

Invest in country's economic zones

PM urges businesses



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged local businesses to invest in the country's 100 economic zones in addition to foreign investment.

"We are setting up 100 economic zones across the country. We are inviting investments there. But we do not want only foreign investments, we want domestic investments there," she said.

The prime minister said this while inaugurating the weeklong 11th National SME Product Fair to showcase locally made products from small and medium enterprises at the Bangabandhu International Conference Center (BICC) jointly organised by the Ministry of Industries and SME Foundation.

She said that of the total 100 economic zones, the government has so far allocated lands for up to 80 economic zones.

"I think that from the SME Foundation or those who are entrepreneurs can avail lands in these economic zones alone or with partnership basis to set up their industries there," she said.

Hasina said that along with the mechanisation of agriculture, the government is emphasising food production and agricultural products which will contribute to the economy, and industrialisation based on that.

"If there is no industrialisation, no employment will be created, and we won't be able to advance further. So, we have to focus on industrialisation," she said.

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Heaps of the Palmyra palm fruits -- mainly from Cumilla, Noakhali and Chandpur -- have arrived at Kadamtali wholesale and retail market in the port city. Traders buy the popular summer fruit from here and sell them in different districts. Retailers make Tk 1,000-1,500 a day after buying them at Tk 3-15 apiece. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Russian strikes on Kharkiv kill 10

25 others injured; Ukrainian drone attack halts operation of Russian refinery

REUTERS, Kharkiv

Russian strikes killed at least 10 people, including a pregnant woman, and injured 25 others in two separate attacks in Ukraine's northeastern Kharkiv region yesterday, local officials said.

It was the latest in what have been constant attacks in recent weeks on Kharkiv city and the region of the same name by Russian missiles and guided bombs as Russian troops have launched an offensive in the northeast of the region.

The first strike yesterday killed five and wounded 16 in a recreation area just outside Kharkiv, while another five people were killed and 9 injured later in the day in two villages in Kupiansk district.

Local governor Oleh Synyehubov said Russian forces shelled two villages of the district with a self-propelled multiple rocket launcher. In the city of Kharkiv,

Mayor Ihor Terekhov gave the toll of dead and wounded.

"The explosions heard in Kharkiv around noon occurred in a nearby suburb. Two Russian missiles hit a recreation centre where people were relaxing, killing five people and injuring sixteen others," he said on the Telegram messaging app.

Meanwhile, Ukraine fired nine US ATACMS at Crimea and attacked Russian regions with at least 60 drones in a major attack that forced one oil refinery in southern Russia to halt operations, Russian officials said yesterday.

Russian air defences shot down nine ATACMS missiles over Crimea along with 57 drones over Russia's Krasnodar region and three drones over Belgorod region, the defence ministry said.

In Kharkiv, Reuters correspondents saw a recreation area destroyed after what rescuers at the scene said was a powerful

blast, followed by a second, "double tap" strike about 15-20 minutes later.

A man's corpse lay under the rubble of what just over an hour previously was a busy lakeside restaurant area on a sunny day. A woman stumbled around in shock looking for her handbag in the wreckage.

Valentyna, a 69-year-old woman who lived opposite the resort, was at home when the explosion hit. Blood ran down the side of her face as she cried, saying husband had been killed in the blast.

After yesterday's attack President Volodymyr Zelensky again called on Western allies to supply Kyiv with additional air defence systems to protect Kharkiv and other cities.

"The world can stop Russian terror - and to do so, the lack of political will among leaders must be overcome," Zelenskiy said on Telegram.

Protest, clashes rock Mirpur

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police chased them away, they threw bricks at vehicles.

It all happened amid a government crackdown on battery-powered three-wheelers in the capital that began on Saturday.

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader on May 15 ordered the authorities concerned to take steps to enforce a ban on battery-run rickshaws in the capital.

"I used to manually pull rickshaws. I took up the battery-run rickshaw two years ago. I routinely give money to police and local ruling party activists. But, police seized my rickshaw from Shah Ali area on Saturday," said Abul Kalam. "How will I feed my children? I still have to pay for the rickshaw which I bought on credit at Tk 80,000."

Fifteen other demonstrators told this correspondent that they lost their livelihood when police seized their rickshaws over the last few days.

A study carried out by Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS) in 2019 said there were two lakh battery-run rickshaws in the city and the number was growing fast.

Hundreds of three-wheeler drivers gathered on the streets at Mirpur-1, Pallabi, Bhashantek, Kalshi Road, Mirpur-6, Mirpur-13 and Mirpur-13 after 9:00am yesterday.

At 10:00am, they marched to Mirpur-10 roundabout and kept

it blocked. Around 2:40pm, ruling party activists assaulted some of the demonstrators and chased the others away with help from police.

The demonstrators then threw bricks at cops, ruling party men, and vehicles and moved to Kalshi area and joined a group of drivers already protesting there. They blocked the road between Kalshi graveyard and Baunia Bandh.

Cops chased them away after they set fire to a police box. Police with the help of locals doused the fire immediately.

Jashim Uddin Mollah, deputy commissioner of Mirpur division of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said, "Several policemen suffered injuries and several demonstrators have been detained. We used teargas and fired rubber bullets to disperse the demonstrators."

As the chaos unfolded in the morning and evening rush hours, hundreds of commuters remained stuck in long tailbacks for hours.

Protests spread to Uttara at night. Md Shahjahan, DMP's Uttara division deputy commissioner, said the drivers vandalised a police box in Sector-13 around 8:15pm.

Police on Saturday seized 250 battery-run rickshaws in Mirpur. In the last one year, Mirpur division of the DMP seized 1,530 electric three-wheelers.

he was cleared in most of the cases lodged against him. He was reelected in 2018 and 2024.

Talking to reporters at the DB office yesterday evening, its chief Mohammad Harun Or Rashid said MP Azim used a Bangladeshi SIM and an Indian SIM in India.

The two numbers were sometimes found switched off and sometimes operational. The issue is also being discussed with the Indian police. Police are trying to find out what happened to Azim.

Harun said that on the morning of May 16, a call was made from Azim's phone to his APS and a leader of Jhenaidah district AL. But no one picked up the phone. His location was traced at Muzaffarabad. He said they were taking this matter seriously and was in contact with the Indian police.

After a programme in the city, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal told journalists that there is nothing to worry about the lawmaker.

"The lawmaker has gone to Kolkata. He will come back," he said.

"Our NSI is working. Indian law enforcement agencies have been informed. There is no reason to worry. He is a member of parliament. He knows what he is doing. He went to neighbouring India. He has not gone to Myanmar where fighting is going on. I think he will come back," the home boss added.

Helicopter carrying

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Meanwhile, the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, urged Iranians to "not worry" about the leadership of the Islamic republic, saying "there will be no disruption in the country's work".

"We hope that Almighty God will bring our dear president and his companions back in full health into the arms of the nation," he said in on state TV.

Expressions of concern and offers to help came from abroad, including Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Qatar and Turkey, as well as from the European Union which said it activated its rapid response mapping service to aid in the search effort.

State television reported that "an accident happened to the helicopter carrying the president" in the Jolfa region of the western province, while some officials described it as a "hard landing".

"The harsh weather conditions and heavy fog have made it difficult for the rescue teams to reach the accident site," said one broadcaster.

More than 40 rescue teams using search dogs and drones were sent to the site, reported the IRNA news agency as TV stations showed pictures of rows of waiting emergency response vehicles.

Raisi was visiting the province where he inaugurated a dam project together with Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev, on the border between the two countries.

Raisi's convoy included three helicopters, and the other two had "reached their destination safely," according to Tasnim news agency.

Foreign countries were closely following the search effort at a time of high regional tensions over the Gaza war between Israel and Hamas since October 7 that has drawn in other armed groups in the Middle East.

A US State Department spokesman said: "We are closely following reports of a possible hard landing of a helicopter in Iran carrying the Iranian president and foreign minister."

"We have no further comment at this time."

An Iranian Red Crescent team was seen walking up a slope in thick fog and drizzling rain, while other live footage showed worshippers reciting prayers in the holy city of Mashhad, Raisi's hometown.

THICK FOG AND DRIZZLE

In neighbouring Iraq, Prime Minister Mohamed Shia al Sudani "instructed the interior ministry and the Iraqi Red Crescent and other relevant authorities to offer available resources... to aid in the search".

Azeri President Aliyev said in a post on X that "we were profoundly troubled by the news of a helicopter carrying the top delegation crash landing in Iran".

"Our prayers to Allah Almighty are with President Ebrahim Raisi and the accompanying delegation," he said, noting that his country "stands ready to offer any assistance needed".

The accident happened in the mountainous protected forest area of Dizmar near the town of Varzaghan, said the official IRNA news agency.

Govt app sees 6 rescue pleas in about six years

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If a victim presses the emergency button on the app, her GPS location, audio recording of the surroundings and picture will go directly to the police super of the area, metropolitan deputy police commissioner, three pre-selected "friends and family" numbers, and to the national VAW helpline -- 109.

