



Diversify jute goods to tap export potentials

PM says at jute fair

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday stressed the need for diversifying jute products based on the demand of international market to unlock export potential.

"We've to pay attention to exploring new export markets for jute, assess what type of goods has demand in different countries, and produce such products accordingly," she said.

The premier said this while opening six jute mills and the three-day

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2



DRIZZLE DELIGHTS! After hours of listening to lectures in classrooms, two tired friends enjoy a moment of relief as they encounter the cool rain droplets during their walk back home from school in the capital's Lalmatia yesterday afternoon.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

ROOFTOP SOLAR POWER '2,000MW can save \$1bn annually'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Although the government in 2018 formulated net metering guidelines for installing solar panels on building roofs, people still have doubts about its viability due to negative experiences, speakers told a webinar yesterday.

Roofs are a great resource for generating highly cost-competitive solar energy. By installing solar panels for only 2,000 megawatts of electricity, the country could save between US \$476 million and US \$1 billion in fuel costs annually, they also said.

Currently, rooftop solar power generation has a capacity to generate only 160.63 MW of electricity.

The webinar, titled "Scaling up rooftop solar deployment in Bangladesh," was jointly organised by Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA) and Energy & Power magazine.

Presenting the keynote paper, IEEFA's lead energy analyst of Bangladesh Shafiqul Alam said rooftop solar power generation in the industries and commercial buildings would save more than it did previously.

"The industries can reduce their electricity bills by Tk 5.88 per kilowatt-hour by installing rooftop solar systems. Commercial buildings will be able to save even more," he also said.

He mentioned stakeholders' priority and motivation, challenges in finance, assurance quality, and lack of business models and regulatory support as the factors affecting the expansion of rooftop solar power generation.

"Bangladesh needs to design a market to incentivise and de-risk investments in rooftop solar to enhance the pace of implementation and achieve scale," he added.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

YUNUS CASE HC verdict on staying conviction March 18

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court on March 18 will deliver verdict on the rule that questioned the legality of Labour Appellate Tribunal's order that stayed the conviction and sentences of Prof Muhammad Yunus and three other top Grameen Telecom officials in a labour law violation case.

The bench of Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder and Justice Kazi Ebadoth Hossain yesterday fixed the date after concluding hearing on the rule.

Following a petition filed by Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE), the HC bench on February 5 issued the rule asking the state why the Labour Appellate Tribunal's stay order should not be scrapped and also halted the stay order till disposal of the rule.

On that day, the HC said as the four accused — Yunus, chairman of Grameen Telecom, and its directors Ashrafur Hassan, Nurjahan Begum, and M Shahjahan — are on bail, their sentences will remain suspended until their appeals are disposed of.

It also said Prof Yunus and three others must

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

SOILMARI RIVER IN KHULNA

Once mighty, now a narrow canal

DIPANKAR ROY, Khulna

Once a mighty river, the 29-kilometre long Soilmari, which flows through Khulna's Batiaghata upazila, is in dire need of excavation.

Over the last five years, extensive siltation turned the 150 metre-wide river to a narrow channel, merely 3-4 metres wide. Encroachment by locals and filling up of the river by housing projects further aggravated the situation.

A huge amount of silt, carried by the tide, deposited on the river bed, said Bangladesh Water Development Board officials.

Experts blamed the lack of

Soilmari is naturally under the influence of tides. Upstream water used to maintain its flow. However, unplanned dams, sluice gates, construction of brick kilns and extraction of earth from the river are killing it.

IQBAL KABIR JAHIID
Chief advisor of Bhabadah Water Drainage Struggle Committee

upstream flow, and construction of unplanned dams and sluice gates for the river's present state, adding that the entire waterbody will soon be lost if urgent measures



to save it are not taken.

Water from at least 100 villages, including Beel Dakatiya, Gutudia, and Panchu, is drained through this river. Waterlogging will become common phenomenon in these areas if the river ceases to exist.

Visiting the river basin along Batiaghata, Khalashibunia, Baguladanga, Par Batiaghata, Mailmara, Dhani Bunia, Soilmari, Uttor Shilmari, and Jolma areas, hundreds of ponds were seen being dug by locals, while brick kilns are being built by encroaching the river.

