

PM Sheikh Hasina addresses ILO Virtual Global Summit on COVID-19 and the World of Work



The Honourable Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, joined global Heads of state, as well as prominent employers' and trade union leaders to take part in global discussions on COVID-19 and the World of Work, held online from 8-9 July.

Speaking on the Global Leaders' Day, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh thanked the ILO for hosting the Global Summit and for all its support during the pandemic which she described as a "full-fledged global economic and social crisis".

Leaders from over 80 nations, as well as UN Secretary-General António Guterres and chiefs of other UN and international agencies also addressed the summit via video messages.

The summit is the largest ever online gathering of workers, employers and governments. Participants will discuss how to address the economic and social impact of the pandemic, which has laid bare the extreme vulnerability of millions of workers and enterprises.

In a six-minute video address, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina documented how the country's ready-made garment (RMG) sector was hardest hit, losing billions of dollars of export orders and how millions of workers, across many industries, lost their jobs.

"When the crisis began to unfold, we immediately announced a US\$12.1 billion stimulus package for various sectors of our economy, as well as support to different segments of our society," said the PM.

"This support package is equivalent to 3.7 % of our GDP. To support our workers in export industries, we have given about 1 billion dollars for paying wages of the workers," she said.

She also outlined a number of emergency stimulus and social protection measures initiated by her government:

“We have given about 1 billion dollars for paying the wages of RMG workers and provided cash and other incentives to over 50 million people who lost their daily income during this pandemic.”

The PM also shared the plight of millions of Bangladeshi migrant workers and the devastating impact job losses are having on remittances in her nation. The World Bank predicts that Bangladesh will lose more than 20% of its remittance earnings, equivalent to US\$4 billion, this year alone.

“The virus does not discriminate but its adverse impacts severely discriminates against the vulnerable, especially the migrants and women workers,” she told a virtual global summit.

Sheikh Hasina added: “I must say that a vigorous, well-coordinated and world-wide response with the participation of all countries, international organizations, civil society organizations and private sector is needed now.”

The three point- suggestion placed by the premier at the event titled “ILO’s ‘Global Leaders’ Day” are:

Firstly: Jobs of migrant workers at the overseas markets must be retained during this crisis;

Secondly: In case of lay-off, compensation and other dismissal benefits must be paid in full along with ensuring their safety and health benefits; and

Thirdly: After the pandemic, these workers would have to be recruited for reactivating the economy.

Sheikh Hasina said this global calamity has now threatened the very base of globalization and connectivity that all of us have carefully built over the years.

“This is no longer just a health problem but becomes a full-fledged global economic and social crisis,” the premier said.

Like many other crises, she said, the LDCs and developing countries are facing the main burden although the crisis did not start with them.

“During this pandemic, our domestic and external supply chains were severely disrupted. We lost export orders of billions of dollars, many of our industries were closed and millions of workers lost their jobs,” she said.

Sheikh Hasina said Bangladesh’s small industries lost most of its resources and markets, and above all, its agriculture suffered huge loss due to supply chain disruption.

“On the back of it, we are hosting 1.1 million forcibly evicted Rohingyas from Myanmar,” she said.

The premier said her government hiked wages of the garments workers by almost 500 percent and also workers of other sectors by on an average 360 percent since it assumed office in 2009.

“We provided cash and other incentives directly to more than 50 million people who lost their daily income during this pandemic,” she said.

Mentioning the huge loss of jobs of Bangladeshi migrant workers and the resulting shortfall in remittance, Sheikh Hasina said it is a great concern for us as remittance is a key component to achieve the SDGs.

“Currently, repatriation of these jobless migrant workers has proved to be a huge challenge. The World Bank predicted that we will lose more than 20% of our earnings from remittance,” the prime minister said.

“Under these circumstances, we may remember the Centenary Declaration of ILO where all of us recognized to transform our world through technological innovation, demographic shifts, climate change and globalization,” she added.

Sheikh Hasina said UN and international organizations will be at the centre of all recovery measures to be supported by G-7, G-20, OECD and international financial institutions.

“With everything happening all around us, the promises of decent jobs for all seem hard to realise individually, but I am convinced that together, we can do it,” she said.

She ended her address by urging global leaders, international financial institutions, the UN and civil society to converge around the ILO’s Centenary Declaration and collectively build a better world.

“The promise of decent jobs for all seems hard to realise individually, but I am convinced that together, we can do it.”