

STOCKS		COMMODITIES		ASIAN MARKETS				CURRENCIES			
Week-on-week		As of Friday		Friday Closings				As on Thursday			
DSEX	CSCX	Gold	Oil	MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI	USD	EUR	GBP	CNY
▲ 1.88%	▲ 1.96%	\$1,798.31	\$43.24	▼ 0.39%	▼ 1.06%	▼ 0.63%	▼ 1.95%	BUY TK 83.95	94.23	104.95	11.79
4,061.57	6,989.24	(per ounce)	(per barrel)	36,594.33	22,290.81	2,652.65	3,383.32	SELL TK 84.95	98.03	108.75	12.40

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Star BUSINESS

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A man of success, a man of values

Top businessmen hail Latifur Rahman, who passed away on July 1

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Business luminaries yesterday paid their heartfelt tribute to Latifur Rahman, founder, chairman and chief executive of Transcom Group, hailing him the most patriotic entrepreneur and an icon for ethical business.

Rahman, who was best known for his ethical business practices at home and abroad, breathed his last on July 1.

"Latifur Rahman was a symbol of ethics and determination," said Mahbubur Rahman,

president of the International Chamber of Commerce — Bangladesh (ICC—B), at a virtual remembrance.

"I can feel his absence. He was an exceptional friend of me and my family."

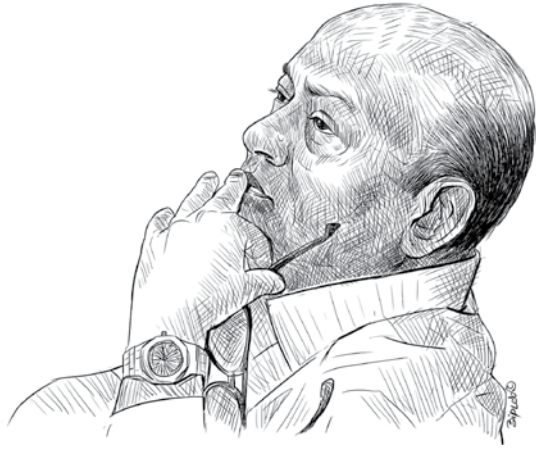
The business luminaries of the country were recalling the legendary ethical business icon in a virtual meeting. The Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) and the ICC—B jointly organised the event to pay tribute to the founder of Transcom Group.

M Anis Ud Dowla, a former president of the chamber, said one has to be fortunate to get a friend like Latifur Rahman.

"And it is equally painful when such a friend departs," he said.

Syed Manzur Elahi, also a former MCCI president, said anyone could disagree with Rahman politely. "He was admirable and a role model for ethical business."

The former caretaker government adviser



said Rahman was extremely analytical. "He had been a business giant and whatever he touched turned into gold."

Tapan Chowdhury, another former MCCI president, said Latifur Rahman was a friend of his family for a long time.

"He always told about the hopes of the country," said the managing director of Square Group.

AK Azad, a former president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), said although he was a very successful businessman, he never interfered in the decision-making of the newspapers he owned.

Rahman was founding director of Mediaworld, the owning company of The Daily Star, and Chairman of Mediastar, the owning company of the Prothom Alo, both leading English and Bangla newspapers of the country.

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Rice imports fall to four-decade low

Analysts point to challenges to sustain increased production

SOHEL PARVEZ

Bangladesh's rice imports fell to a nearly 40-year low in the fiscal year 2019-20 thanks to farmers' endeavour to increase the yields of the main crop and allow the nation to be self-sufficient in the cereal production.

Total import was 4,180 tonnes in the last fiscal year, marking a 98 per cent slump over the previous fiscal year, resulting from high import tariffs and adequate domestic production, food ministry data showed.

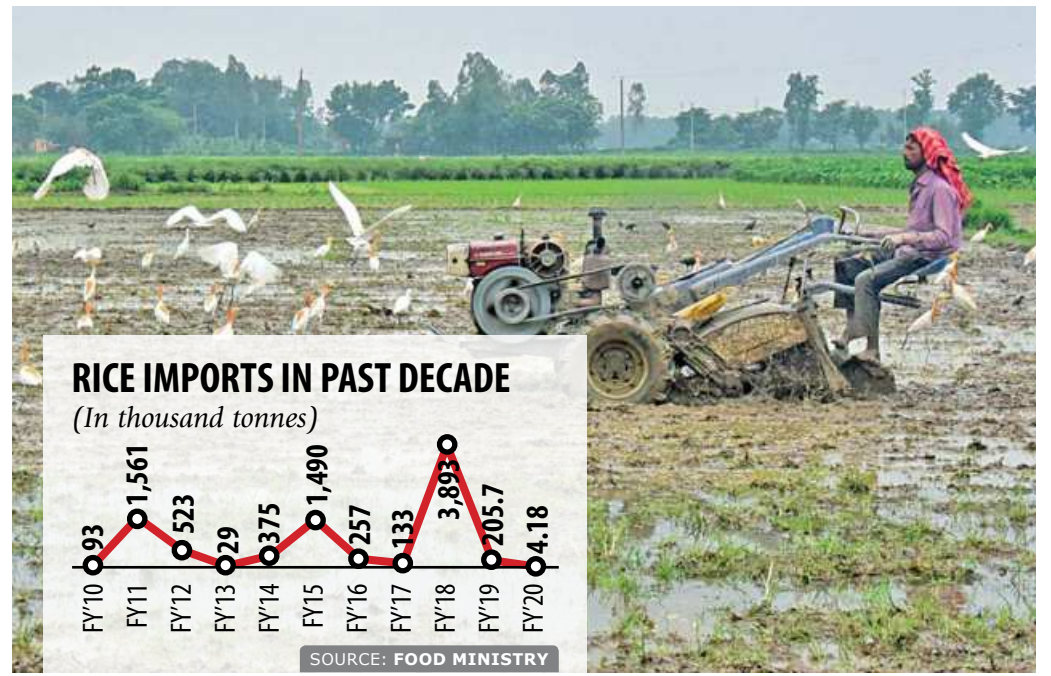
Agricultural analysts attributed the gain to rising production amid farmers' gradual shift to improved varieties and replacement of older varieties by the newer ones. And these were supported by favourable weather, better crop management and subsidies aimed at keeping the prices of fertilizers affordable for growers.

