

Tea industry crucial for us

PM addresses tea workers, calls for development of industry

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has asked everyone to remain vigilant so that the local tea industry is not harmed.

"Our tea industry is crucial for us. Tea crop earns foreign currency. So, this industry must not be harmed and it must flourish," she said.

The PM was exchanging views with the tea estate workers from Moulvibazar, Habiganj, Sylhet and Chattogram through videoconferencing from the Gono Bhaban yesterday.

Hasina said the Awami League government always works for the welfare of the tea estate workers and expansion of tea estates.

She said the nature of work in tea gardens are different from other sectors.

The premier mentioned that her government has been working to improve the living standard of tea workers since assuming office.

She recalled that Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had granted citizenship to the workers when he was the industries minister in 1954.

"For this reason, I think that we have some additional responsibilities towards you. We always tried to solve your problems."

Hasina reminded the workers about how she fixed their daily wages at Tk170, up from Tk120, after a meeting with the tea estate owners. Some other facilities of the workers have also been increased, she added.

She said the government has taken measures so that the owners treat workers with dignity and look after them properly.

The premier briefly described the initiatives taken by her government for overall development of the country. She said the government has taken up programmes to provide home along with land to each homeless family.

The PM said prices of various essentials have gone up significantly

SEE PAGE 7 COL 5



Ukrainian man stands at a destroyed wholesale market after a Russian strike in Kramatorsk, as Russia's attack in Ukraine continues, in Donetsk region, Ukraine yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Russia, West step up energy war

Moscow again delays gas pipeline reopening in blow to Europe after G7 agrees on oil price cap

REUTERS

Stepping up an energy war between Russia and the West, Moscow has announced it will keep its main gas pipeline to Germany shut and G7 countries said they planned a price cap on Russian oil exports.

The standoff over Russian gas and oil exports is a fallout from President Vladimir Putin's six-month invasion of Ukraine, underscoring the deep rift it has caused between Moscow and Western nations.

Russia's defence ministry meanwhile accused Ukrainian forces of mounting a failed attempt to capture the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant that has been a centre of international concern in recent weeks.

The ministry yesterday said a Ukrainian naval force of more than 250 troops attempted to land on the coast of a lake near the plant, which is Europe's largest nuclear energy station.

"Despite the presence of representatives

of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, the Kyiv regime once again attempted to seize the plant," the defence ministry said.

Reuters was unable to verify the report. Kyiv and Moscow have traded accusations about attacks on the power plant, which was captured by Russian forces in March but is connected to the Ukrainian power grid and still operated by Ukrainian staff.

A team of IAEA inspectors arrived at the plant on Thursday to assess its safety. IAEA chief Rafael Grossi, after returning to Ukrainian-held territory, said the physical integrity of the plant had been violated several times.

On Friday Grossi said he expects to produce a report on the safety of the plant early next week, and two experts from the IAEA inspections team would stay on at the plant for the longer term.

A reactor at the site was reconnected

to Ukraine's grid on Friday, a day after it shut down due to shelling nearby, Ukraine's state nuclear company Energoatom said.

Ukraine and the West have said Russia is using the site as a base for heavy weapons in a move to discourage Ukraine from firing on it. Russia has so far resisted international calls to pull troops out of the plant and demilitarise the area.

Russia's Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu on Friday denied Russia had heavy weapons at or near the power plant and accused Ukraine of committing "nuclear terrorism" through its attacks on the facility.

Turkey yesterday offered to facilitate the Zaporizhzhia situation.

In its announcement on Friday that it would not resume shipments through the Nord Stream 1 pipeline as had been expected, Russia's state-controlled energy giant Gazprom GAZP.MM blamed a technical fault.

Jubo Dal leader killed in road accident

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

A Jubo Dal leader was killed in a road accident in Jashore yesterday.

Hasanul Kabir Reza, 36, joint convener of Jhikargacha municipality unit Jubo Dal, was hit by a lorry, said police.

Reza was going to Jhikargacha Bazaar by a rickshaw van. As it was plying on Jashore-Benapole highway, a lorry hit it from behind, said locals.

Reza went under the wheels of the lorry and died on the spot, they added.

