

RMG SECTOR

US calls upon Bangladesh to revisit minimum wage decision

AFP, Washington

The United States yesterday urged Bangladesh to revisit its recent minimum wage decision and to protect workers' rights after police shot dead a woman during the latest protests by garment laborers.

A government-appointed panel in Bangladesh on Tuesday raised factory wages in the country's vast garment industry by 56.25 percent to T2,500 Taka (USD 113) per month, but striking workers demand a near-tripling of the wage to 23,000 Taka.

"We commend the members of the private sector who have endorsed union proposals for a reasonable wage increase," US State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said in a statement.

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Matthew Miller
Spokesman
for US State Department

tripartite process to revisit the minimum wage decision to ensure that it addresses the growing economic pressures faced by workers and their families," he said, referring to an internationally backed structure set up after the 2013 collapse of the Rana Plaza garment factory building, which left at least 1,134 people dead.

Anjuara Khatun, a sewing machine operator and mother of two, was shot in the head and killed when police fired yesterday on protesters in the industrial city of Gazipur, her widower told AFP.

The United States said it was "concerned about the ongoing repression of workers and trade unionists."

"We call on the government of Bangladesh to protect workers' right to peaceful protest and investigate allegations of false criminal charges against workers and labor leaders," Miller said.

The South Asian country's 3,500 garment factories account for around 85 percent of its USD 55 billion in annual exports, supplying many of the world's top brands including Levi's, Zara, and H&M.



Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader receives Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport upon her return home from Saudi Arabia yesterday. The premier had been to the Gulf country on a three-day visit to attend an international conference and perform umrah.

PHOTO: PTI

GREAT POWER COMPETITION

Bangladesh may remain a key battleground

Says new study by US-based research lab

PORIMOL PALMA

Bangladesh will likely remain a key battleground for great power competition in the coming years, given its unique locational position and recent geopolitical trends, including the rise of India and growing Sino-US tensions in the South China Sea, according to a new study.

"From Dhaka's vantage point, growing competition between China and the US in the Indo-Pacific region only offers more opportunities for improving economic growth," according to the study titled "The Belt and Road Reboot" conducted by Aiddata, a research lab of the US-based public university William and Mary.

It says the US, as a defender of liberal democracies around the world, may feel compelled to condemn actions that would push Bangladesh further down the path of authoritarianism. On the other hand, it cannot ignore the realpolitik consideration that China's influence is expanding in South and Southeast Asia.

The study released on Monday used Bangladesh, Zambia and Argentina as case

studies. It assessed China's global flagship programme Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

According to Aiddata, China remains the world's single largest official source of international development finance, with its aid and credit commitments to low- and middle-income countries now hovering around \$80 billion a year. Washington is beginning to close the spending gap with Beijing, now providing approximately \$60 billion of development finance annually.

The report says between March 1971 and 2008, Bangladesh's largest foreign aid and credit providers were Japan, the US, and the UK, but Beijing issued grant and loan commitments worth \$17.5 billion, making it Dhaka's single largest development partner since the BRI was launched in 2013. The projects were largely focused on power plants, transmission lines, highways, and bridges.

"Since December 2008, the centralisation of political power has resulted in higher levels of administrative certainty and created an enabling environment for Beijing to bankroll and build big-ticket infrastructure projects,"

the study says.

It says previous research has demonstrated that elections provide powerful incentives for politicians to showcase their performance, and highly visible physical infrastructure projects are ideal for achieving this goal.

"Her [Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina] critics argue that, under her watch, Bangladesh's economic progress has become solely reliant on nepotistic textile industrialists, and her team is out of fresh ideas to tackle deep rooted structural problems, such as corruption.

"Irrespective of these challenges, with major opposition parties in disarray and dissenting voices in civil society largely silent, today she is predicted to win the January 2024 election," the study said.

Although growing competition between the US and China in the Indo-Pacific region offers more opportunities for economic growth, Bangladesh economy needs diversification through new competitive industries adjacent to its dominant textile industry, says Aiddata.

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5 children drown in Cumilla, Faridpur

STAR REPORT

5 children drowned in ponds in Cumilla and Faridpur yesterday.

In Faridpur'd Muradnagar, 3 children drowned when they went for a bath in a pond at Bashkait village.

Deceased are Sadia Akter, 7, Amena Khatun, 12, Samia Akter, 6.

Provash Chandra Dhar, officer-in-charge of Muradnagar police station, said an unnatural death case is being filed over the deaths.

Meanwhile, two minors drowned in a pond at Algadiya village in Faridpur's Nagarkanda yesterday.

