



Workers at a knitwear factory in Kochashahar union of Gobindaganj upazila.

PHOTO: STAR

Kochashahar knitwear factories seek govt support for export

KM REZAUL HOQUE, Gaibandha

After meeting winter clothing needs of the country's low and limited-income groups, knitwear factories in Kochashahar union of Gobindaganj upazila are now looking to export their goods overseas.

Started by a handful of entrepreneurs about two decades ago, the knitwear industry has become the primary source of income for almost every household in the union. Over the years, knitwear and hosiery factories spread to nearby areas -- Mahimaganj, Shalmar and Shibpur unions and neighbouring upazila of Shibganj in Bogura.

Various types of low-priced warm clothing -- sweater, cardigan, socks, gloves and muffler -- for all ages are now being made in the region. Nayarhat in Kochashahar has turned into a wholesale trading hub where buyers

from all over the country have been flocking before the winter.

According to industry insiders, the small knitting units in the region can produce around ten thousand pieces of clothing each year and the larger ones produce around one lakh pieces a year.

During a visit to the area, the knitting factories were seen busy making goods ahead of the upcoming winter season. Vendors from different districts were also found collecting goods from the wholesale market while many were placing their orders with the manufacturers.

Depending on quality, wholesale price of a regular sweater ranges from Tk 200 to Tk 600, cardigan Tk 300 to Tk 600 and muffler Tk 50 to Tk 100, they added.

Jahurul Islam, who works as a technician at one such factory, said more than five

thousand people now make a living by working at the factories and many of their family members are also doing knitwear-related work.

Shahadul Islam, owner of Rasel Fashion Industries in Nayarhat area, however, said the industry is gripped by numerous problems.

High rates of tax and duties to import yarn from India, Thailand, China and Indonesia are among the main problems, he added.

Absence of online banking services and poor road condition in the industrial area are among other major setbacks, said another factory owner Khaja Mia.

Time-consuming procedures and strict collateral requisites set by banks for issuing loans to business owners are compelling many owners to borrow money at high

interest rates from local loan sharks, said Taslim Uddin, a wholesaler at Nayarhat market. He also said the industry also suffers heavy losses for loss of production due to frequent power outage, from eight to ten hours, during summer time.

Many of the owners said if the government took necessary measures to resolve the problems and set up a training facility for knit workers in the area, they would soon be able to earn foreign exchange from export after meeting local demands.

Contacted, Gobindaganj Upazila Nirbahi Officer Ramkrishna Barman said Tk 300 crore worth of winter clothing is expected to be sold in the country this year and a training facility for knit workers and technicians in Nayarhat would be built by the government.

Kids' lessons suffer as 2 remote schools lack teachers

SAIKAT DEWAN, Khagrachhari

Classes in two primary schools in Panchhari upazila of Khagrachhari are badly hampered as they are running with only one regular teacher for each.

The two schools, Rathindrapara Government Primary School and Tokkhiroypara Government Primary School were set up in fiscal year 2015-16 under the government's "Establishment of 1,500 primary schools" project across the country.

Teachers posted to the two schools do not stick around for long as they are located in remote areas, said the stakeholders.

Rathindrapara Government Primary School is situated about 10 kilometres off the upazila headquarters.

To reach the school, students of surrounding villages need to cross two canals. The journey becomes more troublesome in monsoon, said guardians.

Nazrul Islam continued to serve as the one teacher of the school with 44 students after the other teacher who was posted temporarily left in July.

"Afterwards, the management committee appointed a contractual teacher but we two are too inadequate to run the school," said Nazrul.

"Teachers are not interested to continue here as most of them are temporary and do not live nearby. Often they manage to cancel the postings. As classes are not held regularly, guardians tend to admit their children elsewhere," said Arun Bikash Tripura, management committee president of the school in ward 6 of Ultachhari union.

Sujit Mitra Chakma, primary education officer of Panchhari upazila, echoed his statements.

According to his office, there are four primary schools in the upazila under the "Establishment of 1,500 primary schools" project. There are four posts for teachers in each school.

Tokkhiroypara Government Primary School in the same upazila is running with Dipen Chakma as the lone teacher and 31 students.

Dipen, serving there for the last two years, lives at Fuzgang of the upazila.

"I am losing interest to continue here. I have to take a motorbike ride for half an hour and then walk for two hours to reach the school. It becomes very taxing to make such a journey twice daily and take classes six days every week," he said.

