

## Union warns of instability as tannery wage implementation stalls

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Tannery Workers Union has alleged that the leather industry is facing growing uncertainty due to employers' delays in implementing the revised minimum wage, ongoing layoffs and the interim government's reported move to transfer Savar leather estate under the Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (Bepza).

Despite a gazette issued on November 21 and the ministry's subsequent announcement, implementation of the revised minimum wage is yet to happen, the union's President Abul Kalam Azad said at an event at The Daily Star Centre yesterday.

"Nearly two years of discussions, tripartite meetings and the ministry's final decision have produced no effective action from employers," he added.

Azad claimed that many long-serving workers were being labelled as "temporary" to deny them the revised wage, which he described as a clear violation of labour law.

Also speaking at the event, the union's General Secretary Abdul Maleque said employers were also delaying the renewal of the bilateral agreement that typically follows a Wage Board decision.

"This delay," he said, "has pushed other worker benefits into uncertainty."

The union is extremely concerned that it has not been informed about the interim government's planned initiative to bring the tannery industry under the Bepza, he added.



PHOTO: STAR/FILE

A high-level government committee has recently recommended the transfer of the management of the Savar Leather Industrial Estate from the Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation to the Bepza in an effort to boost environmental compliance and revive the country's leather export sector, according to media reports.

The committee is expected to submit its recommendations to the Ministry of Industries in a month.

Maleque further alleged that skilled and experienced workers, including machinists, were being laid off and replaced with contract labour without receiving their

legal dues. "This is intentionally pushing a formal sector into an informal labour system."

AKM Nasim, country programme director of the Solidarity Center Bangladesh Office, said employers' reluctance to implement the gazetted minimum wage, coupled with the inactivity of government offices, was alarming.

He noted that the law guarantees equal wages for permanent, temporary and contractual workers, yet implementation remains weak for temporary workers in Dhaka and female workers in Chattogram.

"At the same time, reports of worker dismissals in Chattogram due to union activities are also worrying," he said.

Nasim warned that placing the sector under Bepza could severely restrict workers' freedom of association.

Under the recently amended labour law, a union may be formed within an enterprise cluster by only 20 workers, but the number of unions is capped at five.

This, he said, heightens vulnerabilities for smaller unions and prevents any new union formation once the limit is reached, reducing workers' organising strength.

Ensuring a dignified working environment for workers is a shared responsibility of the state and the employers to restore stability in the industry, he added.

Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmed, chief of the Labour Reform Commission, said although the tannery industry is an important sector of Bangladesh, it still faces a precarious situation.

## Remove barriers

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products, discouraging business people from investing in this sector."

Prof Hamid proposed several measures, including imposing regulatory restrictions on the import of medical equipment already manufactured locally and providing VAT exemptions for locally produced medical devices for 10-15 years.

"We should also formulate a national medical equipment policy to protect local manufacturers, similar to the National Drug Policy, 1982," he said.

On private healthcare services, he noted, "There are 6,000 registered hospitals in the country with 126,000 beds, which account for 60 percent of total hospital beds. In addition, around 12,000 private diagnostic centres operate, though half of them are unregistered."

He warned, "Many private facilities lack adequate and qualified staff, remain underutilised, rely on broker-driven marketing, and face complex, time-consuming licensing and renewal processes."

To address these issues, Prof Hamid recommended, "Licences should be renewed every three to five years. One-stop service centres at the Directorate General of Health Services and civil surgeon offices should be introduced to simplify licensing. Training for

health workers should be provided along with a standard remuneration package."

Abdur Razzaq, founder and managing director of JMI Group, said, "We produce 98 percent of medicines locally, but for medical devices, it is only 5-10 percent."

"Without policy support, the pharmaceutical industry would not have reached its current position. So, we need policy support for flourishing medical equipment industries," he added.

Md Mostafizur Rahman, CEO of the Bangladesh Association of Pharmaceutical Industries, noted that entrepreneurs must obtain licences from 47 different agencies to establish an API (active pharmaceutical ingredients) industry, which discourages investors.

He called for a one-stop service to simplify the licensing process.

Health Secretary Sайдур رহمن said the private sector constitutes a major portion of the country's health system, making proper coordination between the public and private sectors essential.

He added that authorities are working to simplify licensing processes for private hospitals.

Several other health professionals and FBCCI members also spoke at the programme.

## BBS census

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details and 5 percent in fire-safety information. The highest inconsistency, 32.92 percent, occurred in business registration data.

BIDS Research Director Mohammad Yunus clarified that the inconsistencies stemmed largely from misunderstandings of questions or ambiguous answers rather than deliberate misreporting.

The assessment, he noted, found no signs of motivated bias.