The deceased are Abu Bakkar, 5, son of Md Jafar Sheikh and Nahida Akter, 4, daughter of Shahfikul Islam, of Algadiya village under Charjoshordi union of the upazila.

Locals said the two children might have drowned while playing near a pond at noon.

Kamruzzama Saheb Fakir, chairman of the union parishad, confirmed the death of the children.

Youth hacked to death over FB post

STAR REPORT

A youth was hacked to death allegedly by his neighbours over a Facebook post in Moulvibazar's Sadar upazila on Tuesday night.

The deceased was identified as Rezaul Karin Nayeem, 21, of the TB Hospital area, our local correspondent reports quoting police.

Harunur Rashid Chowdhury, officer-in-charge of Moulvibazar Police Station, said Roni and Nayeem engaged in an argument on Tuesday evening over a Facebook post by the latter.

Around 7:30pm, Roni and his father Nurul Mia called Nayeem to Roni's house. After Roni went there, he was beaten and hacked with sharp weapons, the OC said quoting locals.

Nayeem died on the way to Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital.

The victim's father filed a murder case against Roni and his father with Sadar Police Station.

Police have started an investigation, the OC said.

ALCWC to meet today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The ruling Awami League has scheduled a meeting of its central working committee to make important decisions ahead of the national election.

The meeting will be held at Gono Bhaban, the official residence of the prime minister, today at 5:30pm. It will be chaired by Awami League President and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

During the meeting, the party is expected to form an election steering sub-committee to prepare for the upcoming election. What programmes the party will take following the announcement of the election schedule will be also discussed.

Apart from this, the movement of BNP and its allies, dealing with the ongoing socio-economic and political crisis, various organisational matters will be discussed and decided in the meeting. Party chief Sheikh Hasina is expected to give important directions in these matters.

Worker shot dead in fresh unrest

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armoured personnel carrier (APC).

One of the policemen lost his right hand when the grenade exploded, said Bacchu Mia, in-charge of the Dhaka Medical College Hospital police outpost.

Law enforcers and garment workers clashed in Ashulia around 2:45pm when hundreds of workers tried to demonstrate on Bypail-Abdullahpur road.

Police fired shots in the air and teargas shells, our Savar correspondent reports, adding that police also charged truncheons.

A FIGHTER'S LIFE ENDS

Sewing machine operator Anjuara Khatun, 28, of Islam Garments in Gazipur was declared dead on arrival at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital around 12:15pm, according to hospital records.

Morgue sources told The Daily Star that there were shotgun pellets on her forehead, arm, and back.

Her husband Jamal Badsha, also a garment factory worker, told The Daily Star that around 7:30am Anjuara went to the factory which is near their home in Konabari. Around 8:10am, the factory authorities announced over loudspeakers that the factory was closed due to the protests.

"After 20-25 minutes, I heard gunshots in front of another factory in the Char Rastar Mor area. Then I

saw people carrying my injured wife on a rickshaw van," he said while waiting in front of Dhaka Medical College morgue.

"She was motionless. I saw blood oozing out of small holes on her head," he said.

She was first taken to a hospital in Konabari which referred her to the DMCH, he said, adding that Anjuara died on the way.

Anjuara and Jamal got married 10 years ago and have been fighting to have a decent livelihood since then.

Jamal said they worked at garment factories in Gazipur for five years after marriage. But when Jamal contracted TB, the couple moved to their village in Kazipara upazila of Sirajganj.

"I could not work for two years. We incurred a debt of Tk 3 lakh. Then we returned to Gazipur to work and repay the debt," Jamal said, adding that they have been struggling to cope with the rising prices in recent months.

"We earned around Tk 21,000 together, but it was not enough. My wife was always worried about the debt. At home, she always said that we both worked hard but were still struggling to lead a decent life due to the measly wage. She supported the recent movement for salary hike," Jamal said.

They could not afford to keep their children with them. Their eight-year-old son and seven-year-old daughter

go to a school in their village.

The children came to visit their parents and could not go back to Sirajganj due to the blockade.

"Anjuara was supposed to take them back to Sirajganj on Friday [tomorrow]. But she has now gone forever," Jamal said in tears.

Jamal demanded a fair investigation into the death and punishment of the responsible.

Apprehending labour unrest over pay hike, 48 platoons of Border Guard Bangladesh were deployed yesterday morning in Dhaka and nearby districts to ensure security at garment factories. Industrial police and Rab members were also deployed.

The workers had demonstrated for 12 straight days before suspending demos following assurances. The current starting wage is Tk 8,000.

