

TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE

Govt now turns to AIIB for \$450m

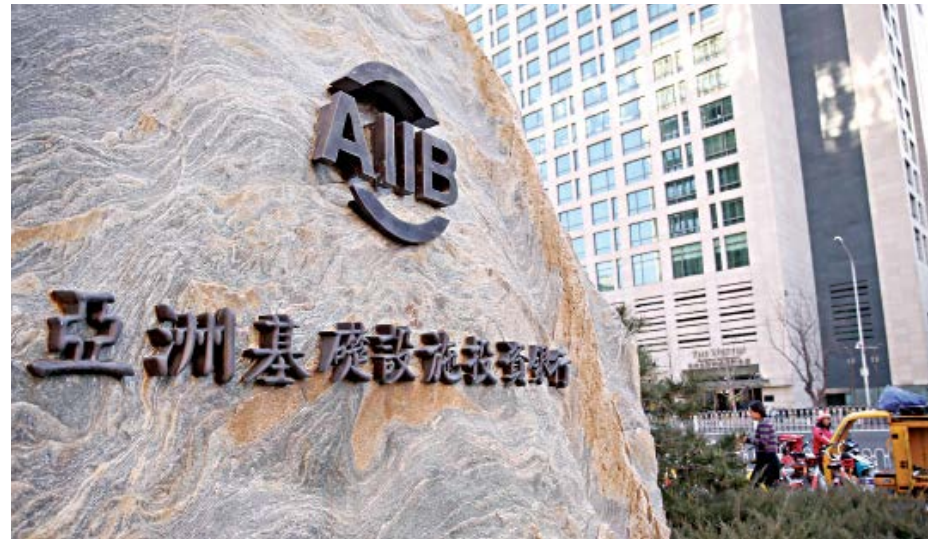
REJAUUL KARIM BYRON

Bangladesh has sought \$450 million from the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) for this fiscal year to meet the emergency health expenditure and finance the massive stimulus packages the country has unveiled in the face of coronavirus outbreak.

The Economic Relations Division (ERD) has sent a letter to the Beijing-based multilateral lender for \$200 million for the health sector and \$250 million in budget support.

"Negotiations for the fund have begun. We hope to avail the fund in the current fiscal year," said an ERD official.

The World Bank has approved \$100 million for the health sector in Bangladesh to help the country combat the deadly bug. Now, \$100 million from the AIIB would be used as co-financing in the project.



Another \$100 million would be used to set up infectious disease hospital at the country's eight divisional cities.

The fund is not enough to build the hospitals, but the government would be able to start the projects with the assistance, the ERD official said.

Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal is also seeking \$500 million in budget support from the Beijing-based multilateral lender for the next two fiscal years to help the country slipping into financial ruins from the countrywide pause in economic activities to flatten the curve of the lethal pathogen.

He made the requests while speaking to AIIB President Jin Liqun during a video conference yesterday.

The fund would be used for automation in the agriculture sector, agriculture produce, fruit and vegetable processing, cold-storage, leather processing, poultry and fish sectors.

"We have requested the AIIB to continue

its support and assistance to help us ride out the crisis," Kamal said in a press release afterwards.

He has urged the AIIB to provide another \$100 million to rehabilitate micro, small and medium enterprises.

Liqun told Kamal that the AIIB would actively consider the requests and there might be some change to the funding modalities, according to the press release. The ERD would now send formal requests to the AIIB.

The AIIB has doubled available funds under its COVID-19 Crisis Recovery Facility to provide \$5 billion to \$10 billion due to high client demand.

"The global economy is facing a formidable challenge. The situation is changing with each passing day. If we don't start to think about the economy now while tackling the pandemic, it would not be possible to return the economy to normalcy even in 2021," said Liqun in the

press release.

Bangladesh is approaching multilateral development partners to mobilise funds for the stimulus packages it announced in response to the pandemic, which has so far infected 4,186 people in the country and killed 127.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina announced a host of stimulus packages amounting Tk 95,619 crore, which is 3.3 per cent of the GDP, aimed at aiding people's purchasing power, widening social safety nets, increasing money supply and making working capital available for the industries, service sector firms and cottage industries.

Bangladesh has approached the Asian Development Bank for \$1.25 billion, \$700 million from the International Monetary Fund and \$500 million from the Islamic Development Bank.

DJ Pandian, AIIB's vice-president for investment operations, also took part in the video conference.

BB forms Tk 15,000cr fund for industrial, service sectors

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Bangladesh Bank yesterday formed a refinance scheme of Tk 15,000 crore for the industrial and service sectors, much to the relief of the cash-strapped banking sector that was fretting about implementing the Tk 30,000 crore stimulus package announced on April 12 for the two from their own sources.

