

45 garment factories shut midday amid labour unrest

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Some 45 garment factories in Ashulia and Gazipur, one of the country's major industrial belts, were forced to shut down in the middle of the day yesterday amidst workers' demonstrations, which have been sporadically erupting since last week.

The demonstrations were over demands for different benefits and allowances, such as increasing maternity leaves from three months to six months, congenial work environments and recruitment of men and women in equal proportions.

"There was no untoward incident," said BGMEA President Khandoker Rafiqul Islam, adding that the factory owners were not obligated to meet some of the demands, such as for attendance bonus and lunch allowance, as those did not fall under the labour law.

Of the factories, 44 were in Ashulia and one in Gazipur, confirmed the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

Six people were detained for questioning from Pukurpar area on suspicion of being "outsiders" and "creating anarchy", said Mohammad Sarwar Alam, superintendent of Ashulia Industrial Police I.

As per the BGMEA's previous decision, most factories reopened yesterday but workers of the 45 factories started staging demonstrations both inside and outside, saying their negotiations with the authorities had not been "fruitful".

Tensions flared after 11:00am and the authorities decided to shut down, said industrial police.

Laily Akhter, a worker of a garment factory in Ashulia, said they were



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PHOTO: AKLAKUR RAHMAN AKASH

demanding an increase of monthly attendance bonus from Tk 500 to Tk 1,000 and its payment every month instead of every two or three years or when jobs were terminated.

They were also seeking Tk 50 as food allowance and an attendance allowance of Tk 100 for night shifts, she said.

"But the factory authority declared a holiday in the afternoon," she said, apprehending that the factory might

be kept closed for 10 days and that they might not be paid for that period.

"We do not want the factory to be closed. We urge the authorities to accept our demands and keep the factory running," said Laily.

Around 11:30am, a group of workers blocked the Jirabo-Bishmail road in front of several factories in Pukurpar area of Ashulia.

Later, members of Bangladesh Police,

Bangladesh Army and Border Guard Bangladesh arrived to disperse them and normalise traffic flow.

During a visit, this correspondent found the six detainees "being interrogated" outside a factory.

However, operations at other factories were normal. Police quoted the workers as saying that they had joined their workplaces after factory owners accepted most of their demands.

White-collar crimes: Bangladesh perspective

DH CHOUDHURY

Readers may agree with my supposition that the current financial misfortune of Bangladesh is largely caused by white-collar crimes. Edwin Sutherland, a US sociologist who coined this terminology, defined white-collar crime as "a crime committed by a person of respectability and high social status in the course of his occupation".

In Bangladesh, we fail to isolate white-collar crimes from ordinary deceptions, because it is not clearly defined in our legal system. A fair guideline can be obtained from the US Department of Justice definition, which articulates: "White-collar offences shall constitute those classes of non-violent illegal activities which principally involve traditional notions of deceit, deception, concealment, manipulation, breach of trust, subterfuge or illegal circumvention".

When this crime has caused so much misery in our society, it is pertinent to ask: a) why do socially established people in Bangladesh commit white-collar crimes and b) whether these crimes can be prevented in the coming days.

Regarding the first question, it is commonly understood that white-collar crimes thrive in a modern complex economic system where there is money, trust, greed and opportunity. Bangladeshi politicians created opportunities for a few in the name of progress and development. Contractual trust, which is a basis for all monetary transactions, was widely flouted. Thereby, paving the way for deception and financial scams to surpass all bounds.

The second issue is the prevention of white-collar crime. We need a robust legal framework and institution comparable to the Serious Fraud Office

of the UK. Simultaneously, we need to inculcate basic moral precepts. Consider how honesty is being routinely touted in religious sermons, political meetings and civil society in Bangladesh. Yet we do not find their reflection in private morality and public policies. This gives rise to the question of whether our families and society inculcate the moral foundation in the right

earnest.

Truly speaking, white-collar crimes cannot be eliminated but can be prevented. With the happening of each financial crisis, Western societies make appropriate legal reforms to prevent reoccurrence. Conversely, in our part of the world, white-collar crimes thrive through political patronage and social indifference.

Trivial phrases like "all men are created equal" or George Washington's inaugural speech where he said "there is an enduring union between virtue and happiness" are some of the precepts of American moral beliefs and behaviour.