Planning Commission Secretary SM Shakil Akhter, who served as the project director of the census, said the quality of the enumeration depends heavily on the skills, training and access available to field workers.

"If we expect enumerators to learn a large and complex manual in just three to five days, then their training must be properly designed and adequately timed," he said.

Access restrictions were a major obstacle, he added. Enumerators were often prevented from entering garment factories, industrial units and other sensitive sites, hampering proper data collection. "Once in the field, enumerators need free and uninterrupted access. Without that access, the source becomes unreachable from the start," he said.

"Given these constraints, achieving an omission rate of 2.95 percent is something I am actually satisfied with," he added.

Echoing the same challenges, BBS Director General Mohammed Mizanur Rahman said they conducted the economic census under extremely challenging political upheaval.

"After August (2024), the political and social environment became unstable, and many establishments closed or moved," he said.

He said undercounting was slightly higher in city corporation areas, mainly because many businesses had shut down or their owners were not available during the census period. "That contributed to the gaps."

"International standards recommend completing the PEC within three months, but due to workload and circumstances, we had to do it after six months. That timing also explains some of the discrepancies."

"We aim to publish the final report by December. Most sections are ready, and we are now integrating the PEC findings," he added.

### and pricing.

Second, he highlighted the large profit gap among operators, with Grameenphone earning substantial profits while Robi and Banglalink barely break even, which he said limits innovation and investment.

Third, he warned that Bangladesh's fixed broadband penetration, less than 10 percent, is too low to support digital economy ambitions, leaving the country overly dependent on mobile networks.

BTRC officials responded that declaring all three major operators as SMP is not feasible.

However, the commission is working with operators to strengthen competition, reduce costs through resource sharing, narrow profit disparities and expand affordable fixed broadband nationwide.

Brig Gen Md Aminul Hoque, director general of the spectrum division, addressed the queries on behalf of the commission.

BTRC Vice-Chairman Md Abu Bakar Siddique thanked participants for their engagement and said all complaints and suggestions would be reviewed.

He emphasised that the regulator works year-round with transparency and accountability to protect the interests of citizens, the government and the telecom industry, and remains committed to resolving the issues raised during the hearing.

Such concentration, he said, weakens competition, service quality

## Default loans

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Tk 4,25,660 crore in NPLs, equal to 32.9 percent of their portfolios. Specialised banks reported Tk 19,305 crore in bad debts, or 39 percent of their lending.

Foreign commercial banks fared better, with Tk 2,952 crore in defaults, equal to 6.1 percent of their loans, according to the BB report.

Bad loans also rose sharply in half a dozen Islamic banks, including Islami Bank Bangladesh, due to massive loan irregularities during the previous regime.

Md Omar Faruk Khan, managing director and CEO of Islami Bank Bangladesh, said that the bank is stepping up efforts for loan recovery through legal channels.

"Besides, we are signing agreements with international legal firms to recover foreign assets. Our main target now is recovery," he told

## Mobile users decry high costs

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He called on operators to consider unlimited call packages and one-second pulse rates, as seen in neighbouring countries.

On data pricing, he argued that while users often debate validity periods, the core cost of data remains high.

He said a 1GB Grameenphone data package cannot be bought for less than Tk 80, whereas Teletalk offers 2GB for Tk 17, though customers still buy Grameenphone data due to better network coverage.

He also questioned why replacing a SIM costs Tk 345, of which Tk 300 goes to the government, and noted that in neighbouring countries, users can switch operators automatically via a mobile request.

Responding to his concerns, a BTRC official said Grameenphone's roaming packages usually have one-year validity, which extends upon renewal.

The official added that Bangladesh ranks among the world's lowest for voice and data charges - 10th lowest for voice and 15th lowest for data.

BTRC continuously evaluates possibilities to keep rates as low as possible, he said.

UNFAIR DEDUCTIONS, SCAMS, NETWORK GAPS

Another user, Omar Faruk said Tk 20 was deducted from his Robi number for services provided by a

company called Medico.

He said Robi initially claimed that he had activated the service himself. After he filed complaints with the BTRC and posted on Facebook, the company refunded the amount and asked him to delete the post.

Faruk said he had also approached the Directorate of National Consumer Rights Protection, but the agency could not process his complaint because Medico had no valid address.

He questioned why operators partner with such entities.

He also said unlimited-validity packages remain costly and effectively last for about 10 years, while Teletalk offers lower-priced alternatives with longer validity.

Another participant, Shahabuddin, urged the BTRC to monitor scam calls, while another attendee asked Teletalk to improve coverage in the Chittagong University area.

