



Salman F Rahman, private industry and investment adviser of the prime minister; Ahmed Jamal, a deputy governor of Bangladesh Bank; Sheikh Fazle Fahim, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industries; Selim RF Hussain, CEO of Brac Bank, and Syed Almas Kabir, president of the Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS), attend an event through a digital platform on Saturday, when Brac Bank and the BASIS launched a special financial package—Digonto—for the BASIS members. Digonto will enable the ICT and ITES companies with wider access to finance and business expansion.

Paper mills flounder as demand thins out

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“But we may not be able to sell paper to that extent,” he said, explaining that the NCTB would be making purchases of a lesser volume compared to the previous year. “We cannot sell below our costing,” he added.
“I do not see any prospect of revival until the opening of school, colleges,” he said.
However, Rahman said because of the expansion of online learning facilities, the market was unlikely to go back to the pre-pandemic period.
“We are trying to go for exports,” he said, adding that it would be possible for them to have a decent income by selling to foreign buyers if the government increased the incentive on such business to 15 per cent from 10 per cent now.
Sukanta Kumar Saha, assistant general manager for export and international market of Meghna Pulp & Paper Mills, a concern of the Meghna Group of Industries, said orders for export had gone dry since the outbreak of global pandemic.
Prices have fallen as pulp producers are selling paper at prices close to that of pulp, he said.
“This has put us in tough competition in the international market as local mills have to make paper by importing pulp,” he said.

Demand for paints picking up again

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The company has a range of decorative products under the Kansai Nerolac Paints umbrella, which have distinctive advantages for the consumers in terms of economics, aesthetics, health and hygiene, he said.
“We will be building on this range by adding a few more products under the Healthy Home Paints plank. We also would be looking towards consolidating our water proofing range.”
The focus of Kansai in Bangladesh has always been on high performance coatings required for all the mega infrastructural projects, he said. “This shall help us in increasing our revenue.”
To increase dealer-based sales, the company is focusing more on the “below the line” activities, as dealers and painters are key, he said.
The government should now think about launching a system for online transfer of customs duty, which would ensure faster release of goods from the ports, he said.
The government should now fulfil the long-pending demand of the paint makers – a waiver on supplementary duty, he said.
The minimum tax on sales should also be waived during this pandemic year for the sake of the return of the small and medium industries to normalcy, he said.
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BB clarifies instances with no limits

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In addition, banks were asked to ensure realisation of tax imposed by the government when international cardholders purchase products and services.
This has created a misunderstanding between international cardholders and banks about what the highest single transaction could be.
Against the backdrop, the central bank issued the notice in order to remove the ambiguity.

India to loan virus-hit Maldives \$250m

AFP
India on Sunday announced a \$250 million loan to the Maldives to boost its coronavirus-battered economy in a further bid to counter China’s growing financial footprint in South Asia.
The Indian Ocean archipelago, renowned for its luxury resorts, has been badly hit by the pandemic, with foreign tourists failing to flock back in large numbers after international flights restarted in mid-July.
India’s High Commission in the Maldives said the loan was being provided after a request by Maldives President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih for “financial assistance to overcome the difficult economic situation.”
“The Maldives is at liberty to use the money in repairing the domestic economic situation in line with its own priorities,” it said in a statement.
A sale of treasury bonds issued by the Maldives government to State Bank of India (SBI) will raise the money, with ten years given for repayment, the statement added.
The assistance follows a \$500 million

pledge by New Delhi in August to help build bridges and causeways in the nation of 1,192 islands located on major East-West shipping lanes.
Under former president Abdulla Yameen’s administration, which was ousted in 2018 elections, the Maldives borrowed some \$1.4 billion from Beijing for expensive infrastructure projects, according to Solih’s government.
The loans added to critics’ concerns that Chinese aid in Asia and beyond was saddling countries with unsustainable debts while expanding Beijing’s sphere of influence.
The bond takes New Delhi’s total pledged financial assistance to the Maldives to over \$2 billion since Solih came to power, according to India’s foreign ministry.
The country, which still has a nighttime curfew in place to combat the virus, has recorded more than 9,600 infections and 33 deaths from Covid-19. The Asian Development Bank forecasts the Maldives’ economy to contract by 20.5 per cent this year, compared to growth of 5.9 percent last year.



Md Jahirul Islam, a member of Bangladesh Ansar, receives a cheque worth Tk 10 lakh from an official of Walton and a guest for purchasing a Walton-branded refrigerator under the company's 'Digital Campaign Season 7', at an event in Panchagarh recently.