"At least 20 housing projects are being developed by filling up the river with sand as the area is very close to Khulna city and the land is valuable," said Ananta

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

Russia proposes Dhaka-Moscow flights

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Russia has expressed an interest in starting direct flights between Dhaka and Moscow so that tourists from both countries can easily travel between the two countries.

Alexander Mantyskiy, Russian ambassador to Bangladesh, expressed this interest during a meeting yesterday with Civil Aviation Minister Muhammad Faruk Khan at the Secretariat.

The Russian envoy also expressed interest in becoming a development partner for Bangladesh's aviation industry.

"If the number of Russian tourists in Bangladesh increases, it will contribute to the development of tourism industry and strengthen the friendship between the two countries," said Alexander.

The ambassador also said Russia is keen to provide any kind of assistance to Bangladesh's growing aviation industry, including technical assistance.

Faruk Khan said, "We sincerely welcome the desire of a friendly country like Russia to become a development partner in the aviation industry of Bangladesh and the interest of launching Dhaka-Moscow direct flights."

In this regard, a decision will be taken subject to discussions between the relevant authorities of the two countries.

25 DRUGS CASES

AG astonished as HC granted bails to accused

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Attorney General AM Amin Uddin yesterday expressed astonishment as a High Court bench recently delivered several orders granting bail to the accused in around 25 drug cases.

The AG, however, did not disclose the names of the judges of the HC bench.

"Bails have been granted in all the 25-26 cases filed after recovering narcotics, including heroine of various quantities — from 50 grammes to more than one kilogramme," he said.

"I have never seen that bail has been granted in the cases filed for recovering such huge amounts

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

10 AIRBUS AIRCRAFT

Biman to evaluate purchase options

RASHIDUL HASAN

Biman Bangladesh Airlines has formed a techno-financial committee to evaluate the opportunity to purchase 10 aircraft from Airbus, following a proposal from the European manufacturing giant.

The information was shared by Biman Managing Director and CEO Shafiqul Azim while speaking to The Daily Star.

The national flag carrier has primarily decided to buy 10 Airbus A350 widebody planes, including two cargo freighters, from Airbus.

The 16-member committee, formed last week, includes the Biman Director of Flight Operations as its chairman, while Biman's Chief Financial Officer along with the Director of Engineering and Materials Management are co-chairmen.

One official from the Civil Aviation and Tourism Ministry and another professor or associate

SEE PAGE 4 COL 8

'Why did such tragedy befall my son?'

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and AAQIB HASIB

When the devastating fire broke out from a gas cylinder in Gazipur's Kaliakoir on Wednesday evening, Shah Alam, a salesman of an ice cream company, rushed to douse the fire with nearby locals.

In the wake of the fire, Alam helped the victims of the fire get to Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery in the capital in an ambulance.

Accompanying the injured to the emergency ward, Alam heard the cries of a boy in a nearby bed,

calling for his father. As the boy kept calling, he approached the bed and asked the boy who is his father.

At the moment, Alam was not prepared for the one word that would change his life.

"Tumi [you]," the boy uttered before fainting.

It was only then that Alam realised that the fire at the densely-populated colony in Telipara Mouchak area had left his own son Golam Rabbi, 11, with over 90 percent burns.



Golam Rabbi

As of yesterday evening, Rabbi was fighting for his life at the hospital's intensive care unit (ICU).

At least 36 people, including women and at least nine children, suffered severe burns from the gas cylinder fire. All of them were undergoing treatment at the hospital with five of them being kept in the ICU.

Of the injured, at least 15 are in critical condition with 50 to 100 percent burns, and another six suffered 30-50 percent burns in their breathing tracts, Pradip Chandra Das, associate professor at the burn institute, told reporters on

Wednesday.

Alam recalled the fateful evening just before the incident occurred while talking to this correspondent yesterday.

"I had given Rabbi Tk 100 to buy sugarcane juice for Iftar from the market, located in the opposite of the site of the fire. Rabbi was not supposed to be at that place when the gas cylinder exploded," he said, his voice breaking.

"I still don't know how and why my son went there. Why did such tragedy

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5



Traders set up wooden platforms to walk over open drains on Hafizullah road in the capital's Chawkbazar area. Locals have been suffering while shopkeepers are compelled to operate amid risks for the last two weeks, as drainage works continue at a snail's pace. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON