

PM for research to boost SME sector

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday stressed the need for carrying out research on demand, production, and marketing to develop the small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

“Research is urgently needed. Through research, we can determine the demand, production and marketing of a product. We have to do it and we will do it,” she said.

The PM was addressing a programme marking the inauguration of the 8th National SME Product Fair 2020 at the capital’s Krishibid Institution Bangladesh.

The SME Foundation has organised the nine-day fair at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre to promote SME products and bring the local SMEs under a single roof.

Hasina said researchers have to find out the solution to meet the demand for raw materials of SMEs. “We have to ensure the source and supply of raw materials locally. We have to look for the method to produce all these raw materials in our country.”

She said the demand for products is the other thing which should be given importance during the research work. “We have to understand the demand of buyers. We have to find which products they want and from which areas.”

The PM said the government was taking up various initiatives to increase the people’s purchase capacity aiming to expand the domestic market for local products.

Hasina said highest importance should be given to the food processing industries.

“Because, the demand for food will surely increase in the world. On the other hand, the more economic

solvency will be achieved by the people, the demand for processed foods and nutrition enriched foods would grow further. So, we have to focus on this sector.”

The PM said many SME products were of world standard and the cultural heritage of the country was also associated with those.

She hoped that Bangladesh would be able to keep pace with the 4th Industrial Revolution by ensuring better coordination among the digital, biological and physical innovations.

Hasina said educated youths get employed through the SME Foundation and thereby poverty is reduced which in turn ensures prosperity of the country.

She said the government was developing youths as skilled and trained manpower and none could term Bangladesh a country of cheap labours any more.

The PM urged the youths not to look for jobs. She said they should rather start doing business taking loans from banks.

Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Industries Amir Hossain Amu, Industries Secretary Abdul Halim and SME Foundation MD Safiqul Islam, among others, spoke at the programme, chaired by Industries Minister Nurul Majid Mahmud Humayun.

Hasina handed the National SME Entrepreneurs Award-2020 to two female and three male entrepreneurs. Each winner received Tk 100,000, a trophy, and a certificate.

A total of 296 SME entrepreneurs, including 195 women, are exhibiting their products at the fair, which will remain open to visitors from 10:00am to 8:00pm every day until March 12. There is no entry fee.



An Indian Pangolin is being tied with a rope by villagers at Nalua tea estate in Habiganj's Chunarughat upazila yesterday. People also beat up the shy, but very slow, mammal that only eats insects. Due to poaching and hunting, the population of the Indian Pangolin is endangered across the world. Thankfully, the one seen here was rescued and provided with primary treatment before it was released in Satchari National Park in Habiganj.

PHOTO: MINTU DESHWARA

Why the judge was removed

FROM PAGE 1

The bench of Justice Tariq ul Hakim and Justice Md Iqbal Kabir came up with the suo moto rule after newspapers published reports on the law ministry’s decision.

Eunus Ali Akond, a Supreme Court lawyer, placed the reports published by The Daily Star, Bangla dailies Prothom Alo, and Kaler Kantho before the HC bench for necessary orders.

The lawyer told the court that the government decision about Judge Mannan was an interference in the independence of the judiciary and contradicted the spirit of the separation of the judiciary.

The bench also fixed March 11 for hearing the rule, Eunus told this newspaper.

On Tuesday, the court of Judge Mannan ordered the authorities to send Awal and his wife to jail rejecting their bail prayers in three graft cases filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission last year.

The ex-MP of Pirojpur-1, also president of the district AL, is accused in all three cases filed for obtaining lease of khas (government) land using fake documents.

His wife is accused in one of the cases.

Judge Mannan passed the order when Awal and his wife appeared before it with bail prayers. Hours after the bail rejection, Judge Mannan was stand released and attached to the law ministry.

Joint District and Sessions Judge Nahid Nasrin, who has been given the responsibility of the acting district and sessions judge of Pirojpur, granted them bail later in the day after the couple moved a review petition, reports our Pirojpur correspondent, quoting Awal’s lawyer Shahidul Haque Khan Panna.

Meanwhile, Supreme Court Bar Association Secretary AM Mahbub Uddin Khokon yesterday demanded resignation of Law Minister Anisul Huq and ACC Chairman Iqbal Mahmud over the incident.

At a press briefing at the SCBA auditorium, Mahbub, also a BNP joint secretary general, said the law minister “transferred Judge Mannan to ensure bail of former MP Awal”.

The incident has eroded people’s faith in the judiciary and damaged its image, he said.

He added that it appeared that a person could secure bail and their bail could be cancelled through the court on the government’s directives.

Mahbub demanded the authorities investigate the incident of granting

bail to Awal.

