

Global trade tensions, coronavirus dim job prospects of youths: ILO

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The sluggish global economy, trade tensions and the coronavirus epidemic are casting a pall over the prospects of decent and productive jobs for youths in Asia and the Pacific, the International Labour Organisation found in a study.

The youth unemployment rate in Asia and the Pacific region has risen since 2012 and is estimated at 14.1 per cent in 2020, compared to 13.7 per cent globally, according to the Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020 (GET Youth 2020).

Young people aged between 15-24 who are employed also face a greater risk than older workers of losing their jobs because of automation, and those with vocational training are particularly vulnerable, the ILO report said.

It calls for vocational training programmes to be revised and modernised so that they meet the changing demands of the digital economy.

The latest data shows that most of the young workers in Asia and the Pacific are in informal jobs, with 86.3 per cent of the young population in informal employment compared to 67.1 per cent for the adult population.

While the incidence of working poverty among youth has continued

to decline, there are still around 55 million young workers, who are not earning enough to lift themselves and their families out of extreme poverty (Tk 170 a day), the report also said.

Young women are almost three times more likely to be neither employed nor in education or training (NEET) than young men.

The gender gap in NEET rates is particularly large in countries like Bangladesh, where 47 per cent of young women are NEET, compared to 10 per cent of young men.

The ILO is working with the government and partners to expand existing learning opportunities to prepare young girls for a successful transition into the world of work.

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and skills training can help them acquire technical and transferable skills to help link them with employment and further education.

Despite being early adopters of technologies, young people in advanced economies in particular, tend to worry the most about the possibility of their jobs being replaced by robots and artificial intelligence.

The report highlights that their anxieties may well be warranted as the risk of automation is highest in jobs held by young people in both advanced

economies and developing countries.

"Not enough decent jobs are being created for these young people, meaning the potential of millions is not being properly tapped," said Tuomo Poutiainen, ILO country director for Bangladesh.

The ILO has been working with the government of Bangladesh, development partners and other countries for over a decade to ensure that young people get access to the best opportunities, training and skills, he said.

"We are currently supporting the government in transforming several TVET institutes into model TVET institutes so that students can meet the challenges posed by technology, climate change, inequality and demographics."

These model institutes will also partner with employers' organisations to offer career guidance and job placement services to all trainees, he said. The GET Youth 2020 report shows that those who do complete tertiary education are less likely to find their jobs replaced by automation.

However, they face other issues because the rapid rise in the number of young people with a degree in the labour force has outpaced the demand for graduate labour, pushing down graduate wages.



SOUTHEAST BANK

M Kamal Hossain, managing director of Southeast Bank, receives an award from Fazole Kabir, governor of Bangladesh Bank, at the closing ceremony of 'Banker-SME Women Entrepreneur Conference and Product Fair-2020' at Bangladesh Bank Training Academy in Dhaka recently. The lender won the award for its outstanding contribution in financing cottage, micro, small and medium enterprises in Bangladesh.

Govt's aman purchase hits a record

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The government bought the highest 6.70 lakh tonnes of boro in 2016, data from the food ministry showed.

Apart from paddy purchase, the DG of Food bought 3.37 lakh tonnes of parboiled rice from millers at Tk 36 per kg and 43,400 tonnes of unboiled rice during the just concluded aman purchase season, according to the food ministry data.

"It is commendable. This shows that

the government can buy paddy if it has willingness," said Akhter Ahmed, country director of International Food Policy Research Institute.

"It would be beneficial for farmers if the government buys paddy directly from producers in the next boro harvesting season," he said.

As drying of boro paddy was a challenge for farmers, the government could buy paddy irrespective of the moisture content

and give it to millers for drying and milling, Ahmed said.

Quazi Shahabuddin, a former director general of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, said farmers usually have a higher marketable surplus during boro harvests compared to that of aman, the second biggest crop.

The government should purchase a higher quantity of paddy from farmers in the next boro season, he suggested.



