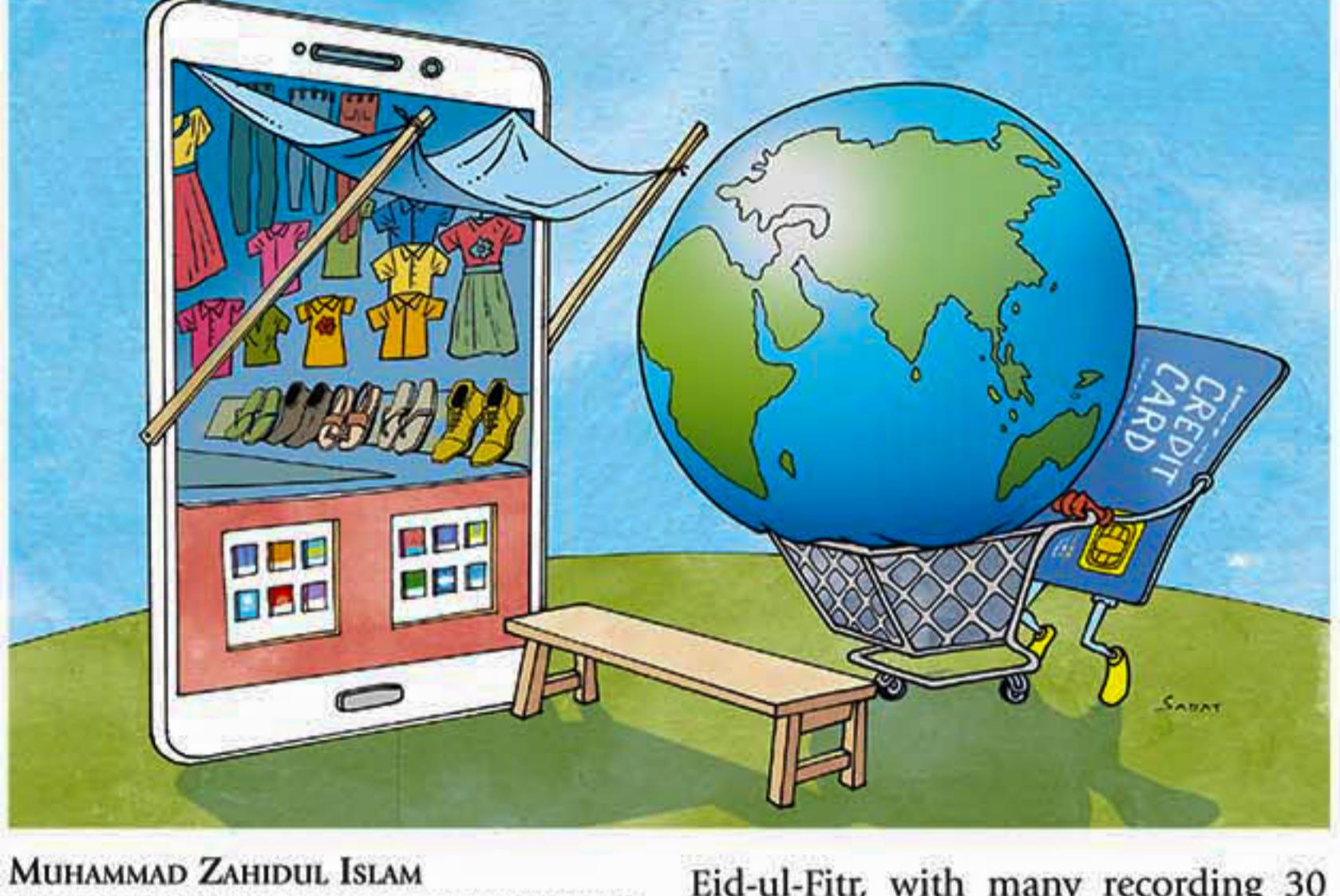


BUSINESS

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Shoppers go digital to beat Eid traffic



MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL ISLAM

The growing demand from rural parts of the country and unbearable traffic in the capital have turned out to be a boon for e-commerce sites ahead of

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Eid-ul-Fitr, with many recording 30 percent higher orders than last Eid.

The improvements in the delivery system and accessibility of internet across the country have also worked in the e-tailers' favour.

"We are processing almost double the orders than last Eid-ul-Fitr," said Biplob G. Rahul, chief executive officer of eCourier, an e-commerce product delivery service company.

The company has been processing more than 10,000 orders a day since last week and Rahul expects the order volume to stay this way until the 25th of Ramadan.

And to maintain the momentum, the company has introduced same day delivery service in Dhaka, capitalising on the staggering traffic congestion.

Though eCourier mostly delivers in cities, its orders from rural parts have soared too.

"Customers in rural parts have very limited shopping options, so e-commerce sites with their variety have been godsend for them," said AKM Fahim Mashroor, CEO of Ajakerdeal.

