



Explore new markets for apparel

PM tells industry stakeholders

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged industry stakeholders to explore new markets for Bangladeshi garment products and keep pace with the ever-changing trends.

"Those working with garments and their exports will have to find new markets. Newer products will have to be produced keeping in mind that the choices vary in different countries," she said.

The premier was addressing through a video conference an event marking the National Textiles Day and the inauguration of six textile educational institutes.

The Ministry of Textiles and Jute organised the event at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre (BICC) in the capital.

"Fashion and design are very important and they are constantly changing. We have to... realise which design is high in demand."

The newly inaugurated six textile institutes are: Sheikh Rehana Textile Engineering College in Gopalganj, Sheikh Russel Textile Institute in Jamalpur, Shahid Abdur Rob Seraniabat Textile Institute in Barishal's Gournadi, Shahid Kamaruzzaman Textile Institute in Naogaon, Begum Amina Mansur

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Parked trucks occupy even the fast lane of this street in Tejgaon. The first mayor of Dhaka North City Corporation, late Annisul Huq, had removed this illegal truck park but the truckers returned to the area despite being evicted several times. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

NEW SETTLEMENTS IN WEST BANK

Western powers 'strongly oppose' Israeli moves

AFP, Berlin

The foreign ministers of five Western powers said yesterday they were "deeply troubled" by the Israeli government's decision to legalise nine West Bank settlements and build thousands of new units.

The ministers from Britain, France, Germany, Italy and the United States said: "We strongly oppose these unilateral actions which will only serve to exacerbate tensions between Israelis and Palestinians and undermine efforts to achieve a negotiated two-state solution."

They underlined their backing for a "comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, which must be achieved through direct negotiations between the parties."

"We continue to closely monitor developments on the ground which impact the viability of the two-state solution and stability in the region at large," they added.

Israel's security cabinet had announced on Sunday that it would legalise nine settlements in the occupied West Bank following a series of attacks in east Jerusalem, including one that killed three Israelis.

These so-called "wild" settlements were built without authorisation from the Israeli government.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who signed up to yesterday's statement, had on Monday already criticised Israel's plans on advancing settlements.

Israel's moves came on the heels of a visit by Blinken to the region in which he explicitly warned against settlement

activity as he sought to ease tensions following violence.

More than 475,000 Israelis reside in settlements in the West Bank, where 2.8 million Palestinians live.

Meanwhile, Israeli troops shot dead a Palestinian teenager in the occupied West Bank early yesterday, Palestinian officials said, with the army saying troops opened fire after the suspect approached them with explosives.

The Palestinian health ministry said Mahmud Majid Mohammed al-Aidi, 17, died from "critical wounds he sustained by live occupation (Israeli) bullets to the head" at Al-Fara refugee camp north of Nablus.

The army said Israeli troops carried out "counterterrorism operations" in several West Bank towns and cities early yesterday.

Man held over rape, murder

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

Police yesterday arrested a man in connection with the rape and murder of a five-year-old girl in Thakurgaon Sadar.

The arrestee is Safiqul Islam, 20, the victim's neighbour, said Atiqur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Bhullia Police Station.

Rahima Begum, the victim's mother, filed a case against him.

According to the case statement, Fariha was playing near her house around 8:00am. After two hours, locals found her body in a maize field.

On information, police recovered the body and sent it to Thakurgaon Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy, the OC said.

Police found several injury marks on the body while preparing inquest report, he further said.

BB CYBER HEIST CASE

CID gets another date for submitting probe report

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday asked the Criminal Investigation Department to submit its report on the Bangladesh Bank cyber heist case by April 4.

The CID has now taken 70 dates to complete its probe into the case filed over the heist of \$101 million from Bangladesh Bank's account with the Federal Reserve Bank of New York in February 2016.

Metropolitan Magistrate Rajesh Chowdhury passed the order after Raihan Uddin Khan, additional superintendent of police and also investigation officer of the case, failed to submit the probe report by yesterday.

At least \$81 million was transferred to the accounts in Manila-based RCBC, from where it disappeared into the casinos of the Philippines.

Bangladesh Bank Deputy Director (accounts and budgeting) Zobayer Bin Huda filed the case with Motijheel Police Station on March 15, 2016.

So far, Bangladesh retrieved \$15 million from RCBC and recovered another \$20 million sent to a bank in Sri Lanka.

On February 1 last year, Bangladesh Bank sued Rizal Bank in a US court to recover \$66m of stolen funds.

2 BCL women

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victim why she didn't inform her about the matter earlier.

The Chhatra League activist also asked the victim to meet her in Sanjida's room. But the student did not comply.

Around 10:00pm on February 12, Sanjida called the victim to the hall's guest room. Sanjida along with Tabassum and several other Chhatra League activists tortured and assaulted her there until 3:30am, added the complainant.

