

Maharashtra turns to Yunus for advice

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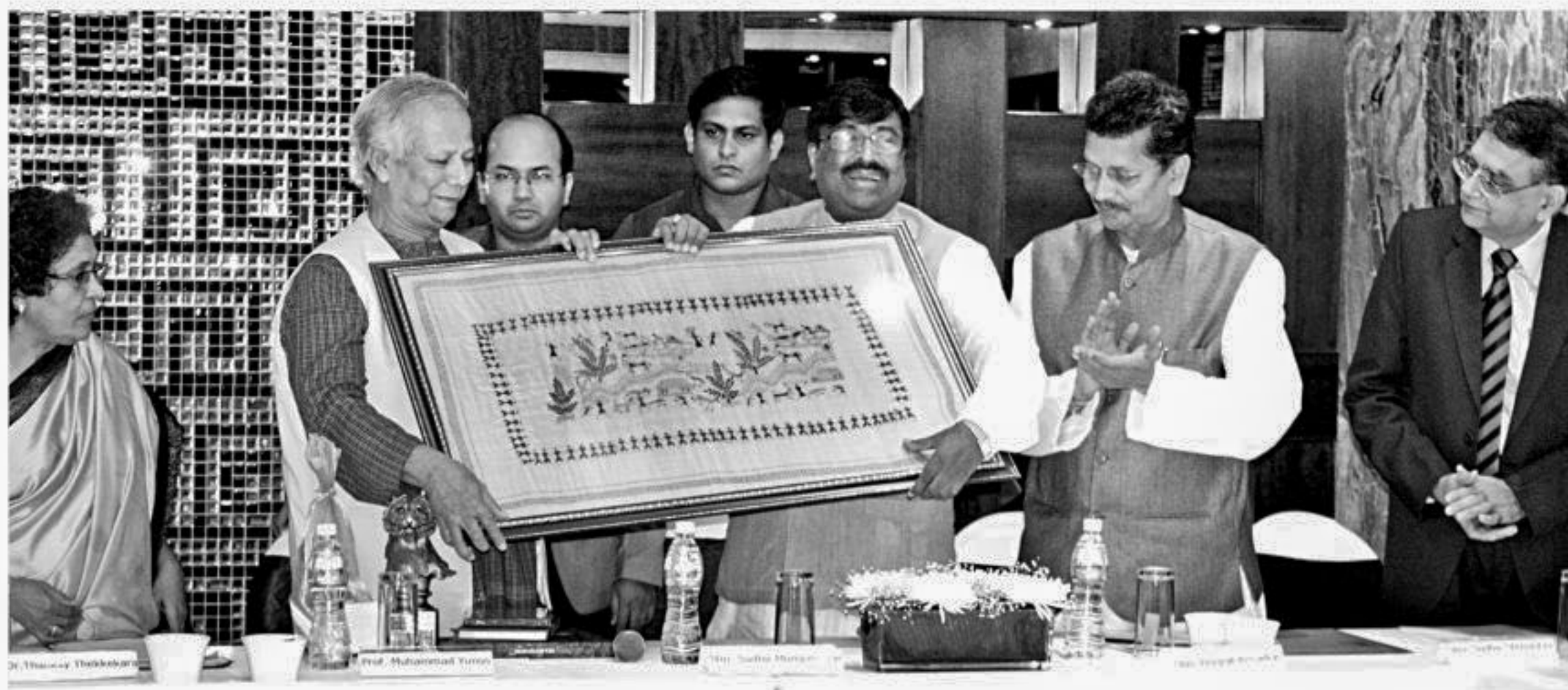
The government of Maharashtra has sought advice from Nobel Laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus in designing programmes for rural development and inclusive financing.

Sudhir Mugantiwar, finance minister of Maharashtra, asked for the Grameen Bank founder's assistance when he visited the Indian state, Yunus Centre in Dhaka said in a statement yesterday.

They discussed various issues at the meeting on Sunday that was attended by secretaries and heads of all government agencies involved in development issues, academics and representatives of national rural finance organisation NABARD.

The minister spoke about the issues that will help him prepare a strategy document to present as part of his next budget statement, and include relevant actions in the budget as well.

Mugantiwar specifically wanted to know more about the programmes to bring the unemployed rural and urban youth out



Maharashtra Finance Minister Sudhir Mugantiwar presents a memento to Nobel Laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus during their meeting to discuss development strategies for the state.

of unemployment.

He and his team wanted to find out why microcredit programmes and lending for small and medium enterprises in his state were not performing satisfactorily, and how to revitalise these programmes in line with the Grameen Bank experience in Bangladesh.