Of the site's total orders this Ramadan, 75 percent are from outside the city, up from 50 percent last year, he said.

Ajakerdeal is now using postal channels for delivering products to rural areas, so people in villages can also purchase products from them, said Mashroor, also a director of Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS).

Currently ajakerdeal is delivering 30 percent of their orders through the post offices and this delivery option was not available even just a year ago.

Mashroor expects the share of orders from rural parts to edge up to 80 percent next Eid-ul-Fitr.

READ MORE ON B3

Tribute to a social warrior

Eminent economists eulogise Muzaffer Ahmad



National Professor Anisuzzaman, third from right, economists Prof Rehman Sobhan, extreme right, and Prof Wahiduddin Mahmud, extreme left, and Prof Muzaffer Ahmad's spouse Rowshan Jahan, second from right, attend a memorial lecture on Ahmad at the MIDAS Centre in Dhaka yesterday.

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The downfall of a society begins when people lose the will to protest the injustices transpiring in front of their eyes. And the number of such individuals who fight for the betterment of the society and the lives of people is declining.

This view was shared by eminent citizens at a memorial lecture on Muzaffer Ahmad yesterday.

"He did not shy away from protesting wrongs. If there was no one with him, he would stand up alone to

protest. That was why he was a well-accepted personality," said Khondkar Ibrahim Khaled, a former deputy governor of the Bangladesh Bank, while recalling Ahmad at an event held at the MIDAS Centre in Dhaka.

Eminent economists Rehman Sobhan, Wahiduddin Mahmud and Anisuzzaman, and Ahmad's wife Rowshan Jahan were present at the event, where Atiur Rahman, former BB governor, gave a memorial lecture on Ahmad, who died seven years ago.

Born in Kolkata on March 27, 1936, Ahmad joined the Dhaka University's

department of economics after completing his PhD from the University of Chicago. But he left the job in 1967 protesting the tyrant Ayub Khan's follower's attack on a lecturer, Rahman said.

He returned to Dhaka University as director of the Institute of Business Administration.

Ahmad was not just a teacher but also a social thinker and worker: he led various civic rights campaigns, ranging from saving the environment and the Buriganga river to fighting corruption and ensuring good governance.

READ MORE ON B3

HK businesses keen to invest in Bangladesh

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

A 24-member business delegation from Hong Kong recently visited Bangladesh to get to know firsthand of investment opportunities as part of efforts under China's Belt and Road Initiative.

The delegation from the Chinese Manufacturers' Association (CMA) of Hong Kong visited Bangladesh at the invitation of Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA) from May 23 to 25.

The BIDA organised a seminar and business matchmaking session between Bangladeshi companies and the delegation at the InterContinental Dhaka hotel yesterday in order to foster strong economic ties between Hong Kong and Bangladesh.

"Given the strength of Hong Kong and the potential of Bangladesh, there are many opportunities that will open up from this trip," said BIDA Executive Chairman Kazi M. Aminul Islam while addressing the event.

"Beyond manufacturing and export, Bangladesh has great opportunities in its domestic market, which will fully flourish within a few years," said Dennis WP Ng, president of the CMA of Hong Kong who led the delegation.

"While visiting Chinese-owned Unimas Sportswear factory in Gazipur, we realised that Bangladesh has talented workers who are really focused on their duties. There are Hong Kong journalists travelling with us because we want them to tell the story of Bangladesh," he said.

The delegation met Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen and interacted with representatives from Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority, Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority and Bangladesh Hi-Tech Park Authority.

Tommy Lee, chief operating officer of the China Economic and Industrial Zone Project in Anowara, Chattogram, gave a presentation on business opportunities for Chinese investors in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh has highest number of green garment factories

10 more receive platinum rating from US organisation

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Ten more garment factories received the top billing from the United States Green Building Council (USGBC) to take the total to 24, the highest in the world, in a heartening development for Bangladesh's apparel sector, whose image has been battered by incidents of industrial accidents.

Of the 24 platinum-rated LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) factories in Bangladesh, six are amongst the top 10 in the world.

"In every consideration, Bangladesh has the highest number of green garment factories in the world," said the USGBC.

Overall, the total number of LEED-certified garment factories in Bangladesh is 90, including the 24 platinum rated buildings, according to the USGBC.

Although the buyers do not pay any extra money for green buildings, such initiative helps a lot in branding of the country or the company, said Mohiuddin Rubel, representative of Bangladesh at the USGBC's chief executive officer's advisory council.

The move towards green buildings

COMPANIES TO GET GREEN CERTIFICATES

UHM Ltd
Saiham Tower
Designer Fashion Ltd
Mithela Textile Industries Ltd
Tosrifa Industries Ltd (fabric division)
Genesis Washing Ltd
AR Jeans Producer Ltd
BIFFL corporate office
SSG Fan Factory
Green Textile Ltd (unit 3)
Pioneer Denim Ltd
Kenpark 2
The Civil Engineers Ltd (woven and unit 2)

helped in recovering Bangladesh's image after the Rana Plaza building collapse in April 2013, which killed 1,134 and injured more than 2,000.

