



A moment during a visit by Robert Chatterton Dickson, British high commissioner to Bangladesh; Kedar Lele, chairman and managing director of Unilever Bangladesh, and Asif Saleh, executive director of Brac, to a Unilever-supported WASH Centre and other initiatives centring Covid-19 run by Brac at a slum in Kalyanpur in Dhaka yesterday.

Youth entrepreneurship can tackle jobless

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"And that if systematically supported with a more enabling ecosystem, will feed further into meeting the other development aspirations of Bangladesh such as LDC graduation and successful achievement of Agenda 2030," he added. Mukerjee said Youth Co: Lab would contribute not only in rebuilding economies but also to achieve a more sustainable future for all. Co-created in 2017 by the UNDP and Citi Foundation, Youth Co:Lab aims to establish a common agenda for countries in the Asia-Pacific region to empower and invest in youth. The hope is for them to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs through leadership, social innovation and entrepreneurship. Zunaid Ahmed Palak, state minister for ICT, also spoke at the event.

Sharmin Rinvi, new president of ERF

SM Rashidul Islam re-elected as general secretary



Sharmin Rinvi



SM Rashidul Islam

Bss, Dhaka

Sharmin Rinvi, news editor of private satellite channel Banglavision, was elected as the president of Economic Reporters Forum (ERF) while SM Rashidul Islam, economic reporter of Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha, was re-elected as the general secretary.

M Shafiqul Alam, bureau chief of AFP, was elected unopposed as the vice president of ERF, a platform of journalists who cover economic issues in the country.

The biennial general meeting and the election for 2020-21 term of the organisation was held yesterday at its office in the city's Paltan area.

Later, Saiful Alam, election conducting board chairman and president of National Press Club, announced the results, according to a press release.

Out of the 238 voters of ERF, some 216 voters exercised their voting rights. The newly elected president Rinvi got 124 votes while her lone competitor Ziaur Rahman, editor of Arthosuchak, received 90 votes.

Apart from vice president, General Secretary SM Rashidul Islam and Finance Secretary Md Rezaul Haque Kawshik were also elected unopposed.

The other elected office bearers are Kutub Uddin Muhammad Jasim as assistant general secretary and Sirajul Islam Qadir, Syed Shahnewaz Karim, Md Azizur Rahman (Ripon) and Rahim Sheikh as executive members.

US job growth slows; millions experiencing long bouts of unemployment

REUTERS, Washington

The US economy created the fewest jobs in five months in October and more Americans are working part time, underscoring the challenges the next president faces to keep the recovery from the pandemic on track as fiscal stimulus dries up and new COVID-19 cases explode across the country.

The Labor Department's closely watched employment report on Friday also showed 3.6 million people out of work for more than six months. Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden took the lead over President Donald Trump in the battleground states of Pennsylvania and Georgia for the first time on Friday, putting him on the verge of winning the White House.

"Initially, the recovery was breathtaking, but has lost much steam," said Sung Won Sohn, an economics professor at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. "With no fiscal stimulus and the resurgence of coronavirus, job gains will be tougher to achieve in the future."

Nonfarm payrolls increased by 638,000 jobs last month after rising by 672,000 in September. That was the smallest gain since the jobs recovery started in May and left employment 10.1 million below its peak in February.

Employment was held back by the departure of 147,000 temporary workers hired for the 2020 Census. A 271,000 increase in leisure and hospitality jobs accounted for about two-fifths of the payrolls gain last month.



Mohammad Rafiqul Islam

Standard Bank gets new DMD

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Standard Bank has recently welcomed its new deputy managing director (DMD) who will also serve as the chief operating officer.

Mohammad Rafiqul Islam was previously the DMD of BD Finance, according to a press release.

He started his career at Dhaka Bank as a probationary officer in 1997 and then went on to work at Standard Chartered and Citi Bank NA. Islam attained an MBA degree from the Institute of Business Administration at the University of Dhaka.

India's new customs rules to take toll on Bangladesh's exports

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"Therefore, such a requirement is a complete departure from the Safta RoO and OCP," said the commission.

The requirement to possess information of the exporters by the importers does not exist in any regional trade pacts, it said.

"Such a requirement will discourage exporters to avail the opportunity of preferential access and will constitute a very stringent trade-restrictive measure undermining the prime objective of the Safta."

There is a provision in the new Indian rule that obliges the CoO issuing authority to furnish information as required.