His three main concerns were:

ensuring financial inclusion for the poorest of the poor through microfinance, spurring entrepreneurship in Maharashtra and reviving bankrupt micro, small and medium enterprises to create jobs.

Explaining social business, Yunus said making money is happiness but making other people happy is super happiness.

The minister then said he wants to convert the state's 1.7 million self-help groups into 'Super Happiness Groups'.

At the end of the meeting, the minister said he would like to go to Bangladesh on a study tour between October 23 and November 9, along with experts and state officials.

Turkish firm keen to expand digital footprint in Bangladesh

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Turkish telecom firm Netas expressed interest in taking part in building a Digital Bangladesh, to ensure transparency and delivery of government services to all citizens by making best use of technology.

Netas and the Turkish Embassy in Bangladesh jointly organised an event -- ICT Experiences by Netas -- at the Westin Dhaka yesterday, where modern digital technologies were showcased.

Netas is interested in extending support with an integrated security system for Dhaka, by launching different surveillance equipment, said C Mujdat Altay, chief executive of the company.

Altay said they proposed a project -- Dhaka Electronic Security Systems Integration -- where Netas will ensure security of the capital city from a single point by installing hundreds of cameras and analysing security information.

The company also established the same security system in Istanbul in 2007 and has been offering the same services in Tokyo, Sao Paulo and London for the last 20 years.

Omer Aydin, chief marketing officer, said they are well prepared to present smart

government solutions and smart cities in Bangladesh.

Netas has the expertise to secure cricket stadiums smartly for local spectators and secure banks for their clients, Aydin said in a presentation.

The company has been serving Bangladesh for the last 16 years with Bangladesh Telecommunications Company Ltd as its main client, the official said.

Netas helped BTCL build the country's optical network, Aydin said.

The Turkish company also has operations with three other telecom companies in Bangladesh.

It is possible to start the digitisation process only with mobile communication, where mobile and fibre technology needs collaboration, said Imran Ahmad, chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on posts, telecom and ICT ministry.

"I hope Netas will give us the real digitisation experience."

Turkish Ambassador to Bangladesh Devrim Ozturk was also present.

Havelans and Korn from Turkey, Ciena from USA, Mitel and Dragonwave from Canada also shared their latest technological advancements in the field of telecom at yesterday's session.



Iftakher Shafi, senior manager for sales at Hotel Agrabad, and Md Shafiqul Islam, head of marketing and sales at US-Bangla Airlines, pose at the signing of an agreement at the hotel's sales office in Dhaka on Sunday. The companies will provide the clients with a joint airline package programme.

Exports to Japan will hit \$2b by 2018: Tofail

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As a result, all Bangladeshi exports to Japan, save for hand gloves and arms, enjoy duty-free benefits.

In fiscal 2014-15, garment exports to Japan rose 14.02 percent year-on-year to \$652.55 million, partly due to relaxed RoO for Bangladesh knitwear from April this year.

Japan's annual garment sales are about \$40 billion, most of which are from China. The RoO are a set of conditions that determine the source of a product and are important in determination of duties.

Exports will increase further if the Japanese investors set up the factories in the proposed special economic zone for them and ship the products to their country, Ahmed said. The Bangladesh government has agreed to give an SEZ to Japanese investors in Chittagong after many of them expressed interest in shifting their companies from other countries.

Japan has already promised to give \$6 billion in aid for implementing the Matarbari power project in Cox's Bazar district, according to Ahmed. Watanabe said both Bangladesh and Japan have been working to establish the SEZ for Japanese investors. Many Japanese companies are waiting to invest in Bangladesh, he said.

The location of Bangladesh is in a very strategic position, he said, adding that the country has the potential to be the hub for Asean (The Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and South Asia as a result.

"Bangladesh needs strong infrastructure, transportation, power and educated manpower to attract more and more investment from abroad. This is my expectation."

The year 2014 was important for Bangladesh and Japan as both the prime ministers paid a visit to each other's countries, he said. In 2008, Japan introduced a 'China Plus One' policy to reduce its dependence on China and encourage its retailers to look for other suppliers such as Bangladesh, Vietnam and Cambodia.

Garment exports up 3.17pc in Aug

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The country fetched \$5.38 billion in July-August of the current fiscal year which is 4.71 percent higher from the earnings of the same period last year.

Exports of jute and jute goods were worth \$133.39 million, home textile \$103.34 million and leather and leather goods \$196.63 million in the July-August period.

Fruit, vegetable exporters must obey registration rules

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The use of fake PCs and doctoring of such documents by a section of errant exporters were the other reasons behind the EU's rejections.

As per the conditions of registration, exporters will have to grow pest- and disease-free fruits, vegetables and betel leaves through contract farming.