Not only branding, green technology also helps to cut down on energy usage by 40 percent and water consumption by more than 30 percent.

"Among many benefits, green

buildings mean less carbon emission. As a result, our environment is saved."

Green buildings also ensure a safe workplace for workers as the factory owners have to follow certain rules for construction of the buildings, said Rubel, also a director of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

Faruque Hassan, managing director of Giant Group, whose building is one of the 13 to receive platinum certification from the USGBC at an event in Dhaka tomorrow, said he spent nearly Tk 200 crore for construction of the factory at Maona in Gazipur.

"The buyers should pay extra for green initiative as we have spent money to conserve the environment," he told The Daily Star by phone.

Some 15 buildings may get the LEED certification from the USGBC soon as they are nearing their completion of processes.

More than 250 garment factories also applied for the LEED certification from the USGBC, according to industry insiders.

Apart from the platinum rating, the USGBC gives gold and silver rating and green certification to garment factories.

Ctg customs badly understaffed

Export-import activities hampered

MOHAMMAD SUMAN, Ctg

Most officials at Customs House Chattogram are not only performing their designated duties but also filling in for vacant posts for an acute shortage of workforce.

This in turn is inevitably hampering the supervision of tax evaluation and monitoring of goods meant for import and export while exporters and importers are suffering for the resulting delays in the shipment of goods.

According to customs sources, 651 people are working at the customs house against 1,248 posts.

There are 126 first class officers against 210 posts, 277 second class officers against 497 posts, 152 grade three employees against 423 posts, and 103 grade four employees against 118 posts.

Twenty-seven assistant commissioners and deputy commissioners, responsible for evaluating taxes of imported goods apart from monitoring export and import consignments, are working against 63 posts.

One official is even overseeing six sections and sub-teams. Assistant Commissioner Mahbubur Rahman is assigned to six sections, namely the assessment section-4 and those on prevention, administration, law, licensing and anti-money laundering.

Fatema Khairun Nur, a deputy commissioner, is assigned to a number of sections and has to discharge duties at five private inland container depots (ICDs).

"Regular supervision of import-export goods is being hampered because of the workforce shortage," said Kazi Mustafizur Rahman, commissioner of Customs House Chattogram.

He said almost all officers have to perform additional duties and sometimes they can not scrutinise invoice documents and test products properly.

"If we get an adequate workforce, we will be able to put extra focus on the consignments of goods of importers and clearing and forwarding agents, who were earlier found trying to evade tax," he said.

In the last five years, the import-export of Bangladesh has nearly doubled but the size of the workforce has remained less than half of that required.

The situation has worsened since July 2017 when the government ordered to keep customs activities open round the clock all the while with no additional workforce being appointed, sources said.

Mahbub Alam, president of the Chittagong Chamber of Commerce & Industry (CCCI), said businesspeople have to bear the extra expenses incurred for delays in the delivery of goods.

"We wrote to the National Board of Revenue and other departments concerned several times requesting them to increase the number of officials at the customs house but to no avail," he said.

READ MORE ON B3

BEA for Tk 12.4 lakh crore budget

Presents alternative budget, advises govt to target the rich, money launderers

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Bangladesh Economic Association (BEA) yesterday placed an alternative budget of Tk 1,240,090 crore for 2019-20, more than twice the size of the outlay Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal is expected to unveil.

Kamal may propose a budget of Tk 525,000 crore for the upcoming fiscal year in parliament on June 13.

"Our alternative budget proposal is implementable though some may call us mad," said Prof Abul Barkat, president of the BEA, at a press conference at the CIRDAP conference hall in Dhaka.

"If I were the finance minister, I would propose such a big budget unless I am barred from doing so," he said.

The BEA's proposed budget gave priority on development expenditure, instead of non-development spending. It favoured allocating 57 percent of the resources for development expenditure.

To finance the alternative budget, the



Prof Abul Barkat, president of Bangladesh Economic Association, places an "Alternative Budget Recommendation 2019-20" at a press conference organised by the association at the CIRDAP conference hall in Dhaka yesterday.

contribute Tk 671,560 crore.

The association said the rich do not pay taxes properly. It recommended collecting more revenue from them through direct tax instead of indirect ones.

It said there are about 50,000 people in the country who have the ability to pay Tk 1 crore in taxes every year, whereas only 100-150 people are paying such amount of tax at the moment.

The BEA, the apex body of the country's economists, suggested identifying people with taxable income and collecting tax through running a tax census.

The association identified 20 areas that usually do not generate revenue but have the potential to do so.

It suggested increasing tax on foreigners, fees on foreign advisers, wealth tax, licence renewal fee for pharmaceuticals, and service delivery and tolls.