The tariff commission said the provision extremely undermines the state authorities of exporting countries by denying the claim for preferential treatment using judgement on the evidence provided by the issuing authority.

"Such provisions are a gross violation of the Safta RoO and OCP," it said, adding the provisions are inconsistent with Safta RoO and OCP and aim at discouraging import under the Safta.

It suggested the government take initiatives to request India to withdraw the rules.

The EPB said the new rules empower customs authorities to cancel preferential tariff benefit for exporters and importers and will put exporters in uncertainty.

As a result, there is a risk that export to India might fall, it said, adding that importers will feel discouraged to import as there is a risk of suspension of tariff benefit.

Bangladesh exported goods worth \$1.09 billion to India and imported \$5.77 billion worth of goods in the fiscal year 2019-20. The trade gap might increase because of the new rules, the EPB said, calling for initiating diplomatic move and engaging the secretariat of the Saarc.

A senior official of the commerce ministry said the ministry would sit with stakeholders, particularly businesses to know their views.

The new rules will apply to all countries, he said.

Asif Ibrahim, a director of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said the measures may be used to raise cases of dumping against exports from Bangladesh.

China October exports surge, imports rise amid global recovery

REUTERS, Beijing

China exports grew at the fastest pace in 19 months in October, while imports also rose, official data showed on Saturday, as the world's second largest economy continued to recover after being hit hard by the coronavirus crisis earlier this year.

Exports in October rose 11.4 per cent from a year earlier, beating analysts' expectations of a 9.3 per cent increase and quickening from a solid 9.9 per cent increase in September.

The surge in exports pushed the trade surplus for October up to \$58.44 billion, compared with the poll's forecast for a \$46 billion surplus and a \$37 billion surplus in September. China's trade surplus with the United States widened to \$31.37 billion in October from \$30.75 billion in September.

China's exports have stayed largely resilient amid the COVID-19 global pandemic, as strong demand for medical supplies and reduced manufacturing capacity elsewhere worked in China's favour.

"Exports growth quickened further and significantly exceeded expectations, indicating a relatively strong momentum," said Liu Xuezhong, an analyst at Bank of Communications in Shanghai.

China's exports could stay strong in the rest of 2020 as domestic firms resume production faster than global rivals and sell more COVID-19 related goods such as face masks, Liu said.

However, some analysts said exports could come under pressure in the coming months, as major European

economies, including France, Germany and the United Kingdom, went back into lockdown as a second wave of coronavirus cases gathered strength. Factory activity accelerated at the fastest pace in nearly a decade in October, a private survey showed, although the official survey pointed to some slowdown in the expansion. Export orders expanded.

Imports rose 4.7 per cent year-on-year in October, slower than September's 13.2 per cent growth, and underperforming expectations in a Reuters poll for a 9.5 per cent increase, but still marking a second straight month of growth.

Chinese airlines are shunning some deliveries of Airbus A320neo aircraft, citing fears of coronavirus infection for their staff in the latest tussle over efforts to keep delayed deliveries on track despite the pandemic, industry sources said.

Analysts said the solid trade performance could provide a boost to China's broader economic recovery, which has gained steam after suffering from a deep slump earlier this year. China's economy grew 4.9 per cent in the third-quarter from a year earlier, but growth could slow to just over 2 per cent this year - the weakest in over three decades but still much stronger than other major economies.

"China has a better recovery from the pandemic and has a comparative advantage, so it has gained a larger market," said Zhou Hao, an economist at Commerzbank in Singapore. "Of course, this advantage is also temporary and may last until the end of the year."

Wage rate ticking up

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Selim Raihan, a professor of economics at the Dhaka University, said the wage rate growth has declined from the pre-Covid period. On the other hand, there is inflationary pressure.

"As a result, the nominal wages are failing to catch up and our real wage is falling. This means, the real purchasing power of the people is falling."

Citing a survey of the South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (Sanem), where he is the executive director, Prof Raihan said the study of 502 manufacturing and service sector firms showed that there has not been much improvement in the wage.

The wage rate growth was the lowest in Sylhet Division at 5.7 per cent. It was 5.76 per cent in Dhaka, 5.87 per cent in Chattogram, 6.2 per cent in Rajshahi, 6.07 per cent in Khulna, 6.09 per cent in Barisal and 6.95 per cent in Rangpur, BBS data showed.

The wage growth slowed to a five-year low in the just-concluded fiscal year driven by the income loss in the manufacturing and services sectors in the fourth quarter of FY2019-20.