The body was handed over to his family members and the lorry was seized, said Mizanur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Navaran Highway Police.

The lorry driver, however, managed to flee. Police are trying to detain him, he added.

Teacher sued, suspended over death of student

A CORRESPONDENT, Narsingdi

A teacher has been suspended for her alleged involvement with the death of a student in Narsingdi.

Nargis Sultana Konika, teacher of social science, was suspended on Friday night, said Nur Uddin Md Alamgir, headmaster of Shibpur Government Pilot High School.

A three-member probe committee has also been formed to investigate the death, he said, adding that further actions would be taken against her if found guilty.

Meanwhile, police filed a case against Konika. The student complained to police against the teacher before her death. As the student's family did not file any complaint, police filed the case, the law enforcers said.

On Thursday, a grade-VIII student died by suicide after she was "humiliated" and beaten by the teacher for wearing trousers with her uniform.

Man found dead in Dinajpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Police recovered the throat-slit body of a man in Dinajpur's Bochaganj upazila yesterday.

Saidur Rahman, 34, was found dead at his home in Rampur village, said police.

Saidur had been living alone. Some unidentified criminals intruded into his house and stabbed him indiscriminately. Later, they slit his throat to confirm his death, said police.

Around 11:00am, locals found the body and informed police.

The body was then recovered and sent to M Abdur Rahim Medical College Hospital for autopsy, said Motiar Rahman, inspector (investigation) of Bochaganj Police Station.

Something to look forward to

FROM PAGE 1

On average, imports from India are subjected to tariffs of about 20 percent, fetching the state coffers about \$2 billion.

That revenue would be lost once the CEPA is inked, said MA Razaque, research director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh.

If Bangladesh signs a free trade agreement with India leaving the current high tariff rates unchanged, the trade diversion effects will be substantial.

It has been estimated that an FTA or agreements like the CEPA with India alone could result in trade diversion worth \$700 million.

"This is the amount of trade that is now taking place with other countries but would be lost due to preferential tariffs granted to one country," Razaque added.

Once the trade deal is signed, Bangladesh's export earnings will go up by \$3-5 billion and India's by \$4-10 billion in the next 7-10 years, the study found.

Since Bangladesh already gets duty-free quota-free market access to the Indian market, the quantitative analysis shows that there will not be large gains for Bangladesh's exports to the Indian market from CEPA negotiation, it said.

Comparatively, India will receive a larger trade gain primarily because of the high tariff rates it is currently facing in Bangladesh.

"Even if the gains appear to be lop-sided now, negotiations for CEPA should start without further delay," said Selim Raihan, one of the authors of the joint feasibility study.

The reason being the CEPA would at least ensure the continuation of duty-free access to India after graduation from the least-developed country bracket in 2026.

Due to being an LDC, save for about 25 items (mostly tobacco and liquor) all goods from Bangladesh enjoy duty-free access to India.

"It must be kept in mind that, upon graduation from the LDC category, Bangladesh will no longer be eligible to continue the high tariff line as it is now," the study said.

Therefore, in a way or another, Bangladesh will have to provide duty-free quota-free market access to India once it graduates out of LDC under the existing South Asian Free Trade Area negotiation.

"It is in this context, the role of CEPA becomes crucial, at least from the Bangladesh perspective," the study added.

Besides, India is a major source of industrial raw materials and capital machinery, according to Raihan, the executive director of the South Asian

Network on Economic Modelling.

For instance, Vietnam, a peer country of Bangladesh, currently has FTAs with some of its major trade partners.

"Despite the fact that the bilateral trade balance for Bangladesh might worsen after the CEPA negotiation, a majority of the increase in imports for Bangladesh would come from the increase in the raw material imports – which might exert a positive benefit for the country," the study said.

However, Bangladesh should identify some sectors and negotiate for including them in the sensitive list for a specific period of time.

"This is widely practised while signing such deals," said Raihan, also a professor at the University of Dhaka's economics department.

Some sectors in both countries, however, are bound to lose out due to increased import competition, the study said.

In Bangladesh, these could include coal, dairy products, metal products, transport equipment, petroleum and coal products, paper products, publishing, electronics equipment and mineral products.

