



| STOCKS | |
|----------|----------|
| DSEX | CSCX |
| ▲ 0.11% | ▲ 0.11% |
| 3,966.75 | 6,821.07 |

| COMMODITIES | |
|--|---|
|  Gold ▲ |  Oil ▼ |
| \$1,723.40 (per ounce) | \$40.63 (per barrel) |

| ASIAN MARKETS | | | |
|---------------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| MUMBAI | TOKYO | SINGAPORE | SHANGHAI |
| ▲ 0.86% | ▲ 0.15% | ▲ 0.23% | ▼ 0.42% |
| 34,247.05 | 23,124.95 | 2,800.57 | 2,943.75 |

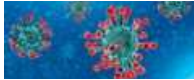
| CURRENCIES | | | | |
|------------|-------|-------|--------|-------|
| | USD | EUR | GBP | CNY |
| BUY TK | 83.95 | 94.24 | 106.09 | 11.74 |
| SELL TK | 84.95 | 98.04 | 109.89 | 12.34 |



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TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE

Finance minister draws a bead on economic recovery



REJAUUL KARIM BYRON and SOHEL PARVEZ

The national and global lockdown measures aimed at battling the Covid-19 pandemic have taken their toll on Bangladesh's industrial production, obliterating tens of thousands of jobs, incomes and demand.

And for the first time in 30 years, the poverty curve, which has been on the downward since fiscal year 1992, is set to reverse the trend.

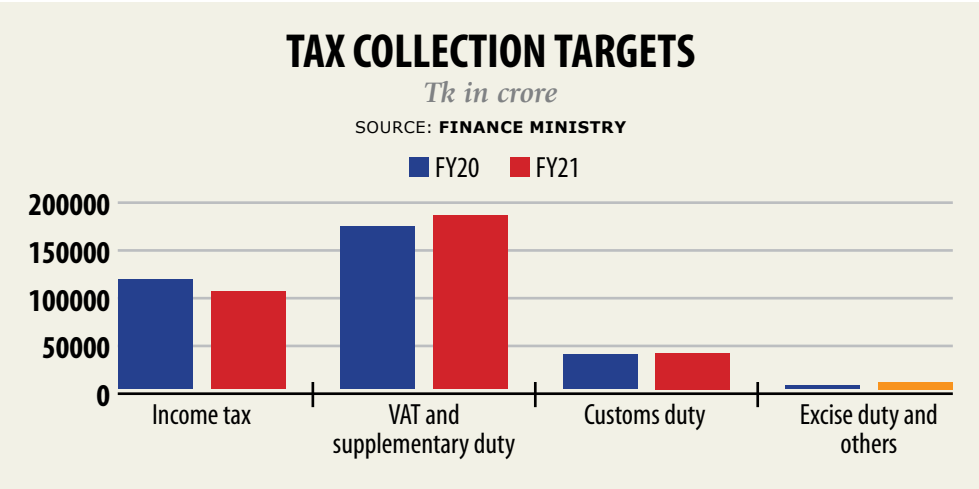
The peril does not end here.

Exports and remittance, two major sources of external financing, plunged as the rogue virus pushed the global economy to the worst-ever recession since World War II. Uncertainty about the course of the pandemic held back much-needed private investment.

About 97.3 per cent of firms faced work order cancellation or low market demand, said Economic Research Group (ERG), a local think-tank, in a survey of 102 firms. Compared to May 2019, firms reported they operated at only 58.8 per cent capacity in May.

"The sight beyond June was incomprehensible and most responses reveal the uncertainty the firms face," said the ERG in its summary findings released on June 6.

Under such a bleak economic prospect and health emergency Finance Minister AHM



Mustafa Kamal unveils the budget for the fiscal year 2020-21 today.

This will be the second budget to be placed by the septuagenarian and the nation will eagerly look at what fiscal steps he comes up with for entrepreneurs and citizens to take the economy to the path of recovery, protect and create jobs and lift millions of people out of the trap of hunger and poverty.

For the first time since 1980, Bangladesh is forecasted to post its lowest-ever GDP growth. The World Bank earlier this week said the economy would grow by 1.6 per cent in FY20, in a stunning decline from the 8.15 per cent logged last fiscal year.

The finance ministry appears to be preparing accordingly. "This is not going to be any traditional budget," it said in a press release yesterday.

This year's budget, with a theme of economic revival and way forward, has been framed in line with the government's past achievements and current circumstances, it said.

The highest importance has been given to the health sector and the agriculture sector has also received increased attention as the government looks to ramp up food production and create jobs.

Various measures -- from expanding social safety net schemes to salvage affected industries and create jobs—are going to be proposed for the next fiscal year, the finance ministry said.

Taxmen and the finance ministry said they considered different fiscal measures to support income, jobs and industries in the next fiscal year.

One of the expected steps is reduction in corporate tax rate for non-listed companies, as the government looks to help them withstand business losses for the demand plunge in domestic and global markets.