Contacted, the victim said she was assaulted and tortured by some Chhatra League leader and activists. The incident was filmed at one stage, she added.

She was also threatened that she would be driven out of the hall and the video would be circulated if she told anyone about the torture.

Asked about the allegation, Sanjida said, "As the student lodged the complaint, she has to prove now whether the incident is true."

She also claimed that the allegation against her was false.

This newspaper could not reach Tabassum for comments.

Proctor Shahadat Hossain confirmed to The Daily Star that he received the complaint and the vice chancellor had been informed of the matter. The VC would decide on the next course of action, he said.

PM, president-elect

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government during the meeting. Shahabuddin is set to be the 22nd President of Bangladesh.

Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal yesterday declared the ruling party's nominee the president-elect of Bangladesh.

As per the election schedule, two nomination papers were submitted for Shahabuddin on Sunday and one of those was accepted as valid after scrutiny on Monday.

A gazette was issued in the afternoon in this regard.

No other political party with representation in parliament proposed any name for the presidential election.

President Hamid is set to complete his tenure on April 23 this year.

According to the constitution, a new president has to be elected within 60 to 90 days prior to the end of the incumbent president's tenure.

Mid-day meals likely for all from July

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There was a school meal programme for students in poverty-affected areas of 104 upazilas, but it ended in June last year.

Before that project ended, the ministry in August 2020 prepared a project worth Tk 17,290 crore to feed 1.41 crore students of the 65,566 government primary schools for five years.

But the project drew flak from many, especially since it had a provision for officials to embark on foreign trips to observe delivery and preparation of mid-day meals including khichri. In June 2021, the Executive Committee of National Economic Council (Ecne) turned down the project.

"The project was not approved as the prime minister was concerned about its structure [modus operandi]. She said cooking khichri in schools might hamper studies," Planning Minister MA Mannan said at the time.

He added that the PM ordered revising the project design.

Besides, no feasibility test was done for the project, Secretary Farid yesterday said.

A feasibility study is required for any development project worth Tk 50

crore and over, according to Planning Commission guidelines.

Farid said it was not decided whether khichri or fortified biscuits (high on energy, nutrients) would be provided. "There are also proposals for fruits, eggs and even samosas. We will finalise soon."

Officials are trying to complete the new DPP as fast as possible, and the project cost could be less than what they had proposed in 2020.

The government wants to start school lunches at least at the schools in poverty-affected areas, Farid said.

Officials are also in talks with the Global Partnership for Education to be able to use some of its \$90 million grant for the meals.

The ministry wants to use the GPE fund to cover schools that may not be initially served by the project, he said.

The ministries of health, agriculture, and fisheries and livestock have expressed interest in working with the mass education ministry for providing the meals, officials said.

The livestock ministry wants to begin providing 250ml of UHT (ultra-high temperature) milk to each student of 50 schools from this month. It will increase the number of schools to 300 and add eggs in July.

Officials wanted to keep a provision for funding the mid-day meals from revenue, Farid said.

The World Food Programme ran a project to feed schoolchildren from 2001 to 2009. The last government school feeding programme was introduced in 2010.

Under that programme, the government gave 75 grams of fortified biscuits to nearly 3 million schoolchildren in 104 upazilas.

Primary education ministry officials said they saw attendance rise by 6.6 percent and dropouts fall by 6 percent in those schools.

According to the Directorate of Primary Education, dropout rate at the primary level was 39.8 percent in 2010 and it fell to 14.15 percent in 2021.

KM Enamul Hoque, deputy director of Campaign for Popular Education, said, "School meals are vital as many children go to school in an empty stomach every day. It makes it hard for them to focus in class, and their learning outcome does not reach the desirable level."

"Students will get better nutrition if they get mid-day meals at schools. It is also a great incentive for families to send their children to school."

Tax officials raid BBC India offices

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which occupies two floors of a high-rise on a leafy avenue in the capital's commercial heart.

A New Delhi-based BBC employee said that officials had been "confiscating all phones" during the tax raid.

Last month, the BBC aired a two-part documentary alleging that Hindu nationalist Modi ordered police to turn a blind eye to sectarian riots in Gujarat state, where he was premier at the time.

The violence left at least 1,000 people dead, most of them minority Muslims.

India's government blocked videos and tweets sharing links to the documentary -- which was not aired in India -- using emergency powers under its information technology laws.

Government adviser Kanchan Gupta had slammed the documentary as "hostile propaganda

and anti-India garbage".

University student groups later organised viewings of the documentary despite campus bans, defying government efforts to stop its spread.

Police arrested two dozen students at the prestigious Delhi University after stopping a screening there in late January.

"First came the BBC documentary, that was banned," the opposition Congress party said on Twitter. "Now IT has raided BBC," it continued, referring to the Income Tax Department. "Undeclared emergency."

Press freedom in the world's biggest democracy has suffered during Modi's tenure, rights activists and opposition lawmakers say.

India has fallen 10 spots to 150 out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index, compiled by Reporters Without Borders, since Modi took office in 2014.

Critical reporters, particularly women, say they are subjected to relentless campaigns of online abuse.

Media outlets, international rights groups and foreign charities have also found themselves subjected to scrutiny by India's tax authorities and financial crimes investigators.

Late Catholic nun Mother Teresa's charity last year found itself temporarily starved of funds after the home ministry refused to renew its licence to receive foreign donations.

Amnesty International announced it was halting operations in India after the government froze its bank accounts in 2020, following raids on its offices.

In 2021, Indian tax authorities raided a prominent newspaper and a TV channel that had been critical of the government's handling of the coronavirus pandemic, triggering accusations of intimidation.

A parent's worst nightmare

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to a doctor, who, after an ultrasound and a CT scan, referred them to the National Institute of Cancer Research and Hospital (NICRH) in the capital's Mohakhali.

"We couldn't believe his words and sought a second opinion from a private hospital in Dhaka. But we had to accept the reality and shift to NICRH as Farha's stomach had begun swelling," Shifa sobbed as she spoke.

"They gave her six rounds of chemotherapy there to shrink the tumour, before referring us to the Dhaka Medical's tumour board for surgery. The doctors at Dhaka Medical performed the surgery on February 5 and removed the tumour and a portion of her kidney to prevent the cancer from spreading. She still needs to receive 27 more doses of chemotherapy and two doses of radiotherapy."

Shifa added, "The whole process has so far cost us Tk 2 lakh, which we had to arrange without any help from others... We are somehow getting by."

Farha's father Ringku, a farmer, said, "This reality was beyond my worst nightmares. I've never experienced the streets and roads of Dhaka. My phone was even pickpocketed right before the surgery, and right now, we are living without communication with anyone."

The situation is similar for four-year-old Imamul Hasan, a cancer patient from Sunamganj, who is suffering from a malignant kidney tumour causing blood to flow through his urine.

Imamul had already come to the hospital late.

Once his family was told about the expenses, they had to go back to the village to mortgage his grandparent's land off to arrange the money.

The delay only further deteriorated his condition.

Prof Shahnoor Islam, unit chief of the paediatric surgery department at DMCH, who excels at paediatric surgical oncology, said, "Although early detection can go a long way, a lack of awareness and information leads to late detection, as patients travel many long winding paths before finally reaching us."

She also reported a severe shortage of beds in her unit, with three to four patients sharing a single one. The unit has only eight beds, mostly occupied by cancer patients.

Besides, DMCH's paediatric oncology and haematology departments have only 30 beds, and a few cabins, making it difficult to accommodate the nearly 200 children with cancer, including outpatients.

"Cancer treatment is expensive, ranging from Tk 2 lakh to Tk 12 lakh, depending on the stage and nature, making it difficult for families to afford. Although we are concerned about the risk of infection, abandonment of treatment due to high costs cannot be

an option," Shahnoor said.

She added that they try to reduce investigation costs by admitting the patients, and if patients don't need hospitalisation during chemotherapy, they are allowed to receive treatment at home.

Besides, as parents often struggle to accept their child's cancer diagnosis, the tumour board at DMCH offers counselling from a psychiatrist to offer hope and support.

World Child Cancer, the leading international children's charity dedicated to addressing the global inequality in childhood cancer care, through its Bangladesh office, has been offering psycho-social support and financial aid to such poor patients and their families in six hospitals in Bangladesh.

This includes funding for diagnostic tests, medications, chemotherapy, transportation, food and accommodation. On average, each family receives Tk 5,000, based on their specific needs and treatment requirements.

"We have family support officers in six hospitals -- DMCH, Bangladesh Shishu Hospital, BSMMU, SSMC Mitford Hospital, NICRH, and Chittagong Medical University. From October to December last year, they provided finances and counselling to 1,368 families," said Jewel Ahmed, country representative of World Childhood Cancer.

Although there are no official cancer statistics for Bangladesh, data from DMCH showed that on average, almost 600 children receive cancer treatment per month at DMCH alone, due to the high number of patient referrals there.

The lack of paediatric onco-surgeons for solid tumour management has also been an obstacle to managing the flow of patients at DMCH -- the only facility with a tumour board for children.

Jewel suggested that if the government's project to establish dedicated cancer hospitals in eight divisions is implemented, it would greatly improve the situation for grassroots children with cancer, as each hospital will have 20 beds designated for them.

On the other hand, Prof Shahnoor emphasised the need for the position of paediatric onco-surgeons at those hospitals to reduce patient flow at DMCH.

"Unlike developed countries, we need adequate shelter facilities for both children undergoing cancer treatment and their guardians."

She also stressed the need for a higher number of molecular labs to reduce delays in returning urgent medical reports, along with more research and training for healthcare professionals to improve childhood cancer treatment in Bangladesh.