

## World News Roundup

## Bangladesh

## Court indicts 13

## Dhaka 'meets' US conditions

DHAKA, Bangladesh, Sept 23, (AP): Bangladesh said it has met the conditions put forward by the United States for better safety and workers' rights in its factories that were essential to regain preferential trade status the impoverished South Asian nation lost in 2013 after two disasters killed 1,500 garment workers.



Delaney

The preferential trade status does not cover Bangladesh's influential garment industry, which helps the country earn \$25 billion annually and mainly exports to the United States and Europe. But Dhaka has long lobbied for its garment industry to have duty-free access to the United States and the lost status was seen as a big blow to that goal.

The government said in its statement late Tuesday that all of the 16 conditions set by the US have been met. It has so far shut down some 364 apparel units for lack of sufficient safety measures. It has amended labor laws, enacting new rules for allowing workers to form unions, increased the number of factory inspectors and settled many criminal cases against trade union leaders who said the charges were meant to silence them. Some 500 factory-based trade unions have been registered and workers' welfare associations have been formed in special export zones.

A delegation of the US Trade Representative's office praised the progress but also found shortcomings. The delegation is visiting Bangladesh to review improvements in safety standards at factories and changes to legal documents allowing for wider workers' rights.

Michael J. Delaney, assistant US trade representative, gave guarded appreciation of the progress.

"We saw very good progress initially on union registrations, with an unprecedented number of unions successfully registering. Now however, there seems to be slowing in this area, with an increasing number of union registrations being denied," Delaney said in remarks shared by the US Embassy in Dhaka.

## Harassment

The team also expressed concern about the alleged harassment of the union leaders.

"We have also heard continuing concerns about the protection of unions from harassment. We want to work with the government to ensure that the Ministry of Labor has the capacity to address these allegations and to ensure unions' rights and responsibilities under the law," Delaney said.

Delaney said it would be crucial that Bangladesh is prepared to take on "increased regulatory responsibilities."

Progress in meeting the 16 US conditions is needed to regain the Generalized System of Preferences benefit under which the US allows imports of some 5,000 goods from 122 of the world's poorest countries with low- or zero-tariff benefits.

In 2012, the total value of US imports from Bangladesh under the GSP benefit was \$34.7 million with tobacco, sports equipment, porcelain china and plastic products topping the list.

The trade benefit was withdrawn after the collapse of Rana Plaza, a building complex housing five garment factories outside the capital, Dhaka in 2013. The Rana Plaza disaster and a fire at a Tazreen Fashions factory in November 2012 left about 1,500 workers dead and hundreds injured.

The garment industry is crucial to Bangladesh's economy as it employs about 4 million workers, mostly rural women, and many other sectors including banks are heavily dependent on it.

## Also:

**DHAKA, Bangladesh:** A court in northeastern Bangladesh indicted 13 people on Tuesday in the beating death of a 13-year-old boy that shocked a nation used to violent crime because a video of him being tortured was posted online.

Metropolitan Sessions Judge Akbar Hossain Mridha said the trial of the 13, including the main suspect who fled to Saudi Arabia, will begin Oct 1.

The boy, Samiul Islam Rajon, died of internal bleeding after being attacked in the northeastern city of Sylhet. The attackers allegedly were punishing him for stealing a bicycle, an allegation his family and police say is unfounded. His body bore at least 64 injuries, according to an autopsy report.

The main suspect, Kamrul Islam, has been detained in Saudi Arabia and is awaiting repatriation. Ten men are behind bars after being arrested with the help of local residents, and two others are still at large.



In this Dec 7, 2012 file photo, machinery is seen at the Tazreen garment factory that caught fire on Nov 24 killing more than 100 people, in Savar, on the outskirts of Dhaka, Bangladesh. (Inset): In this April 21, 2014 file photo, Bangladeshi garment worker Rehana, who worked on the fourth floor of the Rana Plaza garment factory that collapsed a year ago, sits on her bed next to her prosthetic legs at a hospital in Savar, near Dhaka, Bangladesh. (AP)

## India

## PM eyes Silicon Valley on US trip

## Modi signs off on Boeing copter deal

NEW DELHI/MUMBAI, Sept 23, (Agencies): India's cabinet on Tuesday cleared the purchase of Boeing's Apache and Chinook helicopters in a deal worth around \$2.5 billion, two government sources said, in a boost to defence ties with the United States.