Non-listed companies are expected to see a 2.5 percentage points cut in tax to 32.5 per cent from 35 per cent now. The current rate of corporate tax has been unchanged for the last six years, showed data from the National Board of Revenue.

The measures came at a time when a



majority of the firms had to shut operations and lose business for the shutdown since March 26.

The ERG study finds that 57.6 per cent of the firms remained closed even after 45 days of the announcement of the lockdown. More than a quarter of the firms reported about their inability to pay salaries beyond May and 80 per cent would not be able to pay beyond September.

In another rapid survey among 42 firms recently, the Centre for Policy Dialogue said all the firms claimed that there has been an adverse impact on export owing to Covid-19. And 73 per cent reported an effect on

production and import.

In order to stimulate investment and give relief to businesses, the government is likely to bring down the turnover tax rate for small and medium enterprises recording turnovers of Tk 50 lakh to Tk 3 crore annually.

To inject funds into the formal economy, the government may offer black money-holders an opportunity to legalise their untaxed assets upon payment of 10 per cent tax for disclosed incomes and investment.

The government plans to offer amnesty so that no agencies can raise question about the sources of funds.

READ MORE ON B3

Borrowers get interest rebate for Apr-May

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Bangladesh Bank yesterday drew up a policy to rebate interest for borrowers for the April-May period as part of its move to give a breathing space to them from the ongoing economic fallout.

The borrowers, who have taken out a maximum of Tk 1 lakh in loans from banks, will not have to give any interest, according to a notice issued by the central bank.

Banks will have to waive 2 percentage points interest for the borrowers, whose credit amount is between Tk 1 lakh and Tk 10 lakh.

The large borrowers with loans of more than Tk 10 lakh will be allowed to get 1 percentage point rebate. Large borrowers will get a highest interest rebate of Tk 12 lakh as per the BB decision.

Banks will enjoy a subsidy of Tk 2,000 crore from the government to rebate the interest. This means banks

will not rebate any amount by giving money from their own source.

The banking regulator directed banks on May 3 to transfer all interest accrued or to be accrued between April 1 and May 31 this year from all of their loans to an interest-free blocked account.

The BB calculated that a total of more than Tk 16,000 crore in interest was blocked by banks in the two months, of which Tk 2,000 crore will be rebated.

A ray of hope for the jobless

MAHMUDUL HASAN

April was undeniably the worst-ever month for Amena Akter, a second year honours student of a college in Dhaka.

Her father and brother were laid off from a furniture shop near their home in the capital's Mirpur 11 as a result of the government-enforced shutdown.

The bad news did not end for her there. She used to earn some money taking classes at a coaching center in Mirpur and that too had to close.

Her family was devastated, worried sick about how they would pay their house rent and manage other expenses. There seemed to be no hope at getting a job when everyone else

was being terminated.

One day when she was scrolling the newsfeed of her Facebook account she came to know about Kormo, an app-based job marketplace of Google that connects jobseekers to businesses seeking manpower.

She installed the app and found a job advertisement from Meena Bazar. She applied immediately and got an opportunity for a remote interview.

"On April 29, I installed the app and I got the job offer on that day," said Amena. "It was a big relief for my family as now I am helping them with house rent and other expenses," she said.

Like Amena, supermarket chain Meena Bazar employed a few hundred people through the Kormo app in the last two months.

"In March and April, many of our employees left their job fearing for the Covid-19," Kazi Inam Ahmed, a director of Gemcon Group, which owns Meena Bazar, one of the oldest supermarket chains in the country, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"With the Kormo app, we are able to meet our demand for employees," he said.

To address the Covid-19 situation, Kormo introduced two new features — Remote Jobs and Remote Interviews — in their app, allowing those looking for employment to discover critical work-from-home opportunities and safely conduct interviews online.

READ MORE ON B3



An employee of Meena Bazar poses at its Dhanmondi outlet in the capital last week. He has recently been recruited through Google's Kormo, a job and career app.



REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Bangladesh's exports to Canada grew 14.53 per cent year-on-year to CAN\$1.97 billion last year, riding on the trade privilege extended by the North American nation.

In 2018, Bangladesh's shipments to Canada was CAN\$1.72 billion, more than 92 per cent of which were apparel items, according to data from the Canada Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Bangladesh (CanCham). It was CAN\$1.65 billion in 2017.

Canada is one of the traditional markets of Bangladesh. Bilateral trade crossed CAN\$3.2 billion, registering 36 per cent year-on-year growth.

The trade balance is heavily tilted towards Bangladesh with products worth CAN\$726 million going to Canada in 2019, said the CanCham in a press release yesterday.

Canada shipped products worth CAN\$1.24 billion to Bangladesh in 2019, CAN\$642 million in 2018 and CAN\$718 million in 2017.

"We had expected that the export from Bangladesh would grow further this year, but the growth has been affected because of the coronavirus pandemic," said CanCham President Masud Rahman.

Bangladesh has a lot of opportunities to grab more than \$25 billion worth of the Canadian retail apparel market, he said.

"I hope exports from Bangladesh to Canada will start growing soon as the world has started to reopen. Bilateral trade will definitely grow between the two countries," Rahman added.