In India, the sectors could include leather products, apparel, meat products, and vegetable oils and fats.

"One critical area that would be essential in the success of the CEPA would be the removal of non-tariff barriers and other structural challenges existing between the two countries," the study said, adding that there will be more extended opportunities for increasing trade in the Northeast Indian territory.

The CEPA has the potential to go beyond enhanced goods trade and can carve open economic opportunities including connectivity, new markets, investment, finance, technology transfer, and cooperation and partnership.

Both countries would gain from continued trade liberalisation and streamlining of border transactions through trade facilitation and improved physical connectivity.

Closer economic cooperation between the two countries would also promote Bangladesh's prospects for attracting larger investment from India.

Such investments, whether 100 percent Indian or joint ventures, would help to improve the country's export supply capability and boost exports to both the region and the outside world.

"India-Bangladesh cooperation offers a win-win prospect for both countries and the South Asia region as a whole," the study added.

According to an official statement released by India's ministry of

commerce and industry, the CEPA will incorporate a variety of issues of mutual interest, including the development of railway infrastructure, port infrastructure, border haats, regional connectivity through multimodal transportation, harmonisation of standards and a mutual recognition agreement.

Further, the agreement looks to step up cooperation in new areas such as green technologies, renewables, and IT and digital platforms.

The CEPA will also strengthen the scope of investment as it includes new areas and ways of cooperation. In addition, the agreement focuses on four areas for strengthening the India-Bangladesh partnership including connectivity and maintaining an uninterrupted supply chain, a joint production of defence equipment, the exploration of potential areas of investments and joint manufacturing of vaccines and other medicines.

Pillion rider killed as lorry runs over bike

Infant survives

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The pillion rider of a motorcycle was killed in a road accident in the capital's Shonir Akhra area around 11:00pm Friday.

Iqbal Hossain, 32, fell off the motorcycle as a covered van run the motorcycle over, said witnesses.

He was pronounced dead by Dhaka Medical College Hospital doctors after he was taken there, said family members.

Sajid Ahmed, Iqbal's three-year-old son, was on his lap but remained unharmed. Iqbal's elder brother Moshir Rahman, who was riding the motorcycle, sustained injuries.

Sajid visited Moshir's place in Shonir Akhra Friday evening and was returning to his home in Motijheel.

As it was late, Moshir was dropping Iqbal and his son off at Motijheel with his motorcycle. As they reached the main road, the covered van hit them. It was raining outside, said a family member quoting Moshir.

The victim's family did not want to take any legal step in connection with the accident, said Mazharul Islam, officer-in-charge of Jatrabari Police Station.

The body was handed over to the family members without conducting an autopsy, he added.

OTT ushers in a brave new world

FROM PAGE 1

unveiled, with the hosts of the first segment, Rafsan Sabab and national award-winning actress Sunerah Binte Kamal, making their entry.

Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi graced the occasion as the chief guest. Delivering the welcome address, Ispahani Group Chairman Mirza Salman Ispahani said they as an organisation were honoured to be able to present this award alongside The Daily Star.

"OTT is indeed the new normal of the media and entertainment industry. Thanks to government's patronisation of expanding ICT infrastructure and internet accessibility, a huge audience is now connecting with OTT platforms and digital contents. I am sure these platforms will grow rapidly in the near future," he said.

Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, said OTT platforms have ushered in a new era of creativity in the arts and entertainment world.

"Here, all artists, directors, and producers – be they famous or emerging – can fully explore their potentials and creativity. In this way, we are getting new talents from these platforms regularly.

"We need a legal structure and a government policy for these platforms that will encourage the artists to fully utilise their creativity and latent talents. I would like to appeal to the government so that we can recognise and award these platforms and content creators to help them flourish and get inspired to create more positive contents," he said.

The programme spared no expense to recognise talents from both in front of and behind the camera, conferring awards in 31 categories (see full list of awardees on page 6).

The awards were handed over by esteemed personalities from various industries.

Content creators took centre stage first, with the likes of Rafsan the Chhotobhai, Samina Sraboni and Free Motion Firoz winning in their respective segments.