Exporters will also have to get certification from the upazila agriculture officers that the produce collected from the contract growers is free from pest.

The plant health certificates will be issued based on physical inspections by officials of plant quarantine stations.

Faruque asked exporters to select major exportable items and choose zones for safe and pest-free cultivation of the selected fruits and vegetables.

They will also get the necessary support from the agricultural officials, he said.

"We want to ensure production safe food not only for export but also for domestic consumption. So, we will gradually go for zone-based cultivation of fruits and vegetables."

At the programme, a committee consisting of representatives from the DAE and the private sector was formed to chalk down a list in 15 days of the major exportable items

and the zones for their cultivation. DAE Director General Md Hamidur Rahman said his office encourages and trains farmers to grow safe food.

He called upon the exporters to build ties with the farmers, to whom the DAE provides various training on crop production through various projects.

Contract farming and block-based cultivation of selected items will facilitate exporters to get an exportable item in bulk, Rahman added.

SM Jahangir Hossain, president of Bangladesh Fruits, Vegetables and Allied Products Exporter's Association, said the association has

selected 20 spots to grow exportable items through contract farming.

He urged the agriculture ministry to introduce night shifts as well to issue PCs at the airport.

"Sometimes orders come in at the eleventh hour. But the exporters cannot get PCs at that time as the quarantine office issues PCs only during the day."

Misdeclaration will be checked if PCs are issued in two shifts, he added.

The country earned \$153 million last fiscal year from exports of fruits, vegetables, and cut flower and foliage, down 38 percent year-on-year, according to Export Promotion Bureau.

H&M moves to bring higher wages to apparel workers

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Bangladesh increased the monthly minimum wage for the garment workers to Tk 5,300 in November 2013 from Tk 3,000 before.

H&M has a plan to introduce the method for all of its sourcing factories by the end of 2018, which will focus on a well-functioning dialogue between employers and employees for settling disputes, according to a statement from the company.

"The implementation of the method will contribute to sustainable pay structures, more regular wage adjustments and enhanced communication and social dialogue between the management and workers' representatives," the statement said.

Currently, H&M is the largest buyer of Bangladeshi garments, purchasing nearly \$5 billion worth of products a year.

The company has been under pressure along with other retailers to improve factory conditions following the Rana Plaza building collapse in Bangladesh that killed at least 1,127 people, and a nationwide strike by garment workers in Cambodia last year that left three dead.

The company in the statement also said it tested the method in some factories and found good results. "The initial test results are very promising and H&M looks forward to continue the work," the statement said.

H&M said an initiative to train workers for skills development in Bangladesh taken in 2013, in collaboration with the International Labour Organisation and Swedish International Development Agency, is showing promising results.

The progress for H&M's Social Dialogue Programme in Bangladesh continues, the statement said.

The aim of social dialogues is that the workforce has democratically elected and effective worker participatory committees that can lead to the establishment of trade unions able to negotiate in areas such as wages.

The goal is that 100 percent of all factories in Bangladesh which produce for H&M will be covered by the programme.

"A lot of the riots and unrest we have seen in countries like Cambodia and Bangladesh are connected to the issue of wages," Bloomberg quoted Anna Gedda, H&M's head of sustainability, as saying.

"If we can address the issue of wages and industrial relations, it will lead to more stable production markets," Gedda said.

H&M tested the method in three factories across Cambodia and Bangladesh in 2014. Absenteeism fell in the Cambodia factory, while the retention rate increased, Gedda said.

It remains to be seen whether higher wages will affect the company's purchasing prices and profit margins, she said.

The clothes H&M gets from Asia are often priced in dollars. In June, the company reported second-quarter profitability at its lowest level in nine years after a strong dollar led to higher garment costs, according to Bloomberg.

"It's not just about productivity and prices," Gedda said. "It's about creating an environment that is sustainable and can promote a textile industry."



Shahid Hamid, executive director of Dhaka Regency Hotel and Resort, receives the PATA Next Generation Engagement Award-2015 from Kevin Murphy, chairman PATA Pacific Asia Travel Association, at an event in Bangalore, India on Saturday.



Farasath Ali, chairman of NRB Commercial Bank, opens the bank's 33rd branch at Harirampur in Uttara, Dhaka yesterday.



MA Rouf, vice chairman of Mutual Trust Bank; Anis A Khan, managing director; Anjan Chowdhury, a director; Anisuzzaman, professor emeritus at Dhaka University; and Raquibuddin Ahmed, president of Dhaka University Alumni Association, pose with the recipients of the MTB DUAA Samson H Chowdhury Campus Journalism Awards 2015 at Nabab Nawab Ali Chowdhury Senate Bhaban on the university campus.