Contacted, Law Minister Anisul Huq told this correspondent that he had no involvement in the incident.

“He [Mahbub Uddin Khokon] has made the illogical demand of my resignation on false information,” he added.

Later at a press conference at his secretariat office, he gave an explanation of the government decision to stand release Judge Mannan.

He said the judge was withdrawn to bring under control the situation that developed over seeking bail by Awal and his wife.

“Judge Abdul Mannan was insolent and rude towards lawyers of Awal and Pirojpur Bar Association. The association lawyers decided to boycott the court, and people took to the streets. The judge has been withdrawn to bring the situation under control,” Anisul said.

He said rejecting the bail petition of an accused is the discretion of the court. “But if the court behaves in such a manner and creates such a situation that the law and order and upholding of the rule of law come under question, then a step has to be taken. Under such circumstances, the step has been taken. There was no violation of law,” the minister added.

He mentioned that the HC granted ad-interim bail to Awal and his wife, and the SC dismissed the appeals against the HC orders of bail.

In another development, Awal yesterday alleged that being influenced by SM Rezaul Karim, Pirojpur-1 lawmaker and also fisheries and livestock minister, Judge Mannan “illegally rejected their bail prayers”.

At a press briefing in Pirojpur, he also alleged that the ACC had filed the cases being influenced by Rezaul.

Contacted, Rezaul told this newspaper that the allegations brought against him were completely false.

Meanwhile, Transparency International Bangladesh yesterday expressed concern over the stand release of Judge Mannan and the couple getting bail from the acting judge hours later.

It considered the incident rare in the history of the country’s judiciary, said a press release.

TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman yesterday said the incident would further strengthen vested interest groups who want to establish the culture of impunity.

He urged the government and political leaders to shun such paths and take steps to make the judiciary truly independent.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina looking at exhibits displayed at a fair of small and medium enterprise foundation in the capital's Krishibid institution yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

Emergency response plan ready: govt

FROM PAGE 1

Experts say Bangladesh also faces risks of coronavirus spread as many other countries in the region have already reported such cases. They pointed out that people from those countries were travelling to Bangladesh, where preparations to tackle the virus seem inadequate.

In another development, the US State Department on Tuesday put Bangladesh and 24 other countries in a list of “high-priority countries” in the coronavirus fallout. It also announced a commitment of \$37 million to help those countries address the threat of COVID-19 (coronavirus), according to its website.

The countries include Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kenya, South Africa, Indonesia, Iraq, the Philippines, and Zambia.

At a press conference in Keraniganj, on the outskirts of the capital, yesterday, Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Li Jiming also said Bangladesh was facing risks of the spread of the virus.

He claimed that only Chinese people were being screened at airports here, although “95 percent” of the new coronavirus cases were being detected outside China.

According to the World Health Organisation, more cases are being detected outside China, notably in Italy, Iran, South Korea and Japan.

“Screening only Chinese people to prevent the spread of coronavirus is unscientific,” Li Jiming said at the briefing, organised by China Railway Group Limited at Jinjira. China Railway Group Limited and its subsidiaries are implementing the Padma Multipurpose Bridge Project and the Padma Bridge Rail Link Project.

Replying to a question, he said, “We are not quite satisfied with Bangladesh policies [over the coronavirus issue].”

But airport sources said people coming from several other countries, including Iran and Japan, also face similar screening at the airports.

One official at Hazrat Shahjalal

International Airport, however, said they have only one thermal scanner and several hand-held infrared thermometers to detect any possible case.

Talking about measures to tackle the virus, Li Jiming suggested avoiding gatherings and ensuring a mechanism at all international ports to screen all inbound passengers.

He also urged the Bangladeshi authorities to reconsider a decision of cancelling on-arrival visas for Chinese nationals as the “situation has changed a lot”. He also requested them not to impose any restrictions on the Chinese tourists.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh has extended its on-arrival visa restrictions to inbound passengers from Italy, South Korea, Iran and Japan. On February 2, similar restrictions were put in place for Chinese nationals, said the IEDCR.

“No passenger from these countries should be allowed to enter Bangladesh without health clearance from the authorities in those countries,” Prof Meerjady Sabrina Flora, director at the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), told journalists yesterday at a regular briefing at her office.

So far, seven Bangladeshis -- five in Singapore, one in Italy and one in the UAE -- have been found to be detected with the virus. Three of those in Singapore, however, have already been cured.

In the latest development, Iran has confirmed 2,336 cases of novel coronavirus with 77 deaths, while the number of cases is 2,502 in Italy with 79 deaths, 293 in Japan with 12 deaths and 5,621 in South Korea with 33 deaths.