Soukhin Tripura shifted his son, who is in grade III, from the school in January because according to him the classes were not being held regularly.

The Khagrachhari Hill District Council invited applications in 2017 to appoint teachers but is yet to hold the recruitment tests. In August and September, the authorities cancelled two dates showing "unavoidable reasons."

Contacted, Khagrachhari District Primary Education Officer Fatema Meher Yasmin said she was not aware that the schools are running with one teacher each.

"There are 14 schools running under the project in this district. These schools were opened with teachers posted on attachment. The problem will be solved once teachers are appointed permanently upon completion of the recruitment process," she said.



Nilphamari Roads and Highways Department (RHD) in an eviction drive on Saturday knocked down illegal structures beside Nilphamari-Domar regional highway in Sadar upazila.

PHOTO: STAR

500 illegal structures knocked down

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

Nilphamari Roads and Highways Department (RHD) in an eviction drive knocked down around 500 illegal structures from both sides of Nilphamari-Domar regional highway in the last two days.

Estate and Law Officer of RHD Mahbubur Rahman led the eviction drive.

The assistant commissioners (land) of Domar and Sadar upazilas, Nilphamari RHD executive engineer and officer of power development board were present along with policemen during the drive in Sadar upazila.

Executive Engineer Muhammad Monzurul Karim said RHD undertook a project involving Tk 206 crore to widen and strengthen the road.

Locality, school under threat as embankment collapses

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

An ancient neighbourhood of ethnic Marma community along with Amtali Para Government Primary School in Bandarban Sadar upazila is under threat of erosion by the Sualok canal as an embankment built with concrete blocks in June this year has started collapsing.

"We are living amid fear as the erosion has taken a serious turn," said Aung Kyaw Ching Marma, 50, a resident of Amtali Marma Para.

Around 130 families live in the

neighbourhood, said Cha Ba Thui Marma, a local journalist hailing from the area.

Amtali Para Government Primary School, currently enrolling 127 students, is now under serious threat of erosion, said Mong Hla Marma, headmaster of the school.

Locals alleged that the contractor, who is a ruling party man, used sub-standard materials in the embankment by managing the engineer of Local Government and Engineering Department (LGED).

Contacted, Jamal Uddin, Sadar upazila engineer of LGED, denied the allegation and said "We directed the contractor to repair the damaged parts. We implemented the project in June this year at a cost of around Tk 1.52 crore."

The contractor, Nazmul Bhuiyan, former president of Chhatra League's Bandarban College unit, said, "The concrete blocks subsided due to incessant rain. I have already started work to repair the collapsed portion of the embankment."

Abducted 10th grader traceless for week

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A 10th grader girl, abducted from Baherchar area under Rangabali upazila of Patuakhali on October 26, is yet to be rescued.

The victim, 16, is a Class X student of Rangabali Model High School.

A jobless youth named Boni Amin continued stalking her on the way to school, despite her rejection, said the

girl's father.

"Around 9:15am on October 26 when my daughter was going to her school from home, a 10 to 11 member-gang led by Boni Amin waylaid her. They forcibly took her on a motorbike, gagged her and left the place," said the father.

He filed a case with Rangabali Police Station and later police arrested an

accused named Sakon Pyada.

"We raised the issue with the guardians of stalkers but they didn't listen. We are worried as police failed to rescue my daughter in a week," said the girl's father.

Contacted, Md Ali Ahmed, officer in charge of Rangabali Police Station, said they are trying best to rescue the victim.

Conspirators

FROM PAGE 2

After the killing of August 15, Hasina mentioned, it was said that the move was to annihilate one family. "But after the November 3 killings it got clear that the killings were political, and the anti-liberation forces did that to take revenge as Bangladesh achieved independence."

Paying her tributes to the four national leaders, the prime minister said such barbaric killing of leaders inside the central jail was rare in world history.

She said Bangabandhu prepared the nation for the War of Liberation, paving the path for independence and the four national leaders took that path to liberate the country.

She said, "The jail killing was revenge by the anti-liberation forces on the national leaders for their uncompromising leadership in the War of Liberation."

"Bangladesh has passed a long way of bloodshed. The architect of the independence was killed along with the key persons of the War of Liberation. The gruesome murders were followed by indiscriminate killing of many armed forces officers, Awami League leaders and workers and common people."