New GM for Renaissance Dhaka Gulshan

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Renaissance Dhaka Gulshan Hotel has recently appointed Azeem Shah as its general manager.

Previously, he worked with hotel chains, including ITT Sheraton in Australia, Choice Hotels International in Australia, Indian sub-continent and Indonesia, Casino Hotels in Far East Russia, Jabal Omar in Mecca and Marriott International in Bangladesh.

Samsung Junior Software Academy to take in 4th batch

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Samsung Bangladesh is set to take in a fourth batch for its Junior Software Academy from among underprivileged children of Bangladesh.

The programme's principal focus is to provide the students with IT knowledge so that their interest in the technology industry grows further, the company said in a statement yesterday.

The programme is a part of the South Korean multinational electronics company's corporate responsibility activities, providing free training to 30 underprivileged students from grade six to 10 at Samsung's Research and Development Institute.

Samsung has recently collaborated with some non-governmental organisations to run the programme.

The students will receive hands-on training on a wide range of topics such as coding, programming, Microsoft Office, Android Open Source System and basic education for computers and the internet.

"Samsung is proud to organise Junior Software Academy annually so that the programme can help the youth realise their talent and help them understand the technology industry better," said Seungwon Youn, managing director of Samsung Bangladesh.

BGMEA vehemently disputes US senator's report on garment workers

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A tripartite Readymade Garment Sustainability Council (RSC) has been formed in Bangladesh, comprising six representatives from workers, brands and the industry each.

"As far as safety remediation is concerned, we have accepted all external recommendations and have brought revolutionary changes in all aspects of safety in record speed, and thus have proved ourselves worth of any stakeholders' confidence," the letter said.

The report of the ActionAid deserves further clarification as the sample size of the interview-based report seems over-generalised, it said. The association called for more substantiated details about physical abuse and mistreatment of a worker named Shopna interviewed in the report.

Trade union activist Kalpana Akter's allegation of rape of a female worker should have been brought to the attention of the association instantly for taking action, the letter said.

Responding to the allegation of harassment and low wage payment, the association said the workers of Youngone are paid well above the nationally set minimum wage of Tk 8,000.

The Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh receives regular phone calls from workers about occupational health and safety.

The RSC will address these calls from everyone, including non-Accord and the Nirapon factory safety programme, the BGMEA said. The

Accord received 36 calls in 2019 and 2020, the letter said. On the complaint of termination of workers by 104 garment factories in December 2018, the letter said a committee was formed in May last year to assess the appropriateness of the number of terminated labourers and filed cases and to find justified solutions.

Bangladesh amended the labour laws and increased the minimum wage for garment workers in 2018.

"There have been many good practices in the industry," the platform said. For instance, the BGMEA has rolled out a mental health awareness programme in 50 factories.

The BGMEA visits factories to ensure that a five-member anti-sexual harassment committee is set up. It has visited 1,221 factories so far. In Dhaka and Chattogram, where most of the factories are located, 453 and 17 factories have respectively established the committee.

The association has piloted an e-wallet to allow workers to go cashless, adding ease and convenience to their lives. The project will be initiated by June this year.

Besides, more than 100 garment workers are studying at the Asian University for Women in Chattogram. These workers are supported with their wages by the entrepreneurs, while many generous donors also contribute to their academic pursuit.

The first batch would graduate on May 9, the

letter also said.

"With 4.4 million workers, we may have isolated incidents happening, as is the case anywhere else in the world including the US. But from our end, I assure you, our positioning will not be one of defence. Rather, we would like to correct what has gone wrong," Huq said.

She called on the senator to share his findings with the BGMEA in detail.

Chattogram should adopt tech for facelift: experts

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The major challenges that the port city faces include: a lack of smart infrastructure, poor traffic management, low port efficiency, waterlogging, inadequate waste management, and inefficiency in the power and energy sector, according to Ahmed.