Secular Western societies derive their public policy from private morality. The stigma of being labelled as a fraudster is a disgrace in the Western world. There is a common saying in the Western world that one could get away with murder, but not with a white-collar crime. In support of this notion, let me cite examples:

During the 1990s, Robert Maxwell, the UK-based media mogul embezzled employees' pension fund. Upon detection, he faced public outrage. Then he died a mysterious death, widely believed to be a suicide out of shame. Likewise, Bernie Madoff, the stockbroker and once Chairman of NASDAQ, who fleeced many people and devastated many lives, when brought to justice, received a 150-year prison sentence and later died in remorse and shame.

Please do not get me wrong. I am citing the Western precepts and examples in order to bring home the truism that any society in the pursuit of ethically run institutions must build a moral premise first. For example, if we need justice in a community, we have to put in place a just society. Only then societies can produce benevolent people.

History demonstrates that public sentiments towards any common cause can create invincible people's power. Perhaps the July 2024 Bangladesh Revolution brings home some hope of transforming the society.

The author is a former banker

Shoemaker to invest \$7.45m in Bepza EZ

STAR BUSINESS DESK

YiXin Bangladesh, a Chinese company in Bangladesh, will set up a footwear accessories manufacturing factory in the Bepza Economic Zone with an investment of \$7.45 million.

The company has set a target to annually produce 10 million pairs of footwear materials. The investment will create employment opportunities for 1,509 Bangladeshi nationals in the factory.

To this effect, the Chinese company signed an agreement with the Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (Bepza) at the BEPZA Complex in Dhaka yesterday, according to a press release.

Md Ashrafur Kabir, member (investment promotion) of Bepza, and Jian Zaiyi, managing director of YiXin Bangladesh, penned the deal.

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Stocks keep bleeding as investors go for safe bets

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Stocks in Bangladesh maintained their downward spiral for a fifth consecutive day yesterday as skittish investors made fresh bets on lucrative blue-chip and large-cap scrips to pocket short-term gains in the face of price fluctuations.

Blue-chip stocks are of companies widely recognised, well-established, and financially sound. Large-cap stocks are of companies that account for large amounts in market capitalisation, calculated based on the total value of their outstanding stocks.

Shares of many financially sound companies reached lucrative lows after recent price corrections, according to an investor based in Dhaka.

As such, the DSEX edged down by 0.86 percent from the previous day to close at about 5,679 points, marking the fifth day of decline for the benchmark index of the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE).

The DSES index comprising Shariah-compliant companies also shed 0.60 percent to about 1,221 points while the DS30 index representing blue-chip stocks slipped by 0.67 percent to 2,100 points.

The day's turnover, which indicates the total value of shares traded on the DSE, stood at Tk 678.8 crore, an increase of 0.58 percent compared to the previous day's trading

session.

The pharmaceuticals sector dominated the turnover chart, contributing 19.15 percent of the day's total.

Block trades, meaning high-volume securities transactions that are privately negotiated and executed outside the open market, accounted for 3.4 percent of the daily turnover.

Linde Bangladesh Limited was the most traded share, registering a turnover of Tk 32.1 crore.

Shares of many financially sound companies reached lucrative lows after recent price corrections, according to an investor

In its daily market update, BRAC EPL Stock Brokerage said all large-cap sectors posted negative performances while engineering experienced the highest loss of 2.30 percent.

Fuel and power recorded a loss of 2.19 percent followed by the food and allied, non-bank financial institution (NBF) and banking sectors with losses of 1.26 percent, 0.99 percent and 0.62 percent respectively.

The pharmaceuticals sector logged a loss of 0.50 percent while it was 0.24 percent for

telecom.

Paper and printing, travel and leisure, and life insurance were the top three sectors that closed in negative territory, according to the daily market update by UCB Stock Brokerage.

Of the issues traded at the country's premier bourse, 64 scrips saw their prices advance while those of 289 ended lower and 44 did not see any fluctuation.

Shares of BRAC Bank, Beximco Pharmaceuticals, ACME Laboratories, Renata, Olympic Industries, MJL Bangladesh, Grameenphone, LafargeHolcim Bangladesh, Confidence Cement and Libra Infusions drew the most investors, according to LankaBangla Financial Portal.

