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RMG SECTOR

Need better planning for better future

Speakers tell discussion, stress unified code of conduct for factories to promote good governance, protect labour rights

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh's ready-made garment (RMG) sector has improved significantly thanks to the best labour practices promoted by the International Labour Organization, said speakers at a roundtable yesterday.

Export revenues have increased by 55 percent and export volumes by 50 percent following the introduction of ILO's Better Work Bangladesh Programme, said Centre for Policy Dialogue's research director Khondakar Golam Moazzem in his keynote presentation.

He presented these findings in his keynote paper at the roundtable held on the occasion of the 10-year celebration of the "Better Work Bangladesh (BWB)" programme.

ILO and International Finance Corporation (IFC) jointly organised the event, titled "Better Work, Better Lives: Elevating RMG Industry in Bangladesh," in association with The Daily Star and Prothom Alo at The Daily Star Centre in the capital.

Launched in 2014, BWB is a joint initiative by ILO and IFC.

Between 2014 and 2022, Better Work

Speaking at the event, lawmaker Nahim Razzaq said, "Bangladesh is the world's second-largest RMG exporter and hosts the highest number of green factories, but we aren't paid enough apart from the norm."

He called for advocacy from ILO, IFC, and other agencies in this regard.

"This is our standard as legislators and government, because we need to promote compliance," he added.

"We must implement protective measures to ensure the long-term survival of these industries. If they don't survive, there'll be no employment," he said, urging worker federations and unions to act positively for RMG sector's stability.

ILO Bangladesh Country Director Tuomo Poutiainen stressed the significance of understanding labour practices, laws, and standards at the enterprise level, emphasising their importance for developing a harmonious relationship between the business community and workers.

"Bangladesh is not unique in addressing working conditions or investing in safety and health. All countries are doing so because it is integral to modern-day business," he said.



Nobel Laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus shakes hands with Pope Francis during the 2nd World Meeting on Human Fraternity in the Vatican City on May 11. Yunus, who was co-chair of the event, discussed global challenges with the Pope.

PHOTO COURTESY OF YUNUS CENTRE

BNP raises alarm over dwindling reserves

Fakhrul sees no noteworthy change in US position on Bangladesh

STAR REPORT

BNP senior leader Nazrul Islam Khan yesterday voiced concerns over dwindling foreign currency reserves, stating that the nation is grappling with a severe crisis exacerbated by the misdeeds of the government.

"Our reserves are declining... Attempts are being made to boost it by taking loans... they're hoping that the reserves will increase somewhat after receiving the next installment from the IMF," he said.

Citing a report from the Reserve Bank of India, Nazrul said the remittance volume sent by the Indian workers from Bangladesh alone exceeds the total amount sent by Bangladeshi expatriates from many countries.

"We need to consider whether there is any way to halt the outflow of such a significant amount of foreign currency. Again, we are losing much more money than earning by sending two lakh workers abroad due to the outflow of foreign currencies. Is there any effort to prevent this?" he said.

A country has to maintain ties with the governments of other countries, even with a military regime. In view of the current situation of Bangladesh, they (US) are doing what they think is necessary for their country. But they are not doing it against the people of Bangladesh.

MIRZA FAKHRUL ISLAM ALAMGIR
BNP Secretary General

Nazrul, a member of the BNP standing committee, suggested that if Bangladesh can involve its citizens in the tasks currently undertaken by Indian nationals, it could potentially stem the outflow of significant foreign currency.

He said the Awami League government has no interest in taking such an initiative.

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MV ABDULLAH

Hope of seeing my family again kept me going

Youngest crew member recounts ordeal, gets reunited with family

DWAIPAYAN BARUA, Ctg

The incident of Somali pirates capturing MV Abdullah on March 12 was a traumatic event for all crew members, but more so for engine cadet Ayub Khan, the youngest member on board.

This was only Ayub's second voyage after



When a challenge like this comes along, other things feel trivial. We struggled, but our main concern was getting released safely.

Ayub Khan

starting his new job in March of 2023, after completing his education at the Bangladesh Marine Academy in Chattogram.

The youngest of four siblings, Ayub was still grieving the loss of his father, who had passed away a few months back, at that time.

So, the unexpected attack by Somali pirates left the 24-year-old fearing for his own life. In that moment, Ayub thought his time on this planet was going to end.

"Most mariners do not encounter such danger over the course of their entire careers. Seeing as this happened to me at such an stage of my career left me in shock," said Ayub.

Despite his fears, the young mariner did well to cope with the challenging situation, thanks to reassurances from his colleagues and captain.

At the time of the attack, he was on morning duty in the ship's engine room when he heard the alarm.

Initially, Ayub assumed it was part of a drill. But as other crewmen began to scream and cry, he realised something serious had happened and soon discovered the grave scenario they were in.

"I had heard about the Jahan Moni incident where crewmen were held captive for 100 days. So, I was extremely nervous when heavily armed pirates boarded our ship and captured the crew," he explained.

"Just before they took away my phone, I managed to call my elder brother, who was in Dhaka, and bid what I thought was my final farewell," shared an emotional Ayub.

When his mother learned about the hostage

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Speakers at a roundtable held on the occasion of the 10-year celebration of the "Better Work Bangladesh" programme yesterday. ILO and International Finance Corporation jointly organised the event in association with The Daily Star and Prothom Alo at The Daily Star Centre in the capital.

PHOTO: STAR

factories increased workers' base pay by 5.4 percent, reduced noncompliance with overtime hour limits by 22 percent, and increased the possibility of offering maternity leave by 10 percent, Moazzem noted.

Furthermore, Better Work factories were 5 percent more likely to pay on time, showed a 21 percent decrease in noncompliance with overtime compensation, and had a 30 percent higher possibility of offering daycare facilities, he added.

Also, progress was made in gender equality and returns, including elevation of women into supervisory roles, which led to shifting dynamics and resulted in a 5 percent rise in line efficiency and a 39 percent wage increase for female supervisors, he also said.

Better Work is actively collaborating with enterprise industry associations and the government to demonstrate and advocate for endorsement of such practices, he said.

Abdullah Hil Rakib, vice president of BGMEA, urged people to appreciate the RMG sector for the improvements it has made over the years, particularly after the Rana Plaza collapse.

Efforts are underway to develop a unified code of conduct for factories to promote good governance, protect labour rights, and ensure a safe work environment, he said.

Delivering the welcome speech, Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, said, "We want the RMG industry to be profitable, ethical, and sustainable."

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These two young friends were overjoyed when a city corporation water cannon began spraying water on Manik Mia Avenue. For a moment, worries of heatwaves were a distant thought as the two turned it into a fun activity for themselves. Dhaka North City Corporation began using water cannons to prevent air pollution and keep the city cool during hot days. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS



Dengue claims 3 more lives

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three patients died of dengue fever while 21 were hospitalised in the last 24 hours till yesterday morning.

With the new deaths, the dengue death toll rose to 32, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

All the victims are from Dhaka's DSCC areas.

Meanwhile, the number of cases rose to 2,545 this year.

Of the cases, five are from Barishal division, three from Chattogram, one in Dhaka division, one in Khulna division, four under Dhaka North City Corporation, and seven under Dhaka South City Corporation.

Last year, the country witnessed 1,705 dengue-related deaths and a total of 321,179 reported cases.