

European stocks rise defying Covid-19 fears

AFP, London

Europe's stock markets were mostly firmer yesterday as investors focused more on easing lockdowns than fears of another coronavirus wave, while Frankfurt shrugged off data showing that Germany has entered recession.

Some investors went fishing for bargains a day after stocks tanked on news of spiking jobless claims in the United States.

"After two down days for the markets, the week is ending on a more positive note for equities worldwide as fears of a second wave in the current pandemic ease for now," said AJ Bell investment director Russ Mould.

On Wall Street however, the Dow Jones index came off to a weaker start after Thursday's late rally, with the US trend pushing European markets off their highs.

"It's not been the best week for stock markets," said Craig Erlam at OANDA.

In addition to bad European growth numbers and rising tension between the US and China "the threat of a second wave of coronavirus cases is upon us in some countries just as others are starting to emerge from the first," he said.

The coronavirus pandemic has tipped Germany into a recession, official data showed Friday, with

Europe's top economy suffering its steepest quarterly contraction in more than a decade as lockdown measures began to bite.

The German economy shrank by 2.2 percent in the first quarter of 2020, federal statistics agency Destatis said, calling the quarter-on-quarter decline "the worst since the global financial crisis" in 2009.

The agency also revised its gross domestic product (GDP) figure for the final quarter of 2019 from zero growth to a contraction of 0.1 percent. That means Germany has experienced two consecutive quarters of decline, meeting the technical definition of a recession.

Still, European attention was firmly set on restarting economies, said analysts at Charles Schwab.

"European equities are trading mostly higher in afternoon action, with the markets continuing to eye reopening progress in Asia, with China posting stronger-than-expected industrial production in April, along with the continued commencement of reopenings in key regions of Europe and phased restarts in the US," they said.

Asian bourses earlier diverged on mixed Chinese data that showed retail sales contracted in April -- indicating crucial consumer activity remains weak -- offsetting figures showing the first growth in industrial production this year.

Uniform system needed

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The committee that was formed on April 19 submitted a report to the health ministry on April 28.

"Government is taking some steps but it should take this step [introducing a network] immediately as this will not cost anything, except strong management," said Prof Shahidullah.

Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) will coordinate the system, he said.

Shahidullah said the government had implemented some recommendations, but the hospitals are yet to be brought under an umbrella and the ambulance service was not introduced.

Contacted, Nasima Sultana, additional director general at DGHS, said currently there are four dedicated mobile numbers to give patients the update about seat vacancy.

"We are updating our strategy regularly and we are trying to lessen

the sufferings of the patients," she added.

The Committee also recommended the appointment of specialised doctors, medical technologist and sufficient cleaners at the Covid hospitals for better treatment.

"The government told us that steps would be taken to fulfil the recommendations," said Shahidullah, also the president of Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council.

Earlier, the technical committee also recommended that the test number be increased and it was taken into account.

Shahidullah said the government must ensure that the test results are given within a day as any delay in this process would increase the risk of spreading the virus.

Nasima said initiatives were taken to fulfil the recommendations phase by phase as it was not possible to incorporate all the recommendations overnight.

Big spike in new Covid-19 cases

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"Those who have contracted the virus are spreading it others. That is why the infection rate is higher in the capital," he said.

"On average, an infected person spreads the virus to three others every day. Any delay [in enforcing strict lockdown] means more people will be infected," he said. "So the first task is to identify and isolate all the infected right away."

Following the reopening of garment factories, a good number of people returned to Dhaka. The presence of traffic on the streets also reportedly increased. As the government plans to ease the shutdown further, chances are there that more people will throng the city, he pointed out.

"If that happens, the infection will increase at an arithmetic rate."

He also said any rise in test numbers and identification of infected patients were co-related.

DGHS data shows a record of 8,582 samples were tested in 41 laboratories across the countries in 24 hours till 2:30pm yesterday.

ZONING INFECTED AREAS

Be-Nazir Ahmed suggested areas with higher infection rates be put on total lockdown. He also advocated for lifting the closure from the unaffected zones, allowing economic activities to run.

