued by prospect of US, Cuba trade

AFP, Miami

US businesses are lining up to take advantage of the enormous investment potential of Cuba, all but untouched for more than half-a-century by American capitalism.

Last week, President Barack Obama announced a breakthrough in US relations with Cuba, reviving diplomatic ties and making some commercial transactions easier.

No sooner was the historic announcement made, than the American business community began assessing Cuba's untapped markets.

Emilio Morales, president of the Miami-based Havana Consulting Group, described a "tsunami" of interest among investors, particularly in Florida, just 90 miles (144 kilometers) from the island.

No-one, he said, wants to miss out on such a market, fueled by decades of pent-up demand.

"There are a lot of people in the US business community who are in panic," said Morales, who told AFP that since last week, his phone has been ringing off the hook.

The president of the US Chamber of

Commerce, Thomas Donahue, representing business groups and companies, also spoke of a barely-contained enthusiasm to invest in Cuba.

"The chamber and its members stand ready to assist as the Cuban people work to unleash the power of free enterprise to improve their lives," he said in a statement.

The Small Business Administration, another interest group, was equally upbeat about the investment prospects.

"The best way to ensure opportunity and democracy in Cuba is by empowering the Cuban people -- rather than denying them access to resources," said SBA President Maria Contreras-Sweet.

"At the same time, American businesses, small and large, stand to gain access to an important new market for goods and services only 90 miles from our shores."

America's farm states are particularly keen to sell corn, wheat, soy and other crops to Cuba, which has to import much of its food.

And there also has been interest from US technology firms in Silicon Valley in a market that is decades behind the United States with respect to its high-tech infrastructure.

Strict rules of origin stunt exports to Korea

FROM PAGE B1

But Korea keeps the value addition requirement for Bangladesh at 40 percent, meaning Bangladeshi clothes or other exports should have 40 percent local contents.

Bangladesh's exports to Korea amounted to \$345 million in fiscal 2013-14, though its total exports were worth \$30 billion, according to Export Promotion Bureau.

Exports from Bangladesh to Japan, a neighbour of Korea, have been increasing fast and reached \$862.08 million in fiscal 2013-14, from \$750.27 million in the previous year.

Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed said, although Korea provides duty-free market access for major products of Bangladesh under its generalised system of preferences (GSP) for least developed countries, Bangladesh is yet to utilise the facility due to strict rules of origin.

Former commerce secretary Sohail Ahmed Chowdhury called upon Korea to ease the rules to help boost Bangladesh's exports to its market.

However, Kihak Sung, chairman and chief executive of South Korea's Youngone Corporation, which is a major exporter of apparel products from Bangladesh, differed with others on the issue of rules of origin.

"Forty percent local value addition is not so high, rather it could be a blessing for Bangladesh," he said, adding that Bangladesh can overcome the challenge by enhancing its port efficiency.

The commerce minister said Bangladesh has to think twice before going for an FTA as the country enjoys duty-free market access to many countries, including Korea.

University, who presented a paper on Korea's foreign economic policies in the era of East Asian integration, shared the story how his country became an industrialised nation from an agrarian economy 40 years ago.

The country's economy was \$1,304 billion in 2013, up from just \$8.2 billion in 1970. Korea's exports reached nearly \$560 billion in 2013 from only \$835 million in 1970. Imports also soared nearly 260 times since 1970.

The US had been Korea's largest export destination for 30 years. Gradually China replaced the US and has been Korea's largest export market since 2003.

Garments were the top export products of Korea, being one-fifth of its total exports in 1977. Now semiconductors, cars, ships and auto parts took the place. The country now makes high-tech machinery,

which they used to import in 1970s.

In Korea's economic development over the years, FTAs have played an important role, according to Prof Kang. Now the country has 10 FTAs and another five are in the offing, Kang said.

"Korea had focused on multilateralism in late 1990s, but later it emphasised regionalism, hoping to secure foreign markets through FTAs with major trading partners," he said.

Political stability and leadership have also played an important role in the country's economic development, he said.

Lee Yun-young, Korean ambassador, said Bangladesh should work for skills development of its human resources. He called upon factory owners to start evening schools at their factories to educate workers for better productivity.

CSR must be for long-term

FROM PAGE B1

Debapriya Bhattacharya, distinguished fellow of Centre for Policy Dialogue, chaired the dialogue organised jointly by the Korean Embassy in Bangladesh and CPD at the Westin Hotel Dhaka.

Rahman said business' focus on profit making alone is an outdated system.

"The time has come to give back some of the earnings to the community or consumers," she added.

Dr Jaemin Lee of Seoul National University and Shahamin S Zaman, chief executive of CSR Centre, presented two papers on the latest CSR trends and desirable CSR in the perspective of Bangladesh.

Lee said CSR is getting increasing attention in South Korea.

Apart from corporations, educational institutions, government and individuals are coming up with CSR activities, he added.

"The Korean government supports and

guides corporations' increased CSR awareness for their long-term success," Lee said. Treatment of foreign investors is subject to different sets of norms, which he said is a hard law.

The CEO of CSR Centre said there will be a CSR policy in Bangladesh by 2015. But each sector will have to have different ways of CSR following the UN Global Compact principles, which is a platform launched by the UN in 2000, she said.

"CSR has to be a long-term and continuous process. It has to be sustainable as well." Bhattacharya said there is a need for a national narrative in the context of the Global Compact principles. The size of the economy, scale and market are also important in this regard, he added.

Farooq Sobhan, president of Bangladesh Enterprise Institute, and Lee Yun-young, Korean ambassador to Bangladesh, also spoke.