Annual rice output, which was less than 3 crore tonnes until the fiscal year 2007-08, crossed the mark in the subsequent year. Since then, upward trajectory continued except for the fiscal year 2016-17 when floods in the northeastern haor region damaged crops.

Production recovered a year later but encouraged by low import duty, private importers brought in 38.90 lakh tonnes of the cereal in FY2017-18, the highest in nearly three decades.

However, the Food and Agriculture Organisation, in a report in May, said the country was expected to have produced 3.87 crore tonnes of rice in FY2019-20. Bangladesh consumes 3.2 crore tonnes of rice and 55 lakh tonnes of wheat annually, said the UN agency in the report.

"No doubt, Bangladesh has



Total yearly rice production stood at 3.64 crore tonnes in FY2018-19, posting a marginal increase over the previous year. The production estimate for the last fiscal year is yet to be made available by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

However, the Food and Agriculture Organisation, in a report in May, said the country was expected to have produced 3.87 crore tonnes of rice in FY2019-20. Bangladesh consumes 3.2 crore tonnes of rice and 55 lakh tonnes of wheat annually, said the UN agency in the report.

made tremendous progress in rice production and food security," said Humnath Bhandari, the representative for Bangladesh at the International Rice Research Institute, in an email reply recently.

"Rice production this year has been excellent mainly due to favourable weather conditions in boro and hoping good aman production (if no natural calamities) as a result of a good price of rice and government efforts to increase rice production."

Farmers have been producing a higher amount of rice than the country's annual requirement for the last several years.

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Stimulus packages fall flat for implementation delays: ex-DCCI presidents

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The government-announced stimulus packages failed to serve their purpose, which was to swiftly rejuvenate economic activities and protect jobs of millions, due to delays in their implementation, said leading businesspeople and an economist yesterday.

As a result, jobs continue to be lost, some 16 million so far, because of the coronavirus pandemic which has been severely affecting the economy.

The government announced stimulus packages amounting to more than Tk 103 lakh crore to help micro, small, medium and large enterprises face the fallout of Covid-19.

However, most of the enterprises, especially the micro, cottage and small ones, are yet to avail money from the fund for utilisation during the pandemic to avert financial and job losses.

In some cases, the situation had turned so acute that entrepreneurs of the micro, cottage and small enterprises are even losing capital as their sales have declined significantly.

DCCI DEMANDS

- ▶▶ Quick disbursement of stimulus packages
- ▶▶ Cuts in bank borrowing by govt
- ▶▶ Brightening country image for the sake of int'l trade
- ▶▶ Strengthening capital market to reduce dependence on banks
- ▶▶ Tapping export potential of major Asian markets
- ▶▶ Promoting exports of PPEs, masks

The image crisis created over a private hospital issuing fake coronavirus test certificates may have adverse impacts on the international trade of Bangladesh, said the businesspeople.

They said the Italian authorities sent back more than 100 Bangladeshis last week centring the falsification.

If something similar happens to involve businesspersons and any country sends them back, the image crisis would severely affect Bangladesh's international trade.

"So, we should do something immediately so that our image is brightened and rebuilt before the world

and nobody falls victim to being told to return in any airport of the world," said Sabur Khan, a former president of the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI).

"I also feel that this is the time to establish good governance," he told a virtual discussion on "Bi-annual economic state and future stance of Bangladesh economy: private sector perspective" organised by the DCCI.

Nine former DCCI presidents, an economist and Planning Minister MA Mannan participated at the event which was moderated by incumbent DCCI President Shams Mahmud.

Khan's views were echoed by Mannan. "Unfortunately a few people have been damaging our image during this time of crisis as well as the time of rebounding," he said.

The minister cited the example of Vietnam, saying that the country has so far been successful in tackling the pandemic and safeguarding the economy with discipline.

