



The doors to a border haat situated in Baliemari char of Kurigram's Rajibpur upazila have remained shut since the coronavirus outbreak in March last year, bringing sufferings to hundreds of local families that relied on the bi-weekly bazaar for a source of income.

PHOTO: S DILIP ROY

Border haats closed by Covid still remain shut

Hundreds of families deprived of earnings, locals say

S DILIP ROY, Rajibpur

The closure of the border haat in no-man's land along the Jinjiram River at Baliemari Char of Rajibpur upazila in Kurigram district has impacted the livelihoods of more than one hundred families based in the region.

The border haat provided various ways to earn a living for locals but that has since come to an end following its closure in March 2020, when the government implemented a slew of restrictions to contain the spread of Covid-19.

Ever since the haat opened, the people of Baliemari char looked to it as an additional source of income but over time, it became a primary earning source for most families in the area.

Day labourers, fishermen and almost everyone else of Baliemari char depended on the haat to sustain their livelihoods, according to various locals.

DISTRICTS IN FOCUS

Bangladesh and India jointly launched Border Haat in 2011 along the borders of Kurigram district in Bangladesh and West Garo Hill district in the Indian state of Meghalaya.

Since then, three more border haats have been opened by the two nations in order to enable their residents in remote border areas to engage in formal trade.

"In addition to the four existing border haats, both countries are preparing to open six more these haats, three of which are ready to open," said a senior official of the commerce ministry seeking anonymity.

He went on to say that the border haats that

were closed in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic are yet to be reopened.

"But we have border haat management committees at the local level and they can take the decision to reopen the bazaars if they think it's appropriate," he said. The commerce ministry said trade became easier and the ratio of informal trade through the border declined following the opening of such haats.

The haat in Baliemari char would sit two days a week, when buyers and sellers from both countries would come to buy and sell garments, agro-products, and handicrafts.

And through the trade of goods and subsequent rise of relevant businesses, such as those that would transport the goods or carry passengers across Jinjiram river, this border haat became a vital source of income for locals.

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Diversify products, ensure quality

President Abdul Hamid urges businesses at industrial award ceremony

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

President Abdul Hamid yesterday urged business leaders to manufacture a more diverse range of products alongside ensuring quality to face the challenges of the fourth industrial revolution.

He made the call in a recorded video speech which was screened at "President's Industrial Development Award-2019" at Osmani Memorial Auditorium in Dhaka. A total of 19 businesses were honoured in six categories.

The president said in context to the fourth industrial revolution, the application of new technologies was increasing worldwide and industrial products manufactured in the country were facing fierce competition in international trade.

"Multifaceted concepts need to be applied in industrial production to keep pace with local and international business trends without relying on any particular product or service sector," he said.

Talking about productivity, he said, "Workers' hard effort and efficiency are essential to increase productivity...For this, an owner-worker friendly relationship is very crucial."

Hamid said employment was very important for development but it was not possible for the government alone to provide employment for the huge population. "Domestic and foreign investments are mandatory to create huge employment opportunities," he observed.

Highlighting various development plans of the government, he said the government was working to create 100 economic zones for domestic and foreign investors.

"It is aimed to create employment opportunities for 10 million people with an additional \$40 billion export earnings target," he said.

Congratulating the award recipients, he urged them to be careful about protecting the environment while aiding to industrialisation.



President Abdul Hamid

"I hope they will turn Bangladesh into an industrialised country by engaging themselves in the trend of environmentally friendly industrialisation," said the president.

Industries Minister Nurul Majid Mahmud Humayun said the ministry was providing necessary patronage and policy support to entrepreneurs to achieve sustainable and knowledge-based industrialisation.

"Considering the changed situation of the world economy and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2030 and Vision 2041, we are working to formulate a National Industrial Policy 2021," he said, highlighting various development activities of the government.

In addition, a world-class industrial database and industrial university have been set up and a planned and timely roadmap for the development of the light engineering industry was already being prepared, he added.

The awards were conferred in recognition of contributions to the private sector, employment generation and economy of the country at the initiative of the Ministry of Industries.

READ MORE ON B2

GLOBAL BUSINESS

Oil-rich UAE to burn waste to make power

AFP, Sharjah

With rubbish piling up in the desert, the United Arab Emirates has found a new way to get rid of its trash -- incinerators that will turn it into electricity.

The UAE, one of the world's top oil exporters, is building the Gulf region's first waste-to-power plants to ease its chronic trash problem and, at the same time, its reliance on gas-fuelled electricity stations.

Green groups are unconvinced. They say advanced recycling, composting and changing habits amid grossly wasteful rates of consumption would be better for the environment, warning of pollution risks from the greenhouse gas-intensive incinerators too.

But engineer Nouf Wazir, from waste management company Bee'ah, argues they are a way to make use of refuse that cannot be recycled.

"Not everyone knows that waste has value," said Wazir, a senior engineer on the project. The Sharjah facility is expected to launch this year, burning more than 300,000 tonnes of waste per year to power up to 28,000 homes.

In the neighbouring emirate of Dubai, another plant is being developed at a cost of \$1.2 billion, according to Hitachi Zosen Inova, one of the partner companies.

When it is completed in 2024, the Dubai plant will be one of the largest in the world, capable of gobbling up 1.9 million tonnes of waste per year -- about 45 per cent of the household waste currently produced in the emirate.