Under the refinance scheme, lenders will get funds in the form of working capital at 4 per cent interest from the BB, which the end-users will get at 9 per cent.

But to enjoy the refinance scheme, banks will have to provide at least 50 per cent of each loan to the industrial and service sector borrowers from their own sources.

The duration of the refinance scheme is three years that will act as a revolving fund. Banks will have to sign a participation agreement with the BB to enjoy the fund from the scheme.

Banks will be allowed to get an interest subsidy of 4.50 per cent for the disbursed loans, which will be given by their own sources.

The affected clients, who have already taken loans from banks, will be permitted to take a maximum 30 per cent loans from their existing credit limit. The new borrowers will get 30 per cent loans of their requirement.

The most affected borrowers will be given priority while disbursing loans from the fund and banks will provide the loans from their own offer.

Carriers divided over spectrum allocation top-up amid surge in demand

Robi says free spectrum will be win-win for users, operators and govt

MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL ISLAM

The quest for additional spectrum allocation proposal to manage the surge in demand for data during the protracted shutdowns has led to a faction among the four mobile operators.

Market leader Grameenphone is on one side and the rest -- Robi, Banglalink and Teletalk -- are on the other side.

The three have placed a proposal to the government last week seeking 5 Megahertz spectrum each from the 2,100 band -- where 20 MHz of spectrum has been sitting idle for years -- for free for three months.

This will ensure a win-win proposition for the users, operator and the government as well as the service quality will improve, they said.

The operators can recuperate their revenue losses and at the same time, the government's exchequer will get fattened by the extra tax from users.

The government used to get more than 50 per cent of the operators' revenue and will get more from the users' additional consumption, the three operators said.

However, from the onset, Grameenphone opposed the plan.

But soon after Robi, Banglalink and Teletalk had placed in their request for extra spectrum, Grameenphone put in a separate proposal: it wants extra spectrum and it wants to pay for it.

The three are now saying that Grameenphone is flexing its financial muscle: the Telenor subsidiary can afford to pay for the spectrum but they can't.

"They have always tried to make the spectrum price costlier so that none can afford it," said a senior executive of one of the three operators requesting anonymity to speak candidly on the matter.

Yesterday in a discussion with a group of journalists, Robi said due to the lockdown its data traffic has surged more than 25 per cent. It is not possible to maintain a standard customer experience for all with the spectrum it has.

"There is no alternative to the allocation of adequate amount of spectrum," said Shahed Alam, chief corporate and regulatory officer at Robi.

The operator has long been requesting the government to reduce the price of the spectrum to make it viable for it to purchase the amount of spectrum it needs to satisfy its customers' quality expectations.

Subsequently, it had applied for additional spectrum at a discounted price to the government and Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission last year, which is still awaiting regulatory approval.

"We need to bear in mind that the request was made under normal circumstances. But now, with the pandemic in place, we need to approach it differently and with immediate effect to address the crying need of the customers, who have been compelled to adopt a digital lifestyle to remain connected to the society," Alam added.

Within seven days of receiving the spectrum, Robi can significantly improve its service quality.

And the government can take back the additional spectrum once the three-month period is over, Alam added.

The country's second-largest carrier also said that it has reduced the data price in compliance with the government's



RASHED SHUMON

request and that squeezed its revenue.

However, in a session on Monday, Grameenphone said principally they cannot support the free allocation of spectrum as they are contributing to the government.

However, the spectrum is a crucial component to improving service quality for any operator and Grameenphone will take part in constructive dialogue for acquiring additional spectrum and its decision on the above would depend on the outcome of the discussions, said Hossain Sadat, the operator's director and head of regulatory affairs.

There is enough stock of essentials: Munshi

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

With the prices of almost all the essentials going up over the last month, the commerce ministry yesterday reassured that there is enough stock and also fired a warning to unethical traders looking to create an artificial crisis in the market.

"There is no reason for the price hike," said Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi in a statement after a meeting with importers, processors and wholesalers on stock, supply and market situation of the key commodities ahead of the Ramadan month, beginning tomorrow.

Steps have been taken to ensure smooth transportation of goods and to ensure faster clearance and release of imported goods from the ports.

Besides, the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh is selling commodities, including dates, chickpea, lentil and sugar through its trucks even up to the union level this year at less than the market prices.

The amount of sales is higher this year than any other year in the past, he said, adding that 3,000 dealers are selling the commodities through trucks.

Already some irregularities have been detected and legal actions have been taken against the offenders.

Some 90 teams are monitoring market across the country and activities of TCB are also monitored.