Union leaders have rejected the new wage and threatened to go for tough demonstrations.

Over the last two weeks, workers demonstrating for a minimum wage of Tk 23,000 clashed with law enforcers in Gazipur, Savar, and Dhaka's Mirpur.

On October 30, a garment worker was killed after Gazipur Industrial Police personnel allegedly shot him from close range. During the clashes, firefighters recovered the charred body of an unidentified man from ABM Fashion factory where a fire

broke out.

Demanding a starting salary of Tk 25,000, Montu Ghosh, president of Garment Sramik Trade Union Kendra, said the measly amount set was not enough to lead a good life. Inflation and high prices of essentials have made things worse for garment workers.

Nazma Akter, president of Sammilito Garment Sramik Federation, said the new wage is well below the workers' expectations. An acceptable wage should be fixed.

Rights organisation Ain o Salish Kendra in a statement yesterday said police firing on unarmed garment workers is undesirable and unacceptable.

It is the responsibility of the state to determine the wages of garment workers and improve their quality of life, it said.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) yesterday urged workers to return to work and said the new wage structure would be implemented from December 1.

It said the owners may shut down the factories if the workers do not return.

BGMEA President Faruque Hassan in the statement said workers' demonstration after the announcement of the new wage was unexpected.

cases over violence. Of them, 60 were arrested and five cases were lodged yesterday.

Meanwhile, a Pirojpur court yesterday sent local BNP leader Gazi Ohiduzzaman Lavlu to jail, a day after he was arrested on Bailey Road in Dhaka.

Police also arrested Noakhali Jamaat Secretary Nizam Uddin Faruk and Sonaimuri upazila BNP President Mohammad Anwarul Haque Kamal on charges of sabotage.

Stokes ton helps England thrash the Netherlands

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striking with the new ball before spinners Moeen Ali and Adil Rashid took three wickets each.

"I'm more pleased for us to get a victory over the line, it's been a tough World Cup," said Stokes.

England talisman Stokes, battling a longstanding knee injury, made a painstaking fifty in 58 balls and then accelerated, taking just 20 more deliveries to reach his fifth one-day international century.

He was well-supported by Woakes as England added 124 runs in the last 10 overs to finish on 339-9.

Test skipper Stokes, 32, eventually holed out in the last over for 108.

A target of 340 always looked like it might be beyond non-Test side the Netherlands, who had twice defeated England at the T20 World Cup but lost all six of the teams' previous ODI meetings.

England came into this match rock bottom of the table but opener David Malan led the way with a 36-ball fifty that featured 40 runs in boundaries after skipper Jos Buttler won the toss.

England, however, lost two wickets in quick succession.

Joe Root fell for 28 in bizarre fashion when bowled between his legs by Logan van Beek attempting a reverse scoop.

And 133-2 became 139-3 when Malan was run out in sight of his second hundred of the tournament when sent back by Stokes going for a needless single.

Harry Brook gave his wicket away before Buttler and Moeen both fell tamely in single figures.

Stokes, dropped in the deep on 41 off a tough chance, survived a tight lbw review before smashing a no-ball from spinner Aryan Dutt -- and the ensuing free-hit -- for sixes.

He went into the 90s with another six, a straight drive off Bas de Leede.

A reverse swept four off paceman

Paul van Meekeren, his sixth of the innings, saw Stokes to a 78-ball hundred that included five sixes on a ground where he had played for Pune in the Indian Premier League.

Woakes and Stokes shared a seventh-wicket stand of 129.

Van Beek -- who bowled 10 wides -- suffering in a return of 2-88.

The Netherlands slumped to 13-2 in reply, Max O'Dowd chipping Woakes to mid-on before Colin Ackermann was caught behind for a duck off Willey

Several batsmen made it into the 30s, while Teja Nidamanuru was left stranded on 41 not out when last man van Meekeren was stumped off Moeen.

Release Khaleda

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Bangladeshi doctors have said that Khaleda, who was twice prime minister, was at "high risk" of dying without medical intervention overseas after the Hasina government rejected pleas to let her leave.

Khaleda has advanced liver cirrhosis, diabetes and heart problems. Three US doctors carried out minor surgery on her last month, but the government rejected her family's request to allow her to travel to Germany for a liver transplant.

The twice prime minister was convicted and imprisoned in a corruption case in 2018. She was released in March 2020 with an executive order and on condition that she would not leave the country and must receive medical treatment in the country.

The country is gearing up for national elections due in January. Turk also asked the government "to prevent any arbitrary detention including detention that could be perceived as politically motivated or which might impact the environment for fair and credible elections".