The deal strengthens the status of the United States as one of India's top military suppliers, along with Israel, displacing Cold War-era ally Russia from its longstanding position as the South Asian nation's main source of weapons.

The approval for 22 Apache attack and 15 heavy lift Chinook helicopters, meant to replace the military's ageing Soviet-origin choppers, came just as Prime Minister Narendra Modi heads to the United States to drum up investments into India.

"Both have been cleared, the total cost is \$2.5 billion," a defence ministry source, who declined to be identified, because he is not authorised to speak to the media, told Reuters. A senior government official confirmed the decision.

The deal includes an option for 11 more Apaches and seven more Chinooks, an industry source with knowledge of the matter said.

India was the top foreign buyer of US arms in 2013, says defence research firm IHS Janes, and the two governments are now negotiating a series of defence collaboration projects.

The two sides ended negotiations on the helicopters months ago, but budget constraints held up the deal. After

India's finance ministry gave the green light last week, the cabinet committee on security, headed by Modi, gave its approval on Tuesday, the defence ministry source said.

Boeing kept the price of the helicopters stable, despite inflation, extending it over deadlines more than 10 times, said the industry source, who declined to be identified because of the sensitivity of the subject.

In August, the price assurance was extended until Sept. 30, so India had to sign off on the deal before then, the source added.

The Indian Air Force picked the Apache and Chinook helicopters over Russian competitors in 2012. The Chinooks are to be part of a new mountain corps the army is putting together with the intent of deploying it on the border with China.

The two countries fought a brief border war in 1962.

Meanwhile, tech titans will court Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Silicon Valley this weekend, but away from the glitz, the euphoria of his first trip to the United States a year ago has faded as promised deals stall and key reforms flounder.

A firm believer in the new economy and power of social media, Modi will be welcomed by Apple, Facebook and Google, who want to grow in a market where the world's third-largest internet user base is set to multiply in coming years. Apple CEO Tim Cook is due to drop by Modi's hotel in San Jose, before the Indian leader joins Mark

Zuckerberg for a "townhall" session broadcast live from Facebook headquarters.

He will be able to relive some of the glory of 2014's rock star-like Madison Square Garden rally in New York when he addresses 17,000 Indian expatriates at San Jose's "Shark Tank" sports arena on Sunday.

Modi's standing in the United States rose further when US President Barack Obama visited India in January and the two tightened defence and civil nuclear cooperation with a promise of billions of dollars of business.

The relationship is still evolving, with the world's two biggest democracies agreeing on Tuesday to jointly train peacekeepers in Africa, a step in a growing military alignment partly aimed at balancing China's expansion.

But in other areas, progress has been slow.

Western businesses and diplomats in Delhi privately say Modi's reputation as a man of action has been hurt by setbacks on economic reform. Some carp that he is better at speeches and launching projects than seeing them through.

The Thomson Reuters/INSEAD Q3 Asian Business Sentiment Survey found on Wednesday that optimism among Indian companies, while still high, had been dented by the slow pace of reform. US lawmakers wrote to the Obama administration on Monday complaining about barriers to trade they said had got worse under Modi, as well as disputes over copyrights and

patents.

## Also:

**LUCKNOW:** An Indian who became an overnight star when an image of a policeman kicking his typewriter went viral has said he is fed up with all the attention — and just wants to go back to typing letters.

The photograph of the officer harassing Kishan Kumar, who makes a living as a streetside typist in the northern city of Lucknow, provoked an outpouring of sympathy from Indians outraged at his treatment. Local authorities reacted swiftly, suspending the officer who destroyed his typewriter and promising compensation of 100,000 rupees (\$1,500) as well as a new machine.

**MUMBAI:** India has appointed Chinese, French and Spanish firms to conduct studies into building three high-speed rail lines linking its major cities, the railways ministry said on Wednesday.

A consortium led by China's national train operator has been chosen to conduct a feasibility study for a 1,200 kilometre line between Delhi and the country's financial capital Mumbai, the ministry said in a statement.

France's SYSTRA engineering consultancy will lead a consortium conducting a study into a proposed line between Mumbai and the southern city of Chennai, and Spanish transport consultancy Ineco will do a feasibility study on connecting Delhi with Kolkata in eastern India.