He said the government was unable to disburse money from the social safety net programmes for many beneficiaries as they do not have bank or mobile financial service accounts.

Mannan suggested that businesspeople explore export potential of the Asian markets such as China, India, Japan, Sri Lanka and Nepal for increasing the country's trade.

"You can also do a lot of business even with Myanmar although there are some problems," the minister said.

He also highlighted the need for obtaining observer status in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to expand trade with the member states.

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EBL to offer Bangla QR payments

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

Eastern Bank Ltd will introduce an interoperable quick response (QR) payment system using mVisa platform in August in order to expedite the growth of cashless transactions in the country.

The lender is the first bank in Bangladesh that will launch the contactless payment method by way of using the platform of Visa, one of the global leaders in digital payments technology.

Paying for goods will no longer need point of sale (POS) terminals at shops or other places.

Clients will have to just use mobile banking apps linked to their debit and credit cards to scan QR codes displayed by merchants.

Bangla QR payments will allow interoperability and more convenience to customers for making contactless payments using their smartphone devices regardless of the transaction size, said Ali Reza Iftekhar, managing director of Eastern Bank.

Customers will be able to pay at any mVisa enabled QR merchant across the world, which will set a milestone in the payment industry of Bangladesh, he said.

The transaction method will encourage people to maintain social distancing, which will also help curb the coronavirus pandemic.

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Digital cattle market for all Eid needs

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Government agencies and e-commerce businesses have joined hands to introduce a digital platform, where customers can purchase sacrificial animals as well as slaughtering and delivery services, in a bid to maintain public health guidelines on Eid-ul-Azha amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

"This year's situation is not like that of previous festivals and so, a good number of customers will try to buy their sacrificial animals online and would prefer a complete package, including slaughtering and delivery," said Md Abdul Wahed Tomal, general secretary of the e-Commerce Association of Bangladesh (e-CAB).

The joint initiative, featuring the Dhaka North City Corporation, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Division, e-CAB and Bangladesh Dairy Farmers' Association (BDFFA), was launched yesterday under the title 'Digital Haat'.

This is the single largest online cattle market of its kind with all similar private initiatives also being linked to the website, according to organisers.

Initially, an estimated three to four thousand sacrificial animals will be sold

through the platform, half of which will include slaughtering and meat processing services, Tomal said.

"Orders will be taken till July 20 depending on demand and supply," he added.

The response has been huge as a fair number of cattle traders have already registered themselves on the platform.

Organisers plan to accept orders with a 25 per cent down payment.

E-CAB will be responsible for delivering the animal to the buyer ahead of the day of sacrifice.

Dhaka North City Corporation's Mayor Atiqul Islam said that five locations have been pre-selected as places for slaughter while new sites are also being considered.

According to initial plans, 400 cattle will be slaughtered on the first day of Qurbani while 1,000 will be sacrificed on the second day and another 600 on the third, Islam added.

All payments will be made digitally while the postal department's digital financial service, Nagad, is offering a 1 per cent discount on payments made through their channel.

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Engage micro lenders to disburse stimulus loans among SMEs: Sanem

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Microfinance institutions should be involved in fund disbursements from the government's stimulus package to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) so that those firms have quick access to finance amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, according to the South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (Sanem).

"Although entrepreneurs are benefiting from the stimulus package, disbursements are being made through the banking system, which is a very slow process," said Sanem Executive Director Selim Raihan.

Raihan made these comments while speaking at a virtual discussion, held yesterday as a part of the Sanem Netizen Forum on Covid-19 Pandemic - Episode 8, styled 'assessing the overall current situation of the pandemic'.

The government previously announced a Tk 20,000 crore stimulus package for SMEs in a bid to provide the sector with enough working capital to survive the coronavirus fallout and continue its growth.

In his argument for why small-scale lenders should be authorised to make disbursements,

SANEM
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RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶▶ Involve micro finance organisations to deliver credit to SMEs
- ▶▶ Monitor implementation of safety net programmes
- ▶▶ Include the new poor under safety net
- ▶▶ Create jobs for returnee expatriate workers
- ▶▶ Relax loan interest of SMEs who lost their working capital
- ▶▶ Resume economic activities in full swing controlling the pandemic

Raihan said that micro lenders primarily provide financing to SMEs and therefore, involving them would help the sector utilise the stimulus package to its fullest.

The Sanem executive director also expressed appreciation for the government's initiative to protect SMEs as it will help the sector recover alongside the overall economy.

However, he also suggested that authorities should monitor the implementation of the stimulus package to ensure that funds are being properly utilised.

Regarding the social safety net programme, Raihan said that the government is yet to bring people who were recently forced into poverty by the Covid-19 outbreak under the scheme.

Many self-employed individuals became redundant and ended up returning to their villages after failing to secure sufficient working capital due to the ongoing pandemic.

"So, they should be added to the list of eligible people and get full financial cooperation under the stimulus package," Raihan said.

Meanwhile, it is a good initiative to use the foreign exchange reserve to fund development activities. However, the reserve should not be overused as it will discourage foreign direct investment, he added.

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