The demand for Bangladeshi garment items is very high in Canada because of the competitive prices and the North American country can be a major export destination for local garment items even during the pandemic.

"Maintaining a warm relationship with Canada can yield better outcomes," Rahman said.

Mostafa Sobhan Rubel, managing director of Dragon Sweaters, said of his total export volume of \$36

million, 15 per cent is shipped to Canada, 45 per cent to the US and the rest to European markets.

"Canadian buyers did not cancel any work orders because of the pandemic and they paid me even during the crisis," said Rubel, who exports mainly sweaters to the country.

The entrepreneur had faced work orders cancellation amounting to \$24 lakh due to the Covid-19 outbreak. However, his buyers are now reinstating the orders but have deferred payment and shipment of the goods, he said.

For instance, the goods that were supposed to be shipped in March, April and May would be sent in September and October to US buyers.

"Canada can be a major export destination as both demand and prices are higher in the country than in other countries," Rubel said, adding that the demand for sweater items in the North American country is higher because of their extended winters.

READ MORE ON B3

Puma reopens Banani outlet

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Puma reopened its Banani 11 outlet on June 1 after a break of two months by taking all the necessary measures that are practised worldwide to contain the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the pandemic, the store will remain open from 10am to 4pm every day, Puma said in a statement.

The global sportswear brand has cleaned the outlet extensively following global standards, according to the statement.

“Temperature is being checked and masks are being given in the entry into the store. Hand sanitisation has been made mandatory while entering the store, before the trial of any item and before leaving the cash desk,” it said.

Puma outlet’s trial rooms are also being disinfected after each use and the outfits are being kept separately and steam ironed in order to save the consumers from any kind of infection, it added.

Puma franchise was brought to Bangladesh in April 2019 by DBL Group.

Dubai charts a path to luxury industry’s new normal

AFP, Dubai

The waiter at a chic Dubai restaurant wears a face mask and gloves, pours the wine into plastic cups and serves the steaks on paper plates with disposable cutlery.

As the pandemic lockdown eases in Dubai, its world-class tourism industry is charting a gradual comeback -- but the new normal has taken a toll on the city’s “wow” factor.

Tables at the usually buzzing Bistro and bar, set among gleaming skyscrapers and long popular for its food and daily happy hours, are now set two metres (six feet) apart.

“For next time, you can choose to bring your own knife and fork if you wish,” the waiter tells the customers -- a far cry from the typical fine dining experience in a city known for its over-the-top services. Hospitality experts now warn that extravagant luxuries, from sweeping breakfast buffets to frolics in swimming pools may have to be reconsidered.

Dubai, one of the seven sheikdoms that make

up the United Arab Emirates, has been charting its tourism sector’s “gradual return to normalcy”. Pre-pandemic luxuries such as normal cutlery and glassware are making a return in some restaurants.

But with many restrictions and precautionary measures still in place, it just doesn’t feel quite like it used to, said one 31-year-old Swedish expatriate. “Luxury experiences are not particularly luxurious anymore,” she said.

“I don’t think things will return to normal for a long time.” - Crowds are out - With scant oil resources compared to its neighbours, Dubai -- which boasts the most diversified economy in the Gulf -- has built a reputation as a financial, commercial and tourism hub despite an economic downturn in recent years.

The gleaming city is known for its mega malls, high-end restaurants and five-star hotels and resorts, all of which have taken a severe hit during the coronavirus outbreak.

Karen Young, a scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, said that global norms

surrounding travel, luxury and entertainment will have to shift. People will want more privacy and individual experiences in retail and hospitality.

“It’s a good time to explore new customer experiences. Crowded restaurants and clubs are out, exclusive at-home chefs and shopping concierge will be in,” she said.

“But we cannot expect a return to normal anytime soon, and recovery will have to include some reinvention.” Although Dubai is steadily easing restrictions, masks remain compulsory outside the home, and an 11pm city-wide curfew is in operation. Children under the age of 12 and adults over 60 are prohibited from entering malls, entertainment centres and gyms.

Many residents hit the beaches, dined at restaurants, and visited shopping centres over the weekend after Dubai announced malls were allowed to open at full capacity.

And the dancing waters of the Dubai Fountain -- one of the city’s most popular attractions -- began to sway to music again, in the shadow of the world’s tallest tower, Burj Khalifa.