He stressed the need for taking pragmatic steps pertaining to environment, economy and governance in order to transform Chattogram into a connected and smart city.

Later in the evening, two panel discussions were held on "What should be the game plan for Chattogram business" and "Creating the future city -- next step".

BB has no plans to quarantine bank notes to check coronavirus spread

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Customers should wash their hands after touching banknotes because infectious Covid-19 may cling to the surface for a number of days, the UN agency further said. But in Bangladesh, cashless transactions holding sway over cash is an unlikely scenario.

Better than Cash Alliance, an entity of the United Nations, carried out a research on Bangladesh's digital and cash transaction system and found only 6 per cent of the total transactions are settled through the digital method.

"The developed nations have already progressed significantly to develop a cashless society. So, it is easy for them to quarantine their bank notes. But it is a tough job to do same thing in Bangladesh," said a central bank high official requesting anonymity.

Although the central bank has taken different initiatives to give a boost towards a cashless society, Bangladesh has miles to go, he added.

The value of transactions by using the digital tools had increased to 18 per cent in 2019 but the number of transactions had not widened much, said Pial Islam, managing partner of Pi Strategy, which conducted the research on behalf of the

Better than Cash Alliance.

"We should embrace the contactless payment mode in a rapid manner to tackle the deadly flu like coronavirus one."

Contactless payment through the mobile financial services (MFS) can be increased significantly if the authority concerned takes the required measures.

Pi Strategy also carried out another research last year where it found that only 6 per cent of the total MFS transactions were used for shopping, 7 per cent for utility bill payment and 5 per cent for salary disbursement.

This means, more than 80 per cent of the MFS transactions are for person-to-person transfers, Islam said, while urging lenders to encourage people to use bank cards in place of cash.

As of December last year, banks issued a total of 1.82 crore credit and debit cards, according to data from the central bank.

Banks should take prompt measures to build a near cashless society so that the country could check contagious disease like coronavirus, said Syed Mahbubur Rahman, managing director of Mutual Trust Bank.

"Coronavirus is still under control in the country. But the central bank could take a short-term plan if the disease reaches an epidemic level," he added.

Matarbari to play host to deep seaport

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The idea of the deep seaport in Matarbari was conceived after the government started a coal-based power plant project in the area, as a wider channel and a port would be required to bring in the fuel for the plant.

State-owned Coal Power Generation Company Bangladesh (CPGCB) is implementing the Tk 35,984-crore power plant project.

As part of the 1,200 megawatt power plant project on the same site, almost 90 per cent of the work for creating an artificial channel with 14.5-kilometre long, 250-metre width and 18 metres depth has already been completed.

During a visit to Matarbari, it was seen that the world's third-largest cutter suction dredger named Cassiopeia V is busy excavating the channel.

On the northern side of the channel, a 1,750-metre breakwater has been constructed in order to protect the channel from the force of the sea waves and mitigate sedimentation.

The CPA now plans to enhance the width of the channel by 100

metres, as per the requirements of the proposed seaport.

The channel already has a depth of 16 metres and it would be extended by up to 18 metres.

The Karnaphuli channel of the Chattogram port has only 9.5 metres depth, CPA Chairman Rear Admiral Zulfikar Aziz told The Daily Star recently.

The planned draft of the channel would allow bigger-sized vessels with capacity to carry up to 8,000 TEU (twenty-foot equivalent unit) containers to come in, which is four times the capacity of the ships now accommodated at the Chattogram port channel.

The first phase of the port with two terminals -- a 300-metre multipurpose terminal for bulk cargo carriers and a 460-metre container terminal -- would be completed by 2026.

Once the first phase is completed, the port would be able to handle 8 lakh TEUs container annually.

The shipping ministry approved the acquisition of 1,084 acres of land for the deep seaport to be built in two phases, sources said. Another 288.24 acres of land would be acquired later.

Three more container terminals would be set up in the adjoining areas in the second phase, the CPA chief said.