The event took an unexpected turn when comedy duo Amin and Ashik took the reign away from the hosts after a light-hearted banter. The young comedians turned the venue into a rickety stand-up one just for a few moments, drawing laughter from an audience filled with the biggest stars in the industry.

The performances did not stop there.

A beautiful musical serenade was presented to the audience by Khayam Sanu Sandhi, accompanied by a mellifluous dance performance.

On this musical note, Abanti Sithi and Rehaan Rasul jointly picked up the Best Singer award for "Rupkothar Jogote" from "Networker Baire", one of the year's musical highlights, whereas Sajid Sarker won the Best Music Composer award for his masterful work in the same film.

"Bachelor Point" won the "People's Choice for Popular Digital Media Drama" award, and the entire team was present to celebrate.

"Poran" famed director Raihan Rafi, who is arguably in the prime of his career, received Best Scriptwriter (story) award for "Khachar Bitor Ochin Pakhi".

The awarding was soon followed by a dynamic dance performance from Shohel Mondol and Shirin Akter Shela.

The second segment of the event was hosted by Naziba Basher and none other than Yash Rohan, who has earned mainstream acceptance for his role in "Poran".

Afran Nisho's victory in the Best Actor in a Negative Role category was a pleasant surprise for the "Kaiser" famed star, who is used to play the role of a protagonist. This time, he was on the opposite end of the table for "Morichika".

Shuvashish Bhowmik and Rituraj, the adored "Baap Ka Beta" duo, melted hearts with their cutesy and energetic performance. Safa Kabir, who started her journey as prodigious prospect, showed through her performance with Alifia Dance Squad that she has blossomed into a full-blown entertainer.

The choreographer for the event, Mofassal Al Alif, deserves credit for his innovative work with the stars and his crew.

However, excited tension filled the room when the time came to crown the juggernauts of the industry.

Ashfaq Nipun won two back-to-back awards – Best Director (film) for "Koshoneer", and Best Director (series) for "Mohanagar". In complete shock with the audience and jury's verdict, the director thanked the viewers for showering him with love and appreciation.

Arguably two of the greatest actors of the generation, Chanchal Chowdhury and Mosharraf Karim, won Best Actor in the popular and critics categories respectively. Chanchal's display in "Taqdeer" was an acting masterclass, whereas Mosharraf's portrayal of OC Harun was nothing short of iconic.

Accepting his award, Chanchal said, "This award belongs to the entire Taqdeer team who worked so hard and were so passionate about their work. We are working for the digital

platforms and we shall continue to work in the future. I would like to thank The Daily Star and Ispahani Blender's Choice, along with all the organisers, for inspiring us by hosting this amazing event."

On behalf of Mosharraf, his wife Robena Reza, a renowned actress, received the award. He, however, sent a heartfelt video message, thanking the audience and critics for their appreciation.

"Mohanagar", one of the most ground-breaking Bangla OTT contents over the last few years, won the critics choice award for Best Film/Series.

Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi said, "OTT platforms and digital contents have truly initiated a new era in our promising entertainment industry. They are also promoting positive values and good causes in the society. I wish them all the best and I believe that these new artists will bring honour and glory to Bangladesh."

The festivities reached a crescendo with a high-energy performance from none other than the ceiling-breakers of hip-hop – Jalali Set.

After all was said and done, Blender's Choice – The Daily Star OTT & Digital Content Awards not only lived up to the hype, but shattered all obstacles for any artiste previously restricted by mediums.

The message is clear – the future is chalk-full of opportunities for any artiste who dares to dream beyond contemporary platforms for their art.

Eight migrants die trying to cross Rio Grande River into US

REUTERS

Eight migrants died and 37 were rescued as they tried to cross the rain-swollen Rio Grande River into the United States near Eagle Pass, Texas, US customs officials said on Friday.

Border patrol agents, along with local fire and police agencies, were searching for possible additional victims a day after the Thursday incident, said Customs and Border Protection spokesman Rick Pauza.

A total of 53 migrants were taken into custody by U.S. border patrol agents on Thursday, including the 37 rescued from the river, Pauza said. Mexican government authorities arrested 39 people.