

STOCKS		COMMODITIES		ASIAN MARKETS				CURRENCIES				
DSEX	CSCX	Gold	Oil	MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI	BUY TK	USD	EUR	GBP	CNY
4.46%	3.85%	\$1,508.00	\$26.70	5.59%	1.68%	1.18%	1.83%	83.95	91.56	100.75	11.79	
3,603.95	6,746.42	(per ounce)	(per barrel)	28,869.51	16,726.55	2,425.62	2,728.76	84.95	95.36	104.55	12.39	

OPENING
of
NAZIMUDDIN ROAD
SUB-BRANCH
March 19, 2020

S.H. Plaza
90/91 Nazimuddin Road
Chalkbazar, Dhaka

16491

SIBL
Sonal Lend Lease

Star BUSINESS

DHAKA THURSDAY MARCH 19, 2020, CHAITRA 5, 1426 BS starbusiness@thedailystar.net

BB caught napping as Bangladesh grapples with coronavirus

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

A good number of banks in the US, Canada and many other countries around the world have temporarily shut their branches or scaled back their retail operations as part of their efforts to flatten the curve on coronavirus.

Not just that, central banks around the world are coming up with rescue packages to help their economies tide over the coronavirus-induced slowdown.

For instance, the Federal Reserve, the central bank of the US, has cut interest rate to essentially zero on March 15 and launched a massive \$700 billion quantitative easing programme to shelter the economy from the effects of the virus.

Similarly, the Bank of England had earlier slashed the rates by 50 basis points, and on Tuesday, British Chancellor Rishi Sunak unveiled a £350bn lifeline for the economy.

Closer to home, the Reserve Bank of India is mulling over cutting the interest rate to help shore up the Indian economy amid the rapidly escalating global coronavirus pandemic.

All around the world, central banks are driven to action to save the global



machines and transactions through the mobile financial service platform.

But, it will take at least four to five days to issue any instruction to this end, said a central bank official.

The Department of Currency Management, which is dedicated to supplying cash to the market and mopping them up, has yet to get any instruction from the higher-ups for taking any preparation for the rainy days.

An official of the monetary policy department of the BB said they did not get any signal from the higher-ups to work on the central bank policy rate (CBPR), which is the rate that is used to implement or signal its monetary policy stance, if the coronavirus spread massively.

"Our higher-up should take immediate measures given the requirement for cash going up during the crisis period," said a BB official.

The central bank should also take adequate measures to running banking services by using various means if the banks close their branches.

The Daily Star yesterday visited different branches of seven banks. The officials informed the number of clients declined at least 20-30 per cent since fear gripped Dhaka city dwellers.

Asked what types of measures the central bank would take if the covid-19 reaches a pandemic level, its Spokesperson Md Serajul Islam declined to comment.

Both the central bank and the finance ministry should take immediate measures to tackle the crisis or else the situation will get out of control soon, said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute.

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Garment exporters voice concerns

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Garment manufacturers yesterday raised their concerns with western retailers and brands as they are cancelling orders and putting them on hold due to a significant drop in sales in western markets for coronavirus pandemic.

"Brands have voiced their concern and we voiced ours," said Rubana Huq, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, after a meeting with retailers and brands in Dhaka.

Executives of nearly 50 retailers and brands attended the meeting, sources said.

"In case of cancellations, we will have empty floors and we won't be able to fulfil our obligations. Thus, we urged them not to cancel. They have asked for some time to get back to us," Huq told The Daily Star in a WhatsApp message after the meeting.

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Hotline: 01713 656565

economy from the impact of the virus that stands to shave off \$2 trillion this year, according to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

But the Bangladesh Bank is found twiddling with its thumbs.

At the time of writing, the total number of active cases of coronavirus in Bangladesh stands at 14, while one person has died of the lethal, pneumonia-like virus.

And the virus has spread to the level of local transmission in Bangladesh, said the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research yesterday.

The Daily Star spoke with the officials of four departments of the central bank

to learn the measures the BB is preparing to ensure a soft landing for the economy once the coronavirus is tamed.

According to them, the central bank has not thought about the issue yet. Only its payment systems department is mulling over allowing settling of transactions through digital means.

The department is thinking of increasing the ceiling for cash withdrawal from automated teller

Avoid panic buying; stock of essentials adequate: Munshi

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi yesterday urged the public to avoid panic buying amid the looming coronavirus threat, saying that the country has an adequate stock of basic commodities needed to tackle any national crisis.

Prices of household items such as rice, sugar, flour and edible oil in the domestic markets have started to inch up as a section of unscrupulous traders are taking advantage of the fact that people are stockpiling these products in fear of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Retailers are charging extra for such commodities due to the increased demand in the market," said Munshi at an impromptu press conference at his secretariat in Dhaka.

The media briefing was convened to clear up confusion over recent media reports about the price hike of some basic commodities.

Prices have remained stable at the wholesale and import levels, the minister said, adding that there were no reasons behind the increased rates at the retail level.

However, since panic-stricken consumers are buying goods in large



Tipu Munshi

quantities, certain traders are cashing in on the situation to augment sales.

Giving a recent example, the minister said many people had purchased up to 10 kilograms of salt in one go after rumours began to float that there would be a shortage of the kitchen staple.

Although the price of salt was set at Tk 25 per kg, the people who believed the rumour paid Tk 80 a kg.

After learning about the abnormal price hike of salt, the government took strict measures to bring retailers under control and thwart panic buying.