As the UAE has mushroomed from a desert outpost to a thriving business hub, waste has multiplied.

So has power use, which has soared 750 percent since 1990 according to the International Energy Agency. Now with about 10 million people, five times the population of 30 years ago, the wealthy UAE uses more electricity and creates more waste per head than almost any other country.

Authorities put waste production at 1.8 kilos (four pounds) per person per day.

In the UAE, "people consume a lot, and they throw away a lot", said Riad Bestani, founder of ECOSquare, a Dubai-based consultancy specialising in eco-friendly waste management.

Landfills are strewn across the country. In Dubai alone, six cover an area of about 1.6 million square meters (395 acres), according to the municipality.

In the absence of other solutions, it estimates that landfills will occupy 5.8 million square meters of the emirate by 2041, an area the size of more than 800 football pitches.

Fees for landfills are "pretty much nonexistent, so it's quite cheap and easy to dump all materials into the desert", said Emma Barber, director of Dubai-based DGrade, which designs clothes and accessories from recycled plastic bottles.

The UAE has set about diversifying its electricity generation, more than 90 percent of which comes from gas-powered plants.

Last year, the UAE inaugurated the Arab world's first nuclear plant and, making use of its location in one of the world's hottest regions, it has significant solar power resources. In the run-up to the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow, which started on Sunday, the UAE said it was targeting carbon neutrality by 2050.

Asia tourism reopens with big-spending Chinese stuck at home

REUTERS

Asia's gradual easing of international travel curbs is proving a welcome relief for the region's hard-hit tourism operators slowly opening up to visitors from around the world - with one giant exception.

China, previously the world's largest outbound tourism market, is keeping international air capacity at just 2 per cent of pre-pandemic levels and has yet to relax tight travel restrictions as it sticks to zero tolerance for Covid-19. That has left a \$255 billion annual spending hole in the global tourism market for operators such as Thailand's Laguna Phuket to try and fill.

Managing director Ravi Chandran says Laguna Phuket's five resorts have shifted their marketing focus to Europe, the United States and United Arab Emirates to make up for the loss of Chinese visitors, who accounted for 25.2 per cent - 30.2 per cent of its pre-Covid business.

"Up to today, we have not done significant marketing or promotion in China ... because we don't feel anything coming our way," Chandran said.

The pandemic has cost Thailand an estimated \$50 billion a year in tourism revenue



REUTERS/FILE

People enjoy at a beach as Phuket allows foreigners, who are fully vaccinated against the coronavirus disease, to visit the resort island without quarantine, in Phuket, Thailand on September 19.

and Chinese were above-average spenders based on tourism ministry data. Thailand hopes to receive 180,000 foreign tourists this year, a fraction of around 40 million it received in 2019, as it opened places beyond Phuket to

tourists on Monday.

Many experts expect China to keep such stringent measures such as up to a three-week quarantine for those returning home until at least the second quarter of next year and possibly then open gradually on a

country-by-country basis.

"Destinations have to identify new source markets and learn how to market and cater to different cultures," Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) Chief Executive Liz Ortiguera said, citing

India cuts fuel taxes ahead of festive season to boost economy

REUTERS, New Delhi

The Indian government on Wednesday reduced taxes on petrol and diesel in a bid to improve consumer sentiment, as Asia's third-largest economy recovers from the shocks of severe lockdowns to control the spread of the coronavirus.

The excise duty on petrol has been reduced by 5 rupees (\$0.0671) per litre, and that on diesel by 10 rupees (\$0.1342) per litre, the government said in a statement.

Following the federal move, at least ten states ruled by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), or his allies, said late Wednesday they would go further and reduce local fuel taxes by as much as 7

rupees a litre.

The tax relief comes on the eve of the Hindu festival of Diwali, which marks the beginning of a busy festive season in India, typically marked by increased consumer spending.

The federal government will face a revenue loss of between 550 billion rupees (\$7.38 billion) and 600 billion rupees from the cut in taxes, a government source told Reuters, declining to be named as the detail is not public.

Recent months have witnessed a steady growth in consumer spending in India, with a relaxation on curbs on travel and business operations due to a dip in the number of coronavirus cases.

But high fuel prices have been

hurting the margins of corporates as well as farmers, who contribute a significant chunk to the economy.

The cut in fuel taxes is likely to come as a boost to manufacturers and farmers.

"Given that inflation expectation is building up, there was a need to relook at the tax component, said NR Bhanumurthy, economist and vice chancellor at the Bengaluru-based BR Ambedkar School of Economics.

"This will cool down the inflation expectation to some extent, which will augur well for sustained GDP (gross domestic product) growth."

Modi's government has faced increasing criticism from its main opposition Congress party over rising fuel prices in recent weeks.

China's daily coal output near annual high

REUTERS, Beijing/Shanghai

China's daily coal output hit 11.67 million tonnes on November 2, rising around one million tonnes from early October, close to a record high this year amid a raft of measures to ramp up production, according to the country's state planner.

The National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) published six statements late on Wednesday, showing recent coal production and its efforts in reining in prices.

Coal inventories at power houses across the country had exceeded 110 million tonnes as of Tuesday, up by more than 31 million tonnes from end-September, the NDRC said, adding that with production boost measures to be implemented continually, China's daily coal output is expected to break above 12 million tonnes.

Coal prices at mines and ports have dropped significantly, said the economic planner.