An Indian livestock owner sits on a charpoy (rope bed) with a goat at a market ahead of the upcoming Eid Al-Adha festival in the old quarters of New Delhi on Sept 22. After decades of flocking to traditional livestock markets ahead of Eid, breeders in India are now heading online to haggle a good price for their prized animals. (AFP)



Koirala



Bhattarai

## Subcontinent

## Nepal leader cancels US visit:

Nepal's Prime Minister Sushil Koirala on Wednesday cancelled plans to visit the United States so he can hold talks on a new constitution that has triggered deadly protests in parts of the country.

Koirala will meet regional parties opposed to the new charter adopted on Sunday, his foreign adviser told AFP.

Plans to divide the country into seven provinces under a federal structure have infuriated some parties. They say the new internal borders will leave some historically marginalised groups under-represented in the national parliament.

More than 40 people have died in weeks of clashes between police and protesters belonging mainly to the Madhesi and Tharu ethnic minorities, who inhabit the southern plains bordering India.

"Because of the domestic political situation, Prime Minister Sushil Koirala will not go to the US," said Dinesh Bhattarai, the adviser.

"He will stay home... so he can hold talks with political parties opposed to the constitution."

Koirala was scheduled to address the United Nations General Assembly next week about the new constitution, the first to be drawn up by elected representatives in the Himalayan nation.

The ongoing protests have sparked concern in neighbouring India, which has traditionally exerted significant political influence in Nepal.

In a sharply worded statement, New Delhi said it had "repeatedly cautioned the political leadership of Nepal to take urgent steps to defuse the tension in these regions".

"We still hope that initiatives will be taken by Nepal's leadership to effectively and credibly address the causes underlying the present state of confrontation."

The charter is the final stage in a peace process that began when Maoist fighters laid down their arms in 2006 after a decade-long insurgency aimed at abolishing

an autocratic monarchy and creating a more equal society. (AFP)

**Goat sellers flock to Net:** After decades of flocking to traditional livestock markets ahead of Eid, breeders in India are now heading online to haggle a

good price for their prized animals.

Goats, sheep and cows are slaughtered worldwide to celebrate the major Muslim festival of Eid-ul-Adha, which throughout South Asia falls this year on Friday.

India's markets have long been bursting with breeders and buyers in the run up to Eid, with feverish negotiations for the

thousands of specially bred animals.

But farmers said they were increasingly moving to India's popular online classified portals like Quikr and Olx, for easier and stress-free sales.

"I am getting 10 to 15 calls every day," Quaiser Khan, from the northern desert state of Rajasthan, told AFP.

Khan said he usually travelled to markets throughout Rajasthan in the lead up to Eid, keeping him away from home for weeks. But this year he has sold half a dozen goats online, including one for 250,000 rupees (\$3,800).

"This is also hassle free for customers. We deliver to their doorstep. Most of my friends are selling their livestock online," Khan said, adding that his most prized goat has been fed almonds and milk for the last year.

A search of the sites shows a multitude of photos of "premium" and "big black" goats on offer. Those camped out at a traditional market in New Delhi's old city shrugged off the online competition, saying customers preferred to see animals in the flesh before choosing one.

"Sales are yet to pick up, but there will be no impact on our business," Juma Shah, from northern Moradabad city, told AFP.

"The goats sold online are costlier than (those at) this market," he added.

Altamash Qureshi, who is selling four goats for a whopping four million rupees (\$60,600) in total, said online shopping lacked the charm of traditional markets.

"The market has got its own charm and nothing can match it. I am getting customers for the goats amid this muck and foul smell," he said.

Muslims sacrifice livestock on Eid and share the meat with family, friends and the poor to commemorate Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son Ismail on Allah's request. (AFP)



A Nepalese Buddhist woman spins a prayer wheel as she offers prayers at the Boudhanath Stupa in Kathmandu, Nepal, on Sept 22. While many in Nepal cheered Sunday's adoption of a permanent constitution after a 10-year effort, some ethnic groups say their concerns that the seven newly defined states would have borders cutting through their ethnic homeland were ignored. (AP)

## Rajapaksa slams UN 'war crimes' finding

COLOMBO, Sept 23, (RTRS): Sri Lanka's former president Mahinda Rajapaksa criticised on Tuesday the findings of a UN probe into war crimes and called on the government to reject the report, which called for suspects to be prosecuted by a hybrid court with international judges.

Rajapaksa won the 26-year war against Tamil Tiger separatists in 2009, but his military was accused of killing thousands of civilians during the final weeks of the conflict.

The UN report found "patterns of grave violations" between 2002 and 2011 and said it was likely that tens of thousands lost their lives in the final stages of the war.