With its epicentre in China’s Wuhan, COVID-19 has already left at least 3,217 people dead. The infection has already spread to 81 countries. The WHO has raised its global alert level to very high for all countries.

The mortality rate in novel coronavirus is 2.3 percent, according

to Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

Asked whether there was any inadequacy in measures taken to prevent the virus from entering Bangladesh, government officials claimed their preparations were better than those in many other countries.

They, however, said they were taking further preparations in this regard.

FOUR-LEVEL EMERGENCY PLAN

Prof Abul Kalam Azad admitted that Bangladesh was at risk, but maintained that good preparations were in place.

Talking about the four-level emergency plan with this correspondent, he said the emergency level for Bangladesh is one. If the situation deteriorates and the country has 10 confirmed coronavirus cases involving people travelling from abroad, the level would be raised to two.

In that situation, all the coronavirus patients would be isolated and treated in hospitals.

The emergency level-3 means the number of confirmed cases is more than 10 with some of them infected within the country. If that is the case, the DGHS DG said, the government would lock down certain areas, where infections would be reported.

Talking about level-4, he said it would come if the situation turned into an epidemic.

“In such a condition, local administrations would lock down more areas having high number of patients and quarantine the suspected cases,” he told The Daily Star.

Also, local schools and public institutions, including schools and colleges, would be used as quarantine centres, while the isolation units of the hospitals would handle severe cases.

Prof Azad said it was not necessary to admit all patients to hospitals as 82 percent cases are mild and could be treated at home.

He said the government has already formed a 31-member high-

Kuwait restricts entry of people from Bangladesh, 9 other countries

STAR REPORT

In a bid to control the spread of coronavirus, the Gulf country Kuwait has restricted entry of people from 10 countries including Bangladesh and India, according to both Gulf News and Khaleej Times.

The country’s civil aviation authorities decided to impose the restrictions yesterday and said anyone who wants entry must produce certificates issued by the Kuwait embassy in their country saying they are coronavirus free.

With 56 reported cases, Kuwait has the highest number of reported coronavirus infections in the Middle East after Iran.

In a statement on Twitter, the aviation authority warned that passengers who do not provide the certificates will not be allowed into Kuwait.

The procedure will be put in place from March 8, reports Gulf News.

level committee, comprised of representatives from local and global organisations and led by the health minister, to determine the emergency levels.

Also, 10-member district level committees, led by deputy commissioners, and 10-member upazila level committees, led by upazila nirbahi officers, have also been formed to implement the plan in case of emergency, he added.

Prof Muzaharul Huq, founder of Public Health Foundation of Bangladesh, welcomed the government move, but said the most important thing would be to raise public awareness. “The government should be more transparent in this regard.”

He suggested that the government inform people about all its plans immediately so that they could prepare themselves for all situations.

He alleged that the current isolation facilities at hospitals were faulty, posing risks of infection transmission.

“We need a massive emergency preparation. Even a single infection may pose a massive danger to the country,” added Prof Huq, also a former regional adviser for the WHO.

SPEDY RESPONSE NEEDED

In a statement yesterday, Dr Khetrpal Singh, regional director of the WHO South-East Asia Region, suggested the countries in the region be ready to roll out speedy response to the “first case, first cluster, and first evidences of community transmission”.

He said there were three priorities for country readiness -- protecting health workers, engaging with communities and empowering them with timely and accurate information to enable them take protective measures, especially those at highest risk.

Five of the 11 countries in the region have confirmed COVID-19 cases -- Thailand 43, India 28, Indonesia 2 and Sri Lanka and Nepal one each, the statement added.

BNP questions independence of judiciary

UNB, Dhaka

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir yesterday questioned the independence of the judiciary after a former ruling party MP and his wife were granted bail hours after they had been ordered to be sent to jail in Pirojpur.

“The Pirojpur incident has exposed that the government is controlling the judiciary,” he said.

The BNP leader came up with the remark while talking to reporters in front of the party’s Nayapaltan central office before appearing before a Dhaka court.

On Tuesday, Pirojpur district and sessions Judge Abdul Mannan passed an order to send former AL MP AKM Awal and his wife Laila Parvin to jail rejecting their bail prayers in three corruption cases filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) last year.

As local Awami League leaders and activists and pro-ruling party lawyers started demonstrations on the court premises protesting the order, Judge Abdul Mannan was stand-released. Joint District and Sessions Judge Nahid Nasrin was made the acting district and sessions judge of Pirojpur a few hours later.

The acting district and sessions granted the couple bail for two months accepting a review petition filed by them.

Fakhru said the court was forced to grant bail.

“This incident has proved there is no rule of law in the country. It has also nakedly manifested that the judiciary is not independent here.”