A victim can also file a written complaint choosing the category of the crime in the app. Anyone can later attach proof, whether video or audio. All the information is kept private and all request texts from the app are toll free.

Funded by the ICT Division's "Access to Information" (a2i) project, the app was developed by the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs under its "Multi-Sectoral Programme on Violence against Women".

According to the ministry data, the various other services the app received texts for were as follows: 355 for police-related help, 306 for legal help, 243 related to local arbitration, 31 for medical support and 823 for other information.

However, only six requests were made for rescue purposes, which shows a lack of faith in the app in emergency victims.

About police-related help, Raisul Islam, in-charge of Joy Mobile App and the 109 helpline, said, "Suppose there is a case but the police is not arresting the accused. If such an SMS is received by the app, the investigation officer of the case is spoken to from the 109 helpline. Such help-seeking categories are brought under Police Help."

Also, it got only 43 requests to stop child marriage -- one in 2018, 28 in 2019, nine in 2020, three in 2021, one in 2023 and one in 2023.

This newspaper's findings from 41 upazilas of 13 districts, however, showed that around 10,741 girls and at least two boys were illegally married off during the pandemic-induced school closures between March 17, 2020, and September 12, 2021.

The exact number could be much higher if a proper survey is done.

At the launch, MoWCA authorities said that one can find the app by typing Joy 109 in the Google Play Store but a search from five mobile handsets showed that it does not

show up.

According to the ministry data, 4,275 users have installed it on their android mobile devices since December 2019. But the latest data from the Google Play store showed that the app is installed by only 1k+ users.

That means an overwhelming majority of the users, who have installed the app earlier, uninstalled it.

The latest Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics-2023 conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and released in March this year showed more than 50 percent of the total population of 171 million, aged 15 years and above, use the internet.

The percentage of women in that age group using the internet is 42.6.

WHY IS THE APP FAILING IN RESCUE?

Speaking to reporters about the app ahead of its launch, Abul Hossain, the then project director of the multi-sectoral programme of MoWCA, said that apart from providing immediate redress to victims of any abuse, the app is working to identify criminals.

"The app will be identified as a 'threat' to criminals or torturers. If everyone starts using it, the level of crimes will also decrease. Once it is installed and active, the criminals cannot turn it off even if they want to. The data will automatically move to the specified location for a specified period of time."

Speaking as the chief guest at the app's launch, the then state minister for women and children affairs Meher Afroz Chumki said, "This app will help women and children, while also working against criminals. A total of 12 crore people in country use mobile phones now and such apps will definitely be useful for the users."

However, according to statistics, such goals were not met.

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad President Fauzia Moslem said that though the app was initially heavily promoted, its significance waned over time.

She emphasised the importance of further promotion and also providing training on the app's usage to relevant stakeholders, particularly those facing or addressing gender-based violence.

Moslem suggested conducting campaigns in educational institutions

UZ ELECTION

3 hurt in pre-polls violence in Tangail

Houses, shops, election camps vandalised

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

At least three people were injured yesterday during separate clashes among the supporters of two vice-chairman candidates competing in tomorrow's upazila elections in Tangail's Bhuapur.

Multiple houses, shops, and election camps were also vandalised centring the incidents that took place in Tarai, Dhublia, and Pachterilla village of the upazila's Falda union between 12:30am and 3:00am.

Meanwhile, the supporters of vice-chairman candidate Ariful Haque and supporters of his rival candidate Monirul Islam Babu clashed in the areas with local lethal weapons.

Later, they attacked houses, shops, and election camps of each other, leaving three people from both sides injured.

The injured have been treated at Bhuapur Upazila Health Complex.

Informed, police forces were deployed at the spots and the situation was brought under control.

Bhuapur Police Station Officer in Charge Ahsan Ullah said they were investigating the matter after getting direction from the Election Commission and Assistant Returning Officer (RO).

Assistant Returning Officer Mamunur Rashid, also upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) in Bhuapur, said that necessary legal steps will be taken in this regard after an investigation.

Tension among the supporters of the two candidates is prevailing in the area.

Woman's body found in pond

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narsingdi

Police recovered the body of a 30-year-old woman from a pond in Narsingdi's Shihbpur upazila yesterday, three days after she went missing.

The deceased was identified as Mahfuza Begum, of Mashimpur area.

Md Farid Uddin, officer-in-charge of Shihbpur Police Station, said Mahfuza was mentally ill. She often left her house without telling anyone and would return after three or four days.

Around 9:30am, locals spotted her body in a pond and informed police, he said.

The law enforcers sent the body to Narsingdi Sadar Hospital for autopsy.