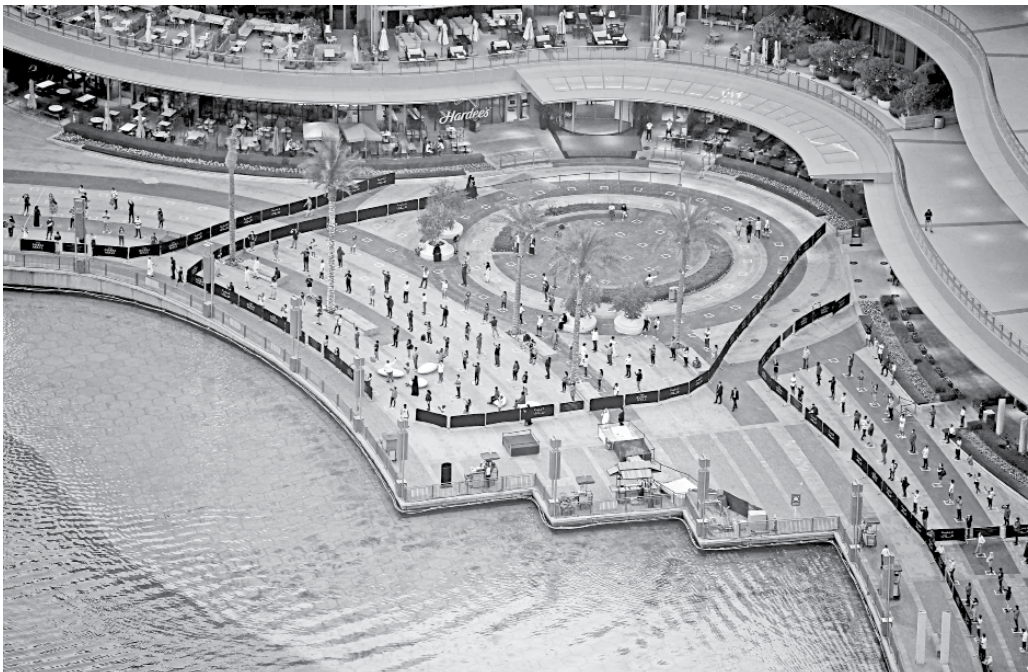
No firm date has been set for allowing tourists back in, but in a slickly produced video released by the tourism authority on Monday, the emirate indicated it could be soon.

“We said we needed a moment, and it will only be a moment more,” it said over footage of fireworks, desert scenes and pristine beaches spliced with images of workers in full protective gear sanitising the city.

In late April, Dubai Tourism director-general Helal Saeed Al-Marri said in an interview that tourists could be welcomed by July, but that the reopening could be delayed until September depending on global progress to curb the pandemic. Tourism has long been the lifeline of the emirate, which welcomed more than 16 million visitors last year. Before the pandemic crippled global travel, the aim was to reach 20 million this year.

According to research firm STR Global, 30 percent of jobs in Dubai’s hotel industry will likely be lost in the coming months until demand recovers. “There’s going to be a lot less group travel,” Al-Marri told Bloomberg in late April.

“This definitely affects the hotel industry and affects the tourism industry and the yield, so there are going to be challenges.” In malls, the retail industry is moving towards a “no touch” model which means hands-off consultations at beauty counters, and no product testers for buyers to peruse.



AFP/FILE

People observe social distancing while gathering to watch the Dubai fountain show which resumes as the Gulf emirate emerges from a lockdown imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pompeo criticises HSBC for backing Hong Kong law

AFP, Washington

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Tuesday took to task HSBC for backing Beijing’s controversial security law proposal in Hong Kong, warning of businesses’ overreliance on China.



US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo

The Asia-focused British banking giant last week posted its support for the law on Chinese social media platform WeChat with a picture of HSBC’s top Asia executive, Peter Wong, signing a petition backing the measure.

“That show of fealty seems to have earned HSBC little respect in Beijing, which continues to use the bank’s business in China as political leverage against London,” Pompeo said in a statement, calling HSBC’s experience “a cautionary tale.” “Beijing’s

aggressive behavior shows why countries should avoid economic overreliance on China and should guard their critical infrastructure from CCP influence,” he said, referring to the Chinese Communist Party.

Pompeo renewed his call on all countries to shun Chinese telecom giant Huawei, which Washington says will jeopardize personal security if it is allowed to dominate construction of the fifth-generation internet.

China’s rubber-stamp parliament last month moved ahead with a law that will punish subversion and other perceived offenses in Hong Kong, a move some activists say will kill the former British colony’s promised freedoms.

Pompeo responded by declaring that Hong Kong will no longer be considered autonomous from mainland China in the eyes of US law. HSBC offered support for the law after public pressure from a pro-Beijing figure in Hong Kong who pointed to the bank’s reliance on business in China.

HSBC executive Wong, speaking to Chinese state media agency Xinhua, voiced hope that the law would bring “long-term stability and prosperity” to Hong Kong.

Other British companies that have backed the law, bucking London’s official position, include bank Standard Chartered.

SIBL urges use of SIBL NOW app

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Social Islami Bank is urging customers to use its mobile app “SIBL NOW” from anywhere round-the-clock to avoid frequent visits to branches in order to contain the spread of Covid-19.

Using this app, customers can enjoy facilities of intra-bank and interbank fund transfers, utility bill and credit card payments, mobile top ups and money transfer to bKash account, according to a statement.

Moreover customers can get details of deposit and investment accounts, mini statement, balance inquiry and cheque books.

Customers need to visit www.siblbdd.com to get an application form where they need to register before submitting the form to the nearest bank branch to verify signature for security purposes.