Analysing data, he said it seemed 80 percent of the villages were free

from coronavirus infection. So the shutdown could be eased there, putting restrictions on the entry of outsiders.

"This will allow many to make up for their financial losses," he said, adding the villages could be marked as "green zone".

The government should then identify the areas where one or two cases were reported. Those areas could be marked as "orange zone", which according to him, would have 15 percent of all cases.

"The government could impose lockdown on this zone from 14 to 42 days until it becomes a green zone," he said.

The rest five percent areas which have the highest number of Covid-19 cases should be marked as "red zone" and be put on strict lockdown. "People from vulnerable groups of these areas can be provided with monthly financial incentives so that they don't feel helpless and act responsibly. This will help improve the situation."

DGHS BRIEFING

At an online briefing yesterday, Prof Dr Nasima Sultana, additional director general (administration) at the DGHS, said the total number of confirmed Covid-19 cases stood at 20,065.

As many as 279 patients recovered since Thursday, taking the total number of recovery cases to 3,882, she added.

8,000 expats lose jobs

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It is expected that some 30,000 undocumented Bangladeshi workers will be regularised under the amnesty programme which will continue till December 31 this year.

Also, many of them are expected to avail the "flexi permits" to stay in the country.

As per Bahrain government's estimate, currently the country hosts around 55,000 undocumented workers. Of them, more than 80 percent are estimated to be Bangladeshis.

Sheikh Mohammed Tauhidul Islam, labour welfare counsellor at the Bangladesh Embassy in Manama, said as many Bangladeshis are expected to be legalised under the amnesty programme, the job losses will not affect Bangladesh's labour market there greatly.

Also, Bangladesh embassy has a plan to train up the jobless workers for developing specialised skills that will be required for employment in several sectors in near future, he told this newspaper via WhatsApp.

Some of the sectors include the ship building industry, welding, and electrical. Besides, Bahrain's finance, services, tourism and manufacturing sectors are also vibrant, he added.

Bahrain's dependency on oil revenue is low compare to many Arab countries, Tauhidul further said.

He said Bangladeshi workers in Bahrain turned unemployed following many on-going projects went shut due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Some 2,000 Bangladeshi workers who were involved in the construction sector lost their jobs since the pandemic, he added.

Tauhidul, however, said it is likely that Bahrain's economy would revamp quickly once the authorities manage to contain coronavirus infections.

This is because Bahrain's economy is small in size although it is diverse, he added.

The official said at least 441 Bangladeshi migrant workers have been infected with coronavirus in Bahrain as of last week.



A police team in PPE gives a guard of honour to Prof Anisuzzaman before his burial at the capital's Azimpur graveyard yesterday. The academic, also a freedom fighter, passed away at a city hospital on Thursday. PHOTO: STAR

The man who taught us the beauty

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There was an open-arm aspect about him that would convince everyone that he would accept you not for what you represented or how powerful you were but for the very fact that you are someone who sought his counsel or guidance. He would never reject you, howsoever a bad student of his you were. Once in his presence you felt, howsoever undeservingly, respected and even welcomed and strangely safe, for you have reached a place from which you will return with dignity.

His voice was full of care and attention and had the ability of touching you deeply, very deeply. As he spoke, and he was not given to saying much, one would hang on to each and every word as if your life depended on it -- and often, if not life, but removal of much of your confusion did.

Those who were his direct students and many more others who were not -- including this writer -- we all received his love and support whenever needed them.

At a time when celebrating Pahela Baishakh, Rabindra or Nazrul Jayanti or organising a simple musical soiree or a dance drama or holding a seminar or a debate was an act of defiance, teachers like Prof Anisuzzaman was our source of strength and guidance.