General wage grew 6.35 per cent in FY2019-20, which was 6.4 per cent a year earlier, according to the Wage Rate Index. This was the lowest wage growth since fiscal 2015-16.

Economists, businesses for second round of stimulus

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The detrimental effects were significant in case of the small-scale enterprises because they are financially not that strong, said Abul Kasem Khan, former president of the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI).

He also suggested easing the procedure for availing trade licences, citing that the renewal process was too complex and expensive. Asif Ibrahim, another former DCCI president, echoed Kasem. He said the

stimulus packages worked wonders for the recovery of garment exports.

Maliha Quadir, managing director of digital service provider Shohoz, said they had already regained 80 per cent of their pre-Covid-19 business volume and expected it to return to normalcy by December or coming January.

Masrur Reaz, chairman of the Policy Exchange of Bangladesh, and Faisal Bin Siraj, country director of The Asia Foundation, also spoke at the event.

Frozen food industry emerges as a bright spot amid pandemic gloom

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But the demand from offices, hotels and such began to increase last month as people are returning to work in an effort to maintain their lives amid the new reality.

So by the end of this year, Paragon will likely post 10 per cent sales growth, he added.

Kamruzzaman Kamal, director of marketing at Pran-RFL Group, said the company saw good growth in the overall frozen food market this year.

"The frozen food market is growing fast

and will continue as such," he added.

Samdani said the various market players will only be able to tap into this added demand once they develop capacity.

"We are yet to develop a proper distribution channel of cold chain facilities to transport frozen foods in the country," he added.

Meanwhile, Golden Harvest is investing to expand its production capacity.

"We are all hoping that the next year will be a good year," Samdani added.

Lenders witness surge in internet banking amid pandemic

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Mutual Trust Bank will open a maximum of 1-2 branches for a year as it has taken programmes to popularise digital banking, said Syed Mahbubur Rahman, the bank's managing director.

Branchless banking will help lenders significantly cut costs at a time when clients will receive faster and hazardless services.

"Internet banking is one of the most sophisticated tools for the expansion of digital financial services," he said, adding that Mutual Trust Bank witnessed a rapid increase in the number of internet banking users amid the pandemic.

Clients are now able to avail various financial services from the comfort of their homes by using the 'MTB Smart Banking' app.

The app helps clients collect their account statements, transfer funds from one bank to another, recharge their mobile balance and pay utility and credit card bills.

As much as 278,600 of Mutual Trust's clients now settle their transactions through the lender's internet banking platform.

Between July and August, Dhaka Bank carried out a special campaign to popularise internet banking so that people would be encouraged to engage in branchless banking, said Emranul Huq, managing director of Dhaka Bank.

During the campaign, the lender also introduced a new service that helps clients open banking accounts from home.

An account opening form is available on Dhaka Bank's website. Clients can get the required document by clicking on a link and after filling it out, the client can submit it online, Huq said.

Representatives of Dhaka Bank even provide the debit card and cheque book services required by respective clients so that they can avoid going to any branch, he said.

"The campaign helped attract 32,000 new customers to the bank. The clients are taking the facilities of internet banking service as well," Huq said.

Dhaka Bank Go -- a mobile app of the lender -- has already gained huge popularity among clients in recent times, he added.

Dutch-Bangla Bank's (DBBL) internet banking service, which was introduced back in 2004, managed to gain popularity amid the pandemic, according to the lender's Managing Director Abul Kashem Md Shirin.

"Two lakh clients now use the internet banking service to transfer their funds from DBBL to other banks," he said.

In addition, 29 lakh clients now use the lender's NexusPay app to settle intra bank transactions.

"The settlement of funds through internet banking gained momentum in recent months. Settling funds through digital means is now a regular habit for clients," Shirin said.

The number of Eastern Bank's clients that engage in internet banking increased by at least 25 per cent amid the ongoing pandemic, said Ziaul Karim, head of communications and external affairs at Eastern Bank.

At least 2 lakh clients now use EBL Skybanking -- the bank's mobile app -- to conduct their required financial transactions, he said.

Bangladesh Bank recently increased the limit on inter-bank fund transfers through internet banking with a view to meeting the customers' requirements.

Clients can now transact a maximum of Tk 5 lakh per day against the previous ceiling of Tk 2 lakh, according to a central bank notice issued on September 6.

Bangladesh Bank also specified the transaction ceiling on internet banking for business institutions for