Allow black money in housing: REHAB

FROM PAGE B4

The demand for apartments fell this year despite showing some improvement last year.

“This is because of client psychology, no one wants to spend money on property during a difficult time,” Alamin said.

There are about 6,000 projects of the REHAB members that are currently lost in limbo following the prolonged nationwide lockdown that began on March 26 as the employees are unable to return to work due to the social distancing and other health guidelines in place.

Both banks and non-banking financial institutions are being directly affected by the ongoing crisis as people continue to either cancel or hold their loan applications, which is a potentially devastating change in consumer behaviour, said Alamin.

Allied sectors of the industry, of which there are 230, are also suffering because of the two-month shutdown, added Liakat Ali.

Staying afloat amid pandemic is equal to making profit

FROM PAGE B4

He acknowledged that the banking sector is in trouble for high non-performing loans and for the new responsibility of channelling a majority of the funds under the Tk 101,117 crore stimulus packages.

“But a higher interest rate will not ensure profits for banks. Moreover, a lower interest rate may encourage the private sector to take loans and repay them on time.”

The sales of ACI were affected during the shutdown and the production of some products was disrupted due to a lack of raw materials, he said.

For instance, the supply of Savlon liquid, a household name, has failed to keep pace with the sharp rise in demand as people rushed to the item

to stay hygiene as part of the efforts to keep the virus at bay.

“There was a dearth of the raw materials needed for the product as sourcing countries also faced lockdowns and they needed more sanitary products as well to meet the demand in their respective domestic markets.”

Demand for sanitary products in Bangladesh surged suddenly and it was not easy to scale up production abruptly, he said.

Now some sourcing destinations are reopening their business, allowing ACI to import raw materials in large volumes.

The company is hopeful that it would be able to ramp up the supply of the product within a short period

of time.

Savlon and Aerosol are the top two brands of the company where Savlon occupies 83 per cent share in the antiseptic category and Aerosol 94.6 per cent in the insect killer category.

Alamgir sees a silver lining in the pandemic.

“The pandemic has spread all over the world and prompted all countries to get to work to find a remedy to treat the disease.”

This has not been the case in case of dengue fever although the mosquito-borne disease kills many people in Bangladesh, he said.

According to the Directorate General of Health Services, 101,354 dengue cases were reported in 2019 and the number of deaths was 156.

Finance minister draws a bead on economic recovery

FROM PAGE B1

Kamal is considering to offer tax holiday benefit to seven new sectors, including transformer and nanotechnology-based manufacturing in order to stimulate private investment, which has stagnated around 23 per cent of the GDP for the last four years.

The tax-free income limit would be increased to Tk 300,000 after keeping it unchanged at Tk 250,000 for the last five years, in a bid to give some breathing space to taxpayers in the lower income bracket.

A new tax slab of 5 per cent for the taxpayers in the lower income bracket is likely to be introduced for the first time after the government maintained 10 per cent as the lowest tax rate for more than two decades.

The government is also pondering

easing tax burden on high income individuals, again after six years. The highest tax rate is going to be slashed to 25 per cent from 30 per cent at present.

However, the owners of cars and jeeps would face higher advance tax during registration and fitness renewals as the government aims to collect 58 per cent of the Tk 568,000 crore budget from taxes.

As the economy is reeling under the coronavirus-induced slowdown and tax collection plunged, the target for the NBR has been fixed at Tk 330,000 crore, just 1 per cent higher from the actual target of Tk 325,600 crore in the outgoing fiscal year.

The NBR would rely on the collection of the value-added tax (VAT) and supplementary duty once again.

The indirect tax paid by consumers is the biggest source of revenue for the state-coffer and the NBR has been tasked to collect Tk 182,000 crore in FY21.

Among other measures, the government is likely to increase the tax on mobile SIM cards and import duty on mobile handsets.

It looks to collect an increased amount of tax in the form of excise duty on bank balances and air travel. In FY21, the high-ticket account-holders are going to face higher excise duty, according to a finance ministry official.

However, as imports dropped and income shrank, the government has slashed the collection targets from income tax to Tk 103,000 crore. It marginally hiked import tariff target to Tk 37,800 crore.

France pledges 15b euros for stricken aviation firms

AFP, Paris

The French government on Tuesday pledged 15 billion euros (\$16.9 billion) for the country’s aviation industry, where thousands of jobs are on the line as the coronavirus crisis hammers the travel industry.

“We are declaring a state of emergency to save our aeronautics industry so that it can be more competitive,” Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire told a press conference in Paris.

“If we hadn’t intervened right away, a third of the jobs in the sector would have disappeared... that’s around 100,000 of the 300,000 direct and indirect jobs,” he added.

The southwestern French city of Toulouse hosts the headquarters of pan-European aircraft maker Airbus, which for decades has supported hundreds of suppliers and service providers in the region.

But orders are being cancelled or put on hold indefinitely as airlines worldwide ground planes amid the travel restrictions, with many fearing it could take years to recover in case of strict new hygiene rules -- such as requiring middle seats to remain empty.

Airlines have parked up to 90 percent of their aircraft, some 4.5 million flights have been cancelled so far, and an estimated \$314 billion in revenues will be lost this year, according to the International Air Transport Association (IATA).

International airlines are in line to make a combined net loss of more than \$84 billion this year, it added Tuesday.

The International Civil Aviation Organization, a UN specialised agency, estimates the pandemic will reduce the number of airline passengers by 1.5 billion by the end of the year.

The French government has already

announced that Air France-KLM, which posted a 1.8-billion-euro loss in the first quarter, will get seven billion euros in loans either directly from the state, or backed by it.

That money will allow it to go through with a purchase of 60 Airbus A220 airliners and 38 long-haul A350 jets. Both planes offer fuel efficiencies and fewer carbon emissions, a growing concern among environmentally-conscious flyers.

But Greenpeace France reacted coolly, saying the government will still be turning a blind eye to the priority of reducing air traffic to bring down carbon emissions.

“The aircraft that pollutes the least is the one that does not fly,” said Sarah Fayolle of Greenpeace France.

The French state and Airbus, as well as Dassault Aviation, Thales and Safran, will contribute 200 million euros each to a fund for small and midsize firms, in particular to help them invest in carbon-reduction technologies.

The plan also includes 1.5 billion euros to spur research on a future “carbon neutral plane” over the next three years, with a goal of having the plane in operation by 2035, Le Maire said.

Defence Minister Florence Parly said 600 million euros of planned military orders would be accelerated, including the purchase of three Airbus A330s that will be converted to refuelling planes, and eight Caracal troop transport helicopters.

Le Maire brushed off concerns that the United States or other countries would protest the state aid as unfair help, amid a long-running feud at the World Trade Organization over subsidies to Airbus and its American rival Boeing.

“We’re not going to be the village idiots who let hundreds of thousands of jobs be destroyed, and the skills they represent... by saying ‘sorry, those are the rules, we have no choice,’” he said.

Exports to Canada grew 15pc in 2019

FROM PAGE B1

The Canadian markets will rebound earlier than other North American countries because it has been able to control the pandemic successfully, Rubel said. “Retailers have started reopening outlets and so, exports to Canada will start to grow now.”

SM Khaled, managing director of Snowtex Group, another leading garment exporter, said of his exports of more than \$200 million, \$13 million goes to Canada. He mainly sends outerwear like jackets, work-wears and rainwear to Canada.

“The share of Canadian work orders in my factory is increasing every year. I am getting a lot of work orders from Canadian buyers this year as well,” he said.

Canada has turned into a good export destination as Bangladesh has been enjoying duty-free access to the market for garment products, leather, textiles, seafood and pharmaceuticals since 2004.

The cornerstone of the commercial relationship between the two countries is agriculture, the lifeblood of both countries, the CanCham said.

“Not only has Bangladesh relied for decades on Canadian suppliers for high quality Canadian grains, seeds and pulses, but more recently nutritional technology and potash fertilizer have been contributing to Bangladesh’s food security and to the health of its citizens.”

A ray of hope for the jobless

FROM PAGE B1

safely conduct interviews online.

“Last two months it has been a bit different. People are now desperately seeking jobs and companies are eager to fill their vacancies,” said an official of Google’s Kormo.

The official said people were getting jobs using the Kormo app quicker than ever.

“When the situation was normal there were things like training. But now there are no such things,” said the official.

According to a recent survey of Brac, around 62 per cent of low-income earners lost work opportunities during the shutdown. The pandemic also left 28 per cent of the respondents economically inactive, it mentions.

In April alone, Meena Bazar hired more than 400 staff during the lockdown using the Kormo app, their sole recruitment channel.

Meena Bazar’s move also comes

from the recent unprecedented demand for delivery services with consumers staying back inside their homes.

This has increased their need to hire more workers and conduct interviews remotely to cope with the requirements of consumers during the pandemic.

Launched in 2002, Meena Bazar now has 16 outlets and directly employs over 1,000 people.

“These days, our expert HR team is working with Kormo and conducting remote interviews to recruit people. This has made the process safer for our team and candidates,” said Ahmed Shoyeb, general manager at Meena Bazar.

“It’s our responsibility as a critical business to step up at this time. We’re confident our partnership with Kormo will enable us to keep up with hiring demands and scale our remote workforce quickly.”

Since September 2018, when

Google launched Kormo, which maintains digital CVs, thousands of people found jobs using the app.

The app was launched with a view to helping people in the informal sector, either unemployed or employed at low pay, find jobs. It eyes the 86 per cent of the country’s labour force who are employed in the informal sector.

The application has been developed under the Google’s Area 120 programme, an incubator for new innovative ideas inside the company.

With free access to the web portal, Kormo helps its early employers’ shortlisted candidates by using AI, tracks the candidates’ end to end application status and overall, acts as an integrated Applicant Tracking System.

The Kormo app’s feature to send consistent reminders (app notifications and messages) to job applicants about the interview schedule has eased HR team’s daily operations significantly.