Awami League leaders Amir Hossain Amu, Tofail Ahmed, Mohammad Nasim, Abdul Matin Khasru, Sahara Khatun, Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya, Mahbubul Alam Hanif, Jahangir Kabir Nanak, Barrister Mohibul Hasan Chowdhury Nowfel, Anwar Hossain, AKM Rahmatullah, Sadeq Khan and Shahe Alam Murad and writer and journalist Anisul Huq also spoke at the event.

Economy under stress

FROM PAGE 1

of payments pose major challenges to macroeconomic stability.

The think tank also questioned the country's eight percent plus GDP growth, saying it came without a proportionate rise in private sector investments.

"The ratio of private investment to GDP has been hovering around 23 percent for the last few years. But the GDP growth gradually increased to eight percent from five to six," Debapriya Bhattacharya, distinguished fellow of the CPD, said.

The GDP growth declared by the government did not match the information available, he said.

Pointing to the problems, he said private sector credit growth had plummeted to 10 percent in August due to a liquidity crunch in the banking sector.

The import of capital machinery had also registered a negative growth in the recent months, he said.

"The capital market has been facing a big crisis in the recent months, at a time when revenue mobilisation has also fallen."

There has been a question of how the high GDP was achieved despite the problems faced by the economy, the economist said.

Criticising the government is not CPD's motive, rather it is to help the government implement the fiscal budget, he said.

Debapriya also said the financial sector is yet to see any reforms. The government was trying to resolve the crisis by giving incentives.

"An addition to incentives has been created inside the economy," he said, adding that the government's capacity to offer incentives would weaken if the trend continued.

The global economy is going towards a structural recession and only reforms in the financial sector will protect Bangladesh from the upcoming depression, he said.

Debapriya also said the steps being taken to deal with financial crimes may not be enough.

The government is conducting raids at casinos in order to stop corruption, but there was a limitation here, he said, adding that those investing in casinos were involved in dodging taxes, money-laundering and siphoning off money from banks.

Only reform programmes in the financial sector can stop such corruption, he said, adding political decision from the highest level of the government was needed for those.

But a vested interest has created a barrier to reforming the economy as they were benefiting from the fragility in the financial system.

On the banking sector, CPD Executive Director Fahmida Khatun said increasing

non-performing loans (NPLs) were eroding people's confidence in the banking sector.

The NPLs stood at Tk 112,430 crore, which was 11.69 percent of total loans, as of June this year. Quoting the International Monetary Fund's recent report, she said such stressed assets of the banking sector would be more than Tk 2 lakh if written-off loans and the amount pending with the court cases are taken into account.

Besides, low interest rates are putting off depositors. The interest rate on deposits is almost zero percent if adjusted for inflation, she said.

The situation has arisen from the decision to cap interest rate on deposits at 6 percent, she said.

The inflation rate was 5.54 percent in September.

Fahmida also expressed concern about the deteriorating conditions of the private banks, similar to those of state banks.

The central bank has recently taken some policy measures, which had an adverse impact on the banking sector and is hampering its progress as well, she said.

The existing GDP growth will not continue in the medium term if the crisis in banking sector persists, the economist said.

Identifying another area of concern, Mustafizur Rahman, another CPD fellow, said the country's foreign exchange reserve to cover

the import bills had been declining for the last few months, which was not a good sign.

Besides, the overall balance in the external sector stood at \$12 million, much lower than \$5,459 million target set by the seventh five-years plan.

Bangladesh is falling behind its major competitors in the key market of the US, he said.

The country's export growth in the US in the first two months of the fiscal year was 3.1 percent, whereas Cambodia posted a growth of 8.20 percent, China 4.90 percent, Turkey 10.30 percent and Vietnam 11.70 percent. The government should take steps to strengthen the capacity of exporters by depreciating local currency, Rahman said.

Towfiqul Islam Khan, a senior research fellow at the CPD, said that the growth in revenue collection in the first quarter of the fiscal year was one of the lowest in the decade.

The NBR set a revenue collection of Tk 325,600 crore, up 45 percent from a year ago. But, it faced a shortfall of Tk 14,906.80 crore from its desired target for the first quarter of FY2020, he said.

The government should change its stance to offer tax rebates, he said.

Its borrowing from the banking sector will increase significantly if revenue mobilisation cannot be increased as expected, he added.