"Then, prices returned to its previous level within a day," Munshi said.

Consumers have begun to buy essential commodities in large quantities following the rise of coronavirus patients in the country.

The government believes this to be unnecessary though as Bangladesh's stockpile of basic commodities is 40 per cent higher than what it was during the same time last year.

"So, we need not be worried about the supply of those goods," Munshi said in response to a query.

Besides, open market sales for select products at reasonable prices will start next month across the country. This will continue even during Ramadan so that ordinary people can buy the goods at affordable prices, the minister added.

The commerce ministry has deployed seven teams in Dhaka to monitor the prices so that no one can make hefty profits by pressuring consumers.

Munshi also informed that he was not aware about any price hike of baby foods in the domestic market as the issue does not fall under the ministry's purview.

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Govt seeks funds from development partners to fight coronavirus

REJAUUL KARIM BYRON

The government is seeking funds from development partners to help the health ministry combat the spread of the novel coronavirus.

On Monday, the officials of the health ministry sat with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in Dhaka to mobilise resources, as the number of people affected by the deadly virus has kept on rising and the government yesterday confirmed the maiden virus-related death.

"The ADB also wants to know the type of assistance Bangladesh would like to receive," said an official of the health ministry with knowledge of the matter.

Earlier, the Economic Relations Division (ERD) forwarded a proposal to the World Bank for \$100 million following a request from the health ministry.

The government is also looking to avail funds from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which has made available about \$50 billion through its rapid-disbursing emergency financing facilities for low-income and emerging market countries that could potentially seek support.

"If the IMF announces funds, it



AHM Mustafa Kamal

will also give funds to us. The IMF, the World Bank, the ADB and others will give funds," said Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal yesterday.

The finance ministry will help the health ministry in whatever ways possible through funding such that it can carry out its tasks properly and without making any delay, he told reporters after a meeting of the cabinet

committee on purchase and economic affairs at the secretariat in Dhaka.

He dismissed the fears that the health ministry is facing fund shortages, saying the government has financial capability and stands ready to help the health ministry to buy any requisite equipment and ramp up logistical support.

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Stocks' freefall continues as maiden coronavirus-related death confirmed

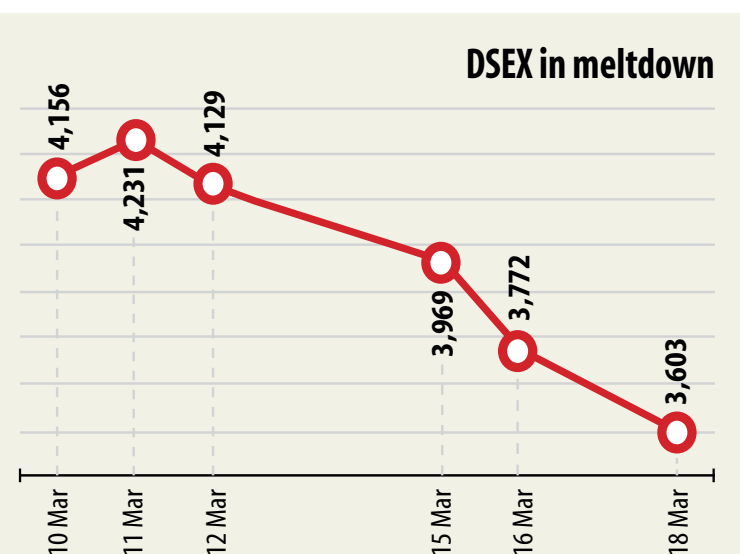
STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Investors passed another terribly gloomy day yesterday as the key index of the Dhaka Stock Exchange plunged 4.46 per cent on a day an elderly man with underlying health conditions became the first Bangladeshi to die after testing positive for coronavirus.

DSEX shed 168.60 points to end at 3,603, the lowest since May 12, 2013, as the fast-spreading coronavirus kept investors at bay.

Stocks have lost 627 points, or 14.83 per cent, in the last four trading days. It fell 18.41 per cent since the virus was first detected in the country on March 7.

At the time of writing, the total number of active coronavirus



cases in Bangladesh stands at 14 and one person died of the lethal, pneumonia-like virus.

The deceased was over 70 years of age, said Meerjady Sabrina Flora, director of the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research, adding that the patient had multiple pre-existing complications like chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, high blood pressure, heart problems and diabetes.

Market analysts say investors are panicked because they fear if the coronavirus pandemic spreads across the country and becomes severe, Bangladesh may face lockdown like many countries around the world.

So, they were selling shares, said an analyst.

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BTCL boss sorry for poor services Comes on Facebook Live, promises actions

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh Telecommunications Company Limited (BTCL) offered an apology to customers on Facebook Live yesterday for not providing services satisfactorily.

"I am regretting that the BTCL could not ensure desired services to our customers," said Md Rafiqul Matin, the state-owned enterprise's managing director who took charges a few months ago.

It is the BTCL's duty to ensure quality services, he said, adding that he duly responded to about 450 customer questions and recommendations through the online platform yesterday, which took about an hour.

There were different complaints against the BTCL officials and if those are proven to be true, the BTCL will not hesitate to take punitive measures, he said.

The BTCL is working towards becoming the number one broadband company in the country, he added.

Matin apologised for not having networks



at the rural level, especially in villages.

"We have undertaken a project to cover more than 1,000 unions and will establish a good number of free Wi-Fi hotspots in those unions," he said, adding that the project was under government assessment.

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