Our time at the Dhaka University -- from 1967 to 1972 -- was perhaps politically the most significant. Within those five years we saw the fall of the ironman Gen Ayub, the coming of another martial law under Gen Yahya, the student-led 11-point movement, the first general election in Pakistan's history, the rise of Bangabandhu to the pinnacle of his electoral victory, the most dramatic and unprecedented non-violent non-cooperation movement, the unbelievable spectacle of one man's voice holding sway over the mighty Pakistan army, the last few dramatic days of united Pakistan, the betrayal with the Bengalis by secret arms build-up while faking dialogue, the most brutal, vicious and barbaric genocide of our people, the tectonic shift in our movement from non-violent to armed one, the majesty of our people coming together in the struggle for independence, the magnificent victory and emergence of independent Bangladesh.

Through these tumultuous times among the teachers who supported, encouraged, protected, enthused, and led us to war by example, Prof Anisuzzaman was one of the most enduring for he did all this with such endearing and genuine love for the students.

His was a voice for democracy, rights

of all people and secularism expressed in the gentlest and kindest of manner. He was truly a scholar at the service of his people. During his later life there would hardly be any request for a book review, a blurb, a comment, an article or a request for presiding over a seminar that he would refuse, saying "I must encourage them all".

Though a school student in 1952, he became a language movement activist in the fifties. In the sixties, he joined every initiative against the military dictatorship of Gen Ayub and was a part of the group that formed the intellectual core that gradually took the nation towards the ultimate goal of independence. He was an integral part of the Mujib Nagar government and worked closely with the leaders there. His scholarly exposition of our cause for freedom helped to win over public opinion in India and abroad.

After liberation, he worked with Bangabandhu's government and was intimately involved in writing of the Bangla version of our constitution. He was a part of several education commissions and contributed to the formulating of education policies in the post-liberation era. He worked tirelessly for the reinstatement of the values and ideology of our Liberation War, actively supported the trial of the war criminals started by Sheikh Hasina's government and personally testified in the trials. These are but a very small sample of his many achievements.

Professor Anisuzzaman was a student's dream of a teacher. His openness was so welcoming and reassuring for anyone who would approach him with either a new idea or an interpretation of a literary text that she or he may have read. No opinion was for him unworthy of a discussion and no student was for him underserving of his personal time. He would always welcome each and every student who ever sought his guidance.

First was his warm voice and truly disarming welcome to his room as a teacher or his house. His soft-spoken words would soon encourage the student to feel at ease and discuss whatsoever s/he came to discuss with the venerable professor.

As soon as the discussion would start one could see that unique aspect of the professor's personality -- his patience. He would listen to whatever the student had to say without interrupting. At the end of it, he would, very softly and slowly, point out the flaws of what has so far been said and suggest some alternative ways of thinking.

There would never be a hint of intellectual superiority in this exchange. The respect and patience with which he treated each and every student was remarkable.

He did not know of any other world but that of a teacher. His writings and research were all meant for his students and for him to be a better teacher.

His humility was extraordinary. After his retirement, he would respond to literally everyone's request to grace their events as the chief guest. With no concern for his health, he would respond with his characteristic "yes" to attend seminars and book launches throughout the day. He continued this practice till his most recent bouts of illness, much to the concern of all those who loved him.

Like most freedom fighters, he did not like many of the aspects of today's Bangladesh. The inequality, the absence of justice, the lack of freedoms, the flouting of fundamental rights pained him enormously. But till the very end he remained optimistic about Bangladesh's future and rejoiced at its every victory however small or profound.

Every genuine scholar is unique and hence we will have to live with the fact that there will be none like him again, ever. So it will be our duty to build on the world that he left us -- a world of thirst for knowledge and intellectual rigour.

Post script.

It was tragic enough that we lost him. But it was deeply painful to endure the fact that we couldn't show our last respects to his mortal remains. It is so heart rending to see him being buried without the thousands of us showering flower petals on his remains, and crying our heart out as we would have buried him.

I can picture the Shaheed Minar where many of us would have gathered to have a last glimpse of his coffin, thousands others who would have carried his body on their shoulders as we would have moved towards the Azimpur graveyard where he was finally rested.

To grieve at his demise from a distance, to express our sorrow remotely, to pray for his Eternal Peace from our homes is not the way we would have liked to say goodbye to our beloved professor, our teacher, our guide, our friend and our guardian angel. What we failed to express today, we pledge to make up with our adherence to what he stood for. Our love for Prof Anisuzzaman will remain for as long as we live.