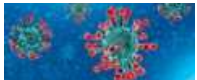
ADB finances landmark private sector solar plant

FROM PAGE B4

The financing comprises a loan from ADB and a loan from the ADB-administered Canadian Climate Fund for the Private Sector in Asia II (CFPS II).

The Canadian Climate Fund for the Private Sector in Asia (CFPS) also provided a technical assistance grant to support project preparation and to catalyse the loans.

CFPS and CFPS II were established by the government of Canada to encourage private investment in climate change mitigation and adaptation projects in Asia and the Pacific.



TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE

Staying afloat amid pandemic is equal to making profit

ACI Consumer Brands' Managing Director Syed Alamgir says in an interview

AHSAN HABIB

Businesses should focus on keeping the supply chain smooth by churning out products and rendering services instead of making profits in 2020 as people are facing a huge challenge to survive because of the coronavirus pandemic, said Syed Alamgir, managing director of ACI Consumer Brands.

"If you are alive and your business stays afloat despite the raging pandemic, this could be your best profit," he said in an interview over telephone with The Daily Star last week.

"If anyone wants to make huge profits now, they will be loser in the long-run."

Alamgir is a well-known figure in the country's consumer brands' segment thanks to his long career spanning more than four decades and he has been called a marketing superstar by the Bangladesh Brands Forum (BBF).

In order to ensure proper service, ACI has kept its supply chain up and running by maintaining all health-related rules so that its products do not spread the contagion and people can access them at affordable prices at the same time, he said.

"We are rendering services to the countrymen by supplying many hygiene and sanitary products needed at this crisis hour to safeguard their health and environment."

Alamgir thinks that ACI Consumer Brands, the maker of ACI Aerosol, Savlon, ACI Mosquito Coil & ACI Pure Spices and Flour, would make a huge contribution to the nation through their day-to-day necessary high-quality products at affordable prices.

"If we can survive and our business can survive in 2020, we would say in 2021 that last year was a good year."

The lockdowns and travel restrictions imposed by the country have led to a steep decline in business activity. Many people became jobless and their consumption and spending has been affected, hitting businesses and the economy hard.

About 15 lakh retail shops were partly closed all over the country. Around 60 lakh people were employed at these shops and all of them bore the brunt of the shutdown, he said.

Many companies supply products to these shops where day labourers



Syed Alamgir

are used. This poor people have been hit hard as many of them had no work during the period.

Impact of coronavirus on a densely populated country like Bangladesh would be more severe and it would take time to get rid of the pathogen, Alamgir said, referring to the World Health Organisation.

"The impact might be dreadful to our economy."

The spending and consumptions of all affected peoples might drop and it will continue for a few years. "As a result, businesses will be impacted and the economic growth would decline."

Despite a rise in the price of the imported raw materials and transportation costs, ACI Consumer Brands has not increased the price of its products to keep them affordable for the consumers.

"In ACI, we have continued our production on the basis of a policy, that is "service is the first and foremost thing."

"Consumers need ACI products even during the lockdown. So, we have kept producing despite the huge risk posed by the deadly virus," he said.

Alamgir, who had previously worked for British pharmaceutical company May & Baker, Pegasus Shoes, Jamuna Knitting & Dyeing and Aromatic Cosmetics Ltd, has introduced many ideas in the fast-moving consumer products segment that shook the markets.

He shot to fame when he pioneered the idea of halal soap in Bangladesh in the 1990s as the marketing director of Jamuna Group of Companies.

The 'halal marketing' has kickstarted a worldwide marketing phenomenon and made him the first Bangladeshi marketer to be cited in the 13th edition of the prestigious marketing book "Principle of Marketing" by marketing guru Philip Kotler.

He was also the winner of the first-ever Marketing Superstar Award in 2019, according to the Bangladesh

Brands Forum.

In 1998, he joined ACI, one of the fast-growing FMCG companies in Bangladesh.

He has initiated many brands in the company. One of them is "Pure" brand. The brand was launched in 2005 and was awarded seven times by the BBF as one of the best brands in the country.

"We are running the business on two mottos now. One is ensuring safety for our employees and the other is to ensure product availability in every corner of the country."

"If we don't supply products, it will create problems in the market," said Alamgir, who completed his MBA from the Institute of Business Administration under the University of Dhaka and received PhD from the New Castle University in the US.

Alamgir welcomed the various stimulus packages introduced by the government to help people, companies, businesses, industries, entrepreneurs and farmers to stay afloat during the pandemic.

"If the stimulus packages are implemented properly, the private sector will get some relief surely."

He called for reconsidering the recent 60 per cent hike in bus fares as it would increase the cost of living for the people, who are already suffering because of the loss of livelihoods.

The government should not turn away from its focus on lowering the interest rate in the banking sector to the single digit, he said.

"A lower interest rate will give a big relief to the private sector."

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ADB finances landmark private sector solar plant

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Asian Development Bank has signed a \$17.7 million financing package with Spectra Solar Park Limited to invest in a 35-megawatt utility-scale solar photovoltaic plant in Bangladesh.