MARKET CONCENTRATION, BROADBAND COVERAGE

Mobile user Munir Hasan raised three concerns. First, he pointed to high market concentration, noting that Grameenphone holds more than 45 percent and Robi over 25 percent of the market, while Banglalink holds nearly the same - levels that would constitute significant market power (SMP) in many countries.

Such concentration, he said, weakens competition, service quality

## Gold holds steady

REUTERS

Gold prices held largely steady on Tuesday, as softer-than-expected US retail sales data reinforced traders' expectations that the Federal Reserve will trim interest rates in December.

Spot gold edged down 0.2 percent to \$4,130.85 per ounce by 09:36am ET (1436 GMT). Prices earlier in the day hit their highest level since November 14, and rose nearly 2 percent on Monday after some Fed policymakers signalled support for a third interest rate cut this year.

US gold futures for December delivery rose 0.8 percent to \$4,127.40 per ounce.

"There's revived hope for a December rate cut based on recent dovish Fed speak, and this (data) doesn't seem to be changing that," said Peter Grant, vice president and senior metals strategist at Zaner Metals. Retail sales increased less than expected in September, taking a breather following a recent stretch of strong gains.

Meanwhile, data showed that for the 12 months through September, the US producer price index increased 2.7 percent after advancing by the same margin in August. The report was delayed by the 43-day shutdown of the government.

Markets are pricing in an 85 percent chance of a December rate cut - compared to 30 percent last week - and a 64 percent probability of a cut in January, CME data showed.

Federal Reserve Governor Stephen Miran said on Tuesday that a deteriorating job market calls for further rate cuts, echoing dovish remarks from Fed Governor Christopher Waller on Monday.

## গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার

জাতীয় প্রতিবন্ধী উন্নয়ন ফাউন্ডেশন

সমাজকল্যাণ মন্ত্রণালয়

এ/৪, সেকশন-১৪, মিরপুর, ঢাকা-১২০৬

০৫ অগ্রহায়ণ ১৪৩২

২০ নভেম্বর ২০২৫

প্রতিবন্ধিতা বিষয়ক কার্যক্রমে নিয়োজিত বেসরকারী সংগঠনসমূহের মধ্যে অনুদান প্রদান সংজ্ঞান বিজ্ঞপ্তি

জাতীয় প্রতিবন্ধী উন্নয়ন ফাউন্ডেশনের অনুদান নীতিমালা ২০১৬ অন্যায়ী প্রতিবন্ধী ব্যক্তিদের উন্নয়নে কর্মরত দেশীয় বেসরকারী সংগঠনসমূহের মধ্যে প্রতিবন্ধী ব্যক্তিদের নির্ধারিত ফরমে নিয়োজিত শর্তাবলী আলোকে প্রত্যাবন করা যাচ্ছে। জাতীয় প্রতিবন্ধী উন্নয়ন ফাউন্ডেশনের ওয়েবসাইটে (www.jpuf.gov.bd) হতে আবেদন ফরম ডাউনলোড করে বিজ্ঞপ্তিতে বর্ণিত শর্ত প্রতিবালনপূর্বক এবং আবেদন ফরম এর মূল্য বাবদ 'জাতীয় প্রতিবন্ধী উন্নয়ন ফাউন্ডেশন' পিরোনামে ৫০০,০০ (পাঁচশত) টাকার পে-অর্ডার/ব্যাংক ড্রাফটসহ ব্যবস্থাপনা পরিচালক, জাতীয় প্রতিবন্ধী উন্নয়ন ফাউন্ডেশন বরাবর আবেদন করতে হবে।

### প্রয়োজনীয় শর্তাবলী :

- ১) আবেদনকারী সংস্থাকে গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকারের সমাজসেবা অধিকারণ/এনজিও বিষয়ক ব্যরো বা সরকার কর্তৃক অনুমোদিত কর্তৃপক্ষের জেনেভারেল সংগঠনসমূহের মধ্যে অন্যায়ী প্রতিবন্ধী ব্যক্তিদের কল্যাণমূলক ট্রান্স হতে হবে।
- ২) প্রত্যাবনী সংস্থা/সংগঠনের অনুমোদিত গঠনত্বে এবং বার্ষিক প্রতিবন্ধে নির্ধারিত নির্বাচিত কার্যক্রমের সুস্পষ্ট ক্লারিফিয়ে বাস্তবায়ন কৌশল উন্নয়নে গৃহীত কার্যক্রমের সুনির্দিষ্ট উদ্দেশ্য সম্বলিত কর্মসূচী প্রতিবন্ধী ব্যক্তিদের উন্নয়নে গৃহীত কার্যক্রমের সুনির্দিষ্ট ব্যায়ের খ