China’s ByteDance seeks \$60b TikTok valuation in US deal

REUTERS
China’s ByteDance Ltd is seeking a valuation of \$60 billion for TikTok as Oracle Corp and Walmart Inc take stakes in the short-video app’s business to address US security concerns, Bloomberg News reported on Sunday, citing an unnamed person familiar with the matter.
Oracle will take a 12.5 per cent stake in TikTok Global and store all its US user data in its cloud to comply with US national security requirements, the companies said on Saturday. Retail giant Walmart said it would take a 7.5 per cent stake.
The two companies would pay a combined \$12 billion for their stakes if they agree to a \$60 billion asking price, Bloomberg reported.
ByteDance, TikTok, Oracle and Walmart did not immediately respond to requests for comment on the report.
The final valuation had not been set as the companies worked out the equity structure and measures for data security, the Bloomberg report added.

US President Donald Trump on Saturday said that he supported a deal in principle would allow TikTok to continue to operate in the United States, even as it appeared to conflict with his earlier executive order for China’s ByteDance to divest the video app.
ByteDance was racing to avoid a

crackdown on TikTok after the US Commerce Department said on Friday that it would block new downloads and updates to the app from Sunday.
US officials had expressed concern that the personal data of as many as 100 million Americans that use the app were being passed on to China’s Communist Party government.



China and US flags are seen near a TikTok logo in this illustration picture.

Indonesia halts exports from seafood producer after virus tests

REUTERS, Jakarta
Indonesia has suspended exports from an Indonesian seafood company PT Putri Indah into China after its frozen fish products tested positive for the coronavirus, the country’s fisheries ministry said in a statement on Saturday.
The ministry said that an investigation was underway and that the suspension would only apply to PT Putri Indah “whereas the others can still do export activities as usual.” The virus was detected on the outermost side of the package, not on the fish, the ministry said.
The seven-day suspension began on Friday, it said.
A person in charge of marketing, answering a number listed for PT Putri Indah, hung up the phone without replying.

China’s economy remains resilient despite external risks, says Xi

REUTERS, Beijing
China’s economy remains resilient and there are ample policy tools at Beijing’s disposal despite rising external risks, President Xi Jinping said in remarks published on Saturday.
The world’s second-largest economy has steadily recovered from a virus-induced slump, but analysts say policymakers face a tough job to maintain stable expansion over the next several years to turn China into a high-income nation.
“The basic characteristics of China’s economy with sufficient potential, great resilience, strong vitality, large space for manoeuvre and many policy instruments have not changed,” Xinhua news agency quoted Xi as saying.
China has strong manufacturing capacity, very large domestic markets and huge investment potentials, Xi said.
Xi reaffirmed a “dual circulation” strategy that would help steer the economy towards greater self-reliance, as U.S. hostility and a global pandemic increase external risks.
China still enjoyed “strategic opportunities” in its development, although the coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated global challenges as globalisation slows and unilateralism and protectionism are rising, Xi was quoted as saying at a meeting on the country’s 14th five-year plan (2021-2025).
“We must seek our development in a more unstable and uncertain world,” he said. Xi urged calmness amid rising difficulties and challenges.
“The great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation can never be achieved easily with the beating of gongs and drums,” he said.

TCB onion now available online

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This new avenue will allow customers from across the country to avail quality at affordable prices from their local markets, the minister said while inaugurating the move through a virtual meeting featuring the owners of various e-commerce platforms.
The TCB retails the highly consumed vegetable through its Open Market Sale (OMS) programme, which mainly aims at providing food at affordable prices for the country’s lower-income bracket. Under the programme, onion is being sold at numerous locations on the backs of trucks.
People of the low-income earners generally do not own smartphones and therefore, purchasing onion via online platforms is out of the question for them.
On the other hand, consumers who cannot find the time to buy onion from the TCB trucks but own smartphones can easily buy the product from the comfort of their homes, Munshi said in a statement.
The concept of selling TCB onion online is a relatively new one and so, a few challenges could arise.
“But we will have to push forward and solve those problems. Onions are not something to be worried about as the country has an adequate stock of the kitchen staple,” he added.
According to the commerce minister, India has agreed to export 25,000 tonnes of onion to Bangladesh while another 10,000-tonne shipment is also expected.
Last week, prices increased exponentially following India’s decision to halt onion exports to Bangladesh. Munshi then blamed a section of unscrupulous traders and panic buying for the sudden price hike.
Prices eventually started to decline after news broke that India would resume shipping onion to Bangladesh on trucks, which were and are entering the country gradually.
Mainul Islam, port manager of the Sonamasjid-Panama Port Link, said although a total of eight onion laden trucks entered Bangladesh through the land port at Mahadipur on Saturday, their passage was ultimately halted on Sunday.
Babul Hasanat Durul, an onion importer, said India stopped sending onion through the Sonamasjid land port.
Besides, the Mohdipur land port customs authority did not get any order on Sunday from the ministry concerned about the onion import and so the trucks there continued to be left stranded.