The solar park is one of the first private sector solar plants in Bangladesh to be financed by multilateral institutions, and will support the country's efforts to attain long-term energy security and meet climate goals by stepping up its use of clean energy, according to a statement.



The agreement for the Spectra solar power project was signed by Shantanu Chakraborty, director of infrastructure finance for South Asia, Central Asia and West Asia at the ADB's private sector operations department, and Khan Md Aftabuddin, managing director of Spectra Solar Park.

Deutsche Investitions-und Entwicklungsgesellschaft (DEG), a development finance institution based in Germany, is co-financing the project with ADB.

Once operational, the plant is expected to provide over 50 gigawatt-hours of clean electricity annually to the national grid and avoid 33,200 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions.

The project aligns with the Bangladesh government's aim to reduce the country's dependence on fossil fuels through renewable energy under Bangladesh Vision 2021.

"This project strongly demonstrates that the solar energy sector in Bangladesh is an attractive destination for private sector engagement," said Chakraborty.

"This is a landmark project that will also incorporate very specific and meaningful design features to empower women and ensure a gender inclusive workplace."

Bangladesh is committed to combating climate change and increasing energy access from renewable energy sources, said Aftabuddin.

"The project establishes important precedents for the solar energy sector in Bangladesh by adopting international best practices. We are grateful to ADB for their commitment and assistance on this project."

Green Delta Capital served as lead arranger for the project. "ADB's financing with co-financing by DEG in this project will help scale up solar projects and unlock foreign investments for renewable energy in Bangladesh," said Md Rafiqul Islam, managing director and CEO of Green Delta Capital.

READ MORE ON B3

Delivery vans of member companies of the e-Commerce Association of Bangladesh arrive at East Rajabazar yesterday to supply products to consumers as the area has been on lockdown since Tuesday midnight.

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Allow black money in housing: REHAB



JAGARAN CHAKMA

Real estate companies have urged the government to allow black money to be invested in the housing sector through the upcoming budget without prying into the sources as it would help the vulnerable industry survive the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

The government needs to allow it without

asking any questions about where the money came from, said Alamgir Shamsul Alamin, president of the Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh (REHAB).

"Then both the industry and economy would benefit sizably from the generation of relevant value added tax and registration fees," he said.

The REHAB has already placed a budget proposal in this regard to the government in the latter part of May.

Considering the emergency situation, the government should make the money whitening scheme more enticing so that untaxed income can be used to further the country's real estate industry and economic

development, according to REHAB.

There are many instances of people legally earning money abroad but sending it home through unofficial channels to evade paying a higher amount in government taxes, said Liakat Ali Bhuiyan, first vice president of the REHAB.

If the government does not provide the scope to invest black money in the real estate sector and refrain from prying into the source, then people will simply spend the money abroad, he said.

The value for undisclosed income, generated legally, in Bangladesh is huge and so that money should be invested in developing the economy, Bhuiyan added.

The association of real estate developers also demanded the deduction of flat and land registration fees from 12 per cent to 5 per cent in a bid to ease the burden on potential investors and the allocation of a special fund to provide long term home loans to encourage property purchasing.

Government officials are allowed to avail home loans at 5 per cent interest. Therefore, the same facility should be given to the general public ensure housing for all, which is a part of the government's development plans, Alamin said.

"If the government fulfills our demands, it will lead to a direct fall in the price for apartments," he added.

For many reasons, Bangladesh's real estate industry witnessed sluggish sales for the past few years but it will likely see a drastic decline if the demand for housing drops due to the unprecedented economic uncertainty brought on by the pandemic, according to the REHAB president.

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\$15m City Bank-ITFC loans for SMEs

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

City Bank has entered into a \$15 million trade finance partnership with International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation (ITFC) for providing short-term loan facilities to small and medium enterprises.

The SMEs will get the funds through an Islamic banking window for importing raw materials.

The financing of Jeddah-based ITFC, the trade financing arm of Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), comes as part of the IsDB's COVID-19 response strategy, says a press release.

The strategy focuses on providing life-saving support through the provision of medical supplies, staple food and fertiliser for agricultural production to some of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation countries.

"Supporting the SMEs as they emerge out from the pandemic is ever more critical now as financial resources of OIC member countries are stretched to meet the urgent

medical and staple food supplies," said Hani Salem Sonbol, CEO of ITFC.

A central tenet of the ITFC strategy is to provide financing to local partner financial institutions like City Bank to facilitate SME access to financing that is key for the country's economic growth and their ability to participate in global value chains, he said.

"This Murabaha financing facility will enable us to provide better value to our importing clients through extensive links and support of ITFC and IsDB," said Sheikh Mohammad Maroof, additional managing director of City Bank.

"We look forward to seeing the new partnership make a lasting contribution to private sector development and socio-economic growth in Bangladesh," he added.

City Bank is the latest partner institution to work with ITFC as it expands its financing outreach to the private sector through local banks in Bangladesh, according to the statement.