Bank branches in commercial areas in Dhaka, Ctg to stay open

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Bangladesh Bank yesterday asked all banks to keep their branches in the capital's Motijheel and Dilkusha areas and Chattogram's Agrabad and Khatungonj open until further notice.

The branches will be open to the public from 10 am to 2 pm, a move that will help in faster release of imported goods from the Chattogram port.

In another move yesterday, the BB lowered the transaction charge for mobile financial services (MFS) for workers of the export-oriented industries.

MFS providers were asked to impose

a maximum of Tk 4 on the withdrawal of workers' wage under the government stimulus package. But they would get Tk 8 per cashout, with banks chipping in with the rest from the 2 per cent service charge they would get the export-oriented industries.

The government on March 25 announced a stimulus package of Tk 5,000 crore to help export-oriented industries pay their workers' wages from March to April. The salary must be paid into a bank or MFS account.

The industries will get the funds from the stimulus package free of interest, but they will have to give 2 per cent service charge to banks.

All import containers can be shifted to ICDs

DWAIPAYAN BARRUA, Ctg

The revenue authority has at last allowed all types of import containers to be shifted and stored at the 19 private inland container depots until June 30 in a bid to decongest the Chattogram port premises.

As of yesterday, a total of 47,577 twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) of import load containers were lying at the port yards, against its capacity of 37,620 TEUs.

The acute container congestion was created due to slow delivery of imported goods amid the long-drawn government holidays declared to contain the spread of coronavirus, according to Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) and users.

But thanks to the National Board of Revenue's decision, about 18,000 TEUs of import containers can now be shifted to the ICDs, said Shipping Secretary Md Mezbah Uddin Ahmed.

Ahsanul Huq Chowdhury, chairman of Bangladesh Shipping Agents' Association, welcomed the move, which came following recommendations from the shipping ministry.

But he stressed on quick dispatch of the import containers from the ICDs. Otherwise, their storage space too would run out.

The NBR though attached some

conditions with the order yesterday.

As per the conditions, all the containers should be scanned while shifting those from the port, and after being transferred to the ICDs, those should be physically examined jointly by Customs House, Chattogram and Customs Intelligence and Investigation Directorate.

Normally, only 38 types of import containers are allowed to be shifted directly to the ICDs. But in the face of severe container congestion, the CPA at a meeting on April 14 proposed shifting about 20,000 TEUs of import containers to the ICDs and SAPL river terminal in Munshiganj.

The NBR on April 18 issued an order allowing another six categories of import containers to be stored at the ICDs but the CPA on the same day sent a letter to the shipping ministry seeking permission to shift all types of import containers.

"The port is the lifeline of the country's economy and it needs to be kept operational at any cost," said Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury, the state minister for shipping, in a press briefing after a meeting with CPA officials in Chattogram yesterday.

CPA Member Md Zafar Alam said they took steps to shift import containers to the ICDs immediately after the NBR order.

NEXT STEP

Making a DIFFERENCE

Using your phones to improve work efficiency

In today's age of smartphones, we end up carrying our phones to work and blame the same device for causing distractions. Having a personalized system that works for you can help you be your best at work. Here are some ways you can enhance your work efficiency by systematically organising your phone to start counting the blessings of technology instead of considering it as a curse:

KEEP ONLY THE ESSENTIALS

There are tons of apps out there to fulfil your needs. Using only the right ones, however, can truly help you in the long run. Uninstall all the unnecessary apps and if you have to keep such apps for obligatory reasons, do so by putting them away from your sight, perhaps at the last section of your apps screen that you rarely reach for. Moreover, having your week plans or tasks entered in your calendar app and giving priority to apps that help you plan your day better can help you stay on top of your game.

CATEGORIZE FOLDERS

Make separate folders containing similar apps to easily switch from entertainment to work mode. You can colour code the folders, although labelling them with convenient names works just fine.

APP BLOCKERS

Putting down the smartphone can be difficult for many

Bangladesh is rapidly moving towards middle income status by 2021. Our businesses definitely offer immense opportunities for the growing economy and this diversity needs a stage for the stories untold. See Bangladesh make its mark on the global map as Making a Difference brings you our proudest success stories from across the country.



individuals. A simple notification ringer can divert your attention from work. There are various app blockers to improve your focus and concentration. Applications like Forest, YourHour or Freedom can ensure that your productivity stays on track and you manage your tasks more effectively.

AUTOMATION SOLUTIONS

Cloud Storages like Google Drive or Dropbox offer you automatic backing up of the contents of your phone to ensure that you do not lose any important document ever. You can save time and get rid of worrying by having the necessary files safely stored. Setting up reminders or alarms can make sure you are well-aware of your plans with others so that you and your co-workers can be on the same page.

REHENUMA RAYSA