But none of the companies saw a double-digit growth in share prices. BRAC Bank logged a gain of 2.18 percent, which was the highest among these companies.

Meanwhile, shares of BAT Bangladesh, Square Pharmaceuticals, United Commercial Bank, IFIC Bank, Delta Life Insurance, Orion Pharmaceuticals, Sea Pearl Beach Resort and Spa, Orion Infusion, Robi Axiata and Unique Hotel and Resorts showcased tame performances.

The Chittagong Stock Exchange saw a similar trend as the Caspi, the all-share price index of the port city bourse, decreased by 0.86 percent from the previous day to settle at about 16,238 points.

Canada jobless rate rises to 7-year high

AFP, Ottawa

Canada's unemployment rate rose to 6.6 percent in August, its highest level since May 2017 -- excluding peak Covid-19 pandemic years -- the national statistical agency said Friday.

The result, an increase from 6.4 percent in July, was despite little change in the total number of jobs for a fourth month in a row.

Statistics Canada noted that the jobless rate has been generally trending up since April 2023.

Analysts said this is likely to add pressure on the Bank of Canada to continue lowering interest rates, after three successive cuts, in order to prevent the economy from stalling as it seeks to throttle inflation.

"With population growth strong once again and labour force participation rebounding, hiring in August wasn't enough to keep the unemployment rate from rising two ticks," Desjardins' Royce Mendes commented in a research note.

Overall, he said, the data points to the economy "continuing to stagnate in the third quarter."

Desjardins pegged economic growth at just one percent from July to September versus the central bank forecast of 2.8 percent.

"This was a slightly softer than expected (jobs) report consistent with continued steady interest rate cuts from the Bank of Canada," concluded CIBC analyst Andrew Grantham.

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Women ride Pakistan's economic crisis into the workplace

AFP, Karachi

Amina Sohail veers through heavy traffic to pick up her next passenger -- the sight of a woman riding a motorcycle drawing stares in Pakistan's megacity of Karachi.

The 28-year-old is the first woman in her family to enter the workforce, a pattern emerging in urban households coming under increasing financial pressure in Pakistan.

"I don't focus on people, I don't speak to anyone or respond to the hooting, I do my work," said Sohail, who joined a local ride-hailing service at the start of the year, transporting women through the dusty back streets of the city.

"Before, we would be hungry, now we get to eat at least two to three meals a day," she added.

The South Asian nation is locked in a cycle of political and economic crises, dependent on IMF bailouts and loans from friendly countries to service its debt.

Prolonged inflation has forced up the price of basic groceries such as tomatoes by 100 per cent. Electricity and gas bills have risen by 300 per cent compared to July last year, according to official data.

Sohail used to help her mother with cooking, cleaning and looking after her

younger siblings, until her father, the family's sole earner, fell sick.

"The atmosphere in the house was stressful," she said, with the family dependent on other relatives for money.

"That's when I thought I must work."

"My vision has changed. I will work openly like any man, no matter what anyone thinks."

Pakistan was the first Muslim nation to



PHOTO: AFP/FILE

Amina Sohail, a motorbike rider with a local ride-hailing service provider Bykea, drives down a street in Karachi, Pakistan. She joined a local ride-hailing service at the start of the year, transporting women through the dusty back streets of the city.

be led by a woman prime minister in the 1980s, women CEOs grace power lists in Forbes magazine, and they now make up the ranks of the police and military.

However, much of Pakistani society operates under a traditional code which requires women to have permission from their family to work outside of the home.

According to the United Nations, just 21 percent of women participate in Pakistan's work force, most of them in the informal sector and almost half in rural areas working in the fields.

"I am the first girl in the family to work, from both my paternal and maternal side," said Hina Saleem, a 24-year-old telephone operator at a leather factory in Korangi, Karachi's largest industrial area.

The move, supported by her mother after her father died, was met with resistance from her extended family.

Her younger brother was warned that working could lead to socially unacceptable behaviour, such as finding a husband of her choice.

"My uncles said 'get her married'," she told AFP. "There was lots of pressure on my mother."

At the changeover of shifts outside the leather factory, workers arrive in painted

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