Eastland Insurance Declared 10% Dividend

33rd Annual General Meeting of Eastland Insurance Co. Ltd. was held recently through Virtual platform, presided over by Mr. Mahbubur Rahman, Chairman of the company. The Chairman informed that the company earned gross premium of Tk. 1,035.32 million in 2019 and during the last 33 years settled claims amounting to Tk. 3,048.39 million. The Assets of the company stood at Tk. 2,595.23 million as on December 31, 2019. The shareholders approved total 10% Dividend (5% Cash & 5% Stock Dividend) for the year 2019, as recommended by the Board of Directors.

Apartment prices to go beyond reach of middle class

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There’s a tremendous need for investment in the real estate sector for it to survive as demand declines when people are in a state of panic, he added.
According to the REHAB president, the banking sector has done well to step forward and support the real estate sector by providing long-term home loans to their customers.
In the past, banks would only allow a five-year tenure for repayment but now, the instalment period can be up to 25 years, he said.
Meanwhile, Alamin urged Bangladesh Bank to allocate a fund for the housing sector from which customers can avail long-term loans at cheap rates.
“We cannot provide apartments at reasonable prices for the middle-income group in the Dhaka city due to the high price of land and bank interest,” he said.
For this reason, the National Housing Finance and Investments Ltd should come together with REHAB to somehow provide apartments for the middle class within an affordable price.
The mid-income earners can only afford to spend up to Tk 60 lakh for a 1,000 square feet apartment, which is not financially feasible for developers, Alamin added.
The lion’s share of the country’s

burgeoning middle-class, a key demographic for the real estate industry, cannot afford housing at existing rates.
“Therefore, the government should undertake topical policy measures that would help provide reasonably-priced housing for the middle-income people,” he said.
Even government officials are unable to purchase such apartments as they have to take loans from state-run banks at 5 per cent interest.
Alamin also said the government’s stimulus packages can be a relief for the sector, allowing developers to regain their confidence and continue operations.
In regards to some allegations brought against certain developers, the REHAB president said the land owners who are unable to develop their own property due to financial constraints end up giving the job to developers, who at times cannot fulfil their commitments.
However, things have changed over time as land owners are now more aware about how developers operate, he added.
FR Khan, managing director of Building Technologies and Ideas, said amid the ‘new normal’, the future remains uncertain and so companies will have to develop a form of immunity against such a crisis.
He too fears that apartment prices will

shoot up due to the Covid-19 fallout.
Developers will not suspend their projects despite the spike in the cost of raw materials as the overall cost of the project will increase if there are prolonged delays, Khan said, adding that providing amnesty for untaxed income invested in real estate breathed life back into the sector.
In regards to used apartments, he said this secondary market is growing gradually and has shown good potential for the future.
Young buyers can take this opportunity to buy a second-hand apartment at a lower cost and eventually sell it to buy a bigger and newer apartment.
However, the registration cost for a used apartment and a new one is the same even though it should be reduced, Khan said.
According to the managing director, a 25-year-old apartment can be as good as new with some renovations.
In regards to backward linkage industries, he said around 12 major sectors, such as cement and steel, were directly affected alongside the real estate sector due to the ongoing pandemic.
Tanvir Ahmed, managing director of Sheltech, said real estate directly contributes 7 per cent, or \$21 to \$25 billion, to the country’s gross domestic product each year.
But the sector is in quite a fragile state

as nobody knows when the economic uncertainty will end, he said.
A number of developers take land from private owners by pledging a number of commitments that cannot be fulfilled.
For this reason, land owners become losers, he added.
On the other hand, the bigger companies try to maintain their reputation and therefore duly fulfil their commitments but this makes it impossible for them to provide cheap apartments for their customers.
“We want the land owner to be a gainer alongside the developers and customers,” Ahmed said.
Mashid Rahman, managing director of Rangs Properties, said there are 250 backward linkage industries that are directly involved with real estate and so they will also be benefited when the sector rebounds in the future.
The real-estate sector is the largest employer of manpower and has huge investment. So, the coronavirus impact on the sector falls on the country’s overall economy, he said.
However, the managing director added that the sector has the chance to think of different solutions to the problem.
The webinar was conducted by Tanjim Ferdous, a national consultant of United Nations in Bangladesh.