Japanese firm Penta Ocean Construction Company, as the sub-contractor, is implementing the breakwater, channel and land development portions of the project.

The Chattogram port handled 2.89 million TEUs containers in 2019 and its capacity would be at best 5 million TEUs even after the implementation of several ongoing expansion projects, said Chattogram Port Users Forum Chairman Mahbubul Alam.

"The Matarbari port would certainly play a supplementary role in catering to the extra volume of exports and imports in future," he added.

Also at yesterday's Ecnec meeting, the green light was given for construction of a bridge over the Payra river in Patuakhali at a cost of Tk 1,042 crore.

The project is due to be completed by December 2025.

The project was undertaken after Shirshendu Biswas, a fourth-grade student in the district, wrote

to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina requesting her to construct a bridge over the river in Mirzaganj upazila in 2016.

The meeting also approved the Dhaka Sanitation Improvement Project involving Tk 3,855 crore. Of the fund, the World Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank will jointly provide Tk 2,856 crore.

The project has been undertaken in a bid to develop the sanitation system in selected areas of the city and improve the institutional and operational capacity of the Dhaka Wasa.

Two revised projects also received approval at the meeting.

One of them is aimed at improving nutrition through production of fruits round the year. The project was undertaken in 2015 at a cost of Tk 195 crore. The project's cost was revised up to Tk 460 crore yesterday, up from Tk 299 crore in the first revision.

The project cost of the 20-storey building of the National Security Intelligence also witnessed a second revision to Tk 352 crore from Tk 249 crore. The original cost was estimated at Tk 88 crore.

HSBC, Ucep join hands to develop skilled workers

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"In Bangladesh, there is a lack of skilled workforce," said Ahmad Kaikaus, principal secretary to the Prime Minister's Office, while addressing the event.

"We don't have plenty of natural resources. So, we have to build skilled human resources to increase the production in the industrial sector."

The Beza has received \$20 billion in investment proposals from home and abroad, said Paban Chowdhury, executive chairman of the Beza. The agency is working to change the scenario of the country's industrial sector, he said.

On the agreement, Chowdhury said the Ucep would supply skilled workers to the industrial units of the zones. If the government cooperates with entrepreneurs, the economy will grow very swiftly, said Mostafa Kamal, chairman of Meghna Group of Industries.

Fazlur Rahman, chairman of City Group, urged the government to address the ease of doing business issues to help businesses, who are the driving force of the economy.

He, however, appreciated the government officials as their mindset is gradually changing and they are becoming pro business-minded.

The training programme will also provide training to those with disabilities in order to turn them into skilled workforce and give them an equal access to better livelihood.

HSBC has a long-term pledge to support people and give them access to education and training, so they can acquire the skills they need to succeed in today's workplace, said the largest trade bank in the country in a statement.

The programme intends to bridge between two needs -- the employment need of youth from underprivileged communities and the continued

need of skilled workforce -- for the economic zones in Bangladesh.

It will make youth interested about the prospects of job opportunities in the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Shilpa Nagar by obtaining technical skills demanded by industries.

Considering the skills demand of industries and future trends of the requirements of skilled workforce in the economic zones, two trade courses -- namely industrial sewing machine operation and electrical installation and maintenance -- have been proposed under the programme.

The graduates will be supported for job placement in local and national industries as well as in the economic zones in Mirsarai, the statement said.

Md Mahbub ur Rahman, deputy CEO and head of wholesale banking of the bank; MA Jabbar, managing director of DBL Group; and Parveen Mahmud, chairperson of the Ucep Bangladesh, also spoke.



IFC

Eunusur Rahman, chairman of Dhaka Stock Exchange, and Nuzhat Anwar, senior country officer at IFC Bangladesh, attend the launch of International Finance Corporation's new study 'Portrait of Bangladesh's Independent Directors' at an event in Dhaka yesterday. IFC has partnered with DSE as part of the global 'Ring the Bell for Gender Equality' initiative to celebrate International Women's Day 2020.