Anisuzzaman

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Foundation Chairman Abul Khair.

The final rituals and the burial were carried out as planned by the Prime Minister's Office.

The scholar and leading intellectual breathed his last at Combined Military Hospital at the age of 83.

TRIBUTES POUR IN

About Prof Anisuzzaman, Indian Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla on Facebook said, "One of our region's leading intellectuals and a true secularist who gave meaning to having an educated mind..."

Nihad Kabir, president of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, in a statement said, "The country has lost one of its brightest luminaries in the education sector and a valiant freedom fighter in the passing away of National Professor Anisuzzaman... MCCI prays for the eternal salvation of the departed soul of Professor Anisuzzaman and conveys deep sympathies to his bereaved family."

The Gyantapas Abdur Razzaq Foundation in a condolence message said it will deeply miss his leadership.

"Dr Anisuzzaman's departure is an irreparable loss to the nation. The usual metaphors (tower of strength, pillar of the national community, a lighthouse to others, and so on) may be applicable, but is perhaps inadequate for he transcended them.

"As a distinguished scholar he educated us, as a truly enlightened human being he encouraged us, and with his humility, compassion and moral authority, he inspired us. He had received numerous honors and awards in his life, but perhaps much more important to him was the fact that he had won the admiration and the warm regard of almost all who came to know him."

"The Gyantapas Abdur Razzaq Foundation will deeply miss his leadership (he was our founding vice president and settler)," it said in a message.

Ganosanghati Andolan, Ain o Salish Kendra, Patuakhali Science and Technology University, Bangladesh University of Professionals, also paid tributes in separate messages.

Anisuzzaman was a freedom fighter and was a member of the Planning Commission of Bangladesh during the Liberation War.

He was awarded Ekushey Padak and Swadhinata Padak, the highest state awards given by the government of Bangladesh.

The Government of India bestowed on him the country's third-highest civilian honour, Padma Bhushan.

3 more infected

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Block-F of Kutupalong Lombasia Rohingya camp was placed under lockdown after a the first coronavirus case was reported.

"Around 5,000 Rohingyas live in that block and they were asked not to come out of their homes until further notice. The daily essentials will be supplied to them from the RRRC's office during the lockdown," he told The Daily Star.

Sources at the district administration said the Rohingya man who tested positive for Covid-19 on Thursday was sent to the isolation centre, run by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

Besides, his seven family members were under observation by the UN body. Their samples would likely be collected for Covid-19 testing.

Some 1.1 million Rohingyas live in squalid camps in Cox's Bazar. Of them, around 750,000 took shelter in Bangladesh since a brutal military crackdown was launched in Myanmar's Rakhine State in August 2017.

'No benefit' in anti-malaria drug virus treatment: studies

AFP, Paris

Treating Covid-19 patients with the malaria drug hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) had no positive effect and caused other health complications, two new studies showed yesterday.

The anti-inflammatory has been touted by US President Donald Trump among others as a potential "game changer", after initial studies in lab settings showed it may be able to prevent the virus replicating.

But several subsequent studies -- including one funded by the US government -- appear to have doused hopes that HCQ can help patients hospitalised with Covid-19.

In the first study released yesterday, researchers in France monitored 181 patients hospitalised with pneumonia due to Covid-19 and who needed oxygen.

Eighty-four were treated with HCQ and 97 were not.

They found no meaningful difference between the groups for either transfer to intensive care, death within seven days or developing acute respiratory distress syndrome within 10 days.

"Hydroxychloroquine has received worldwide attention as a potential treatment for Covid-19 because of positive results from small studies," said the authors of the research, published in the BMJ journal.



Finding no health worker or gurney around, a man carries his ailing 50-year-old mother in his arms to the emergency department of Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday. They went to the hospital from the city's Banasree area by a rickshaw. The woman had been suffering from fever and breathing problems for the last few days. Some attendants of patients said getting service at the hospital becomes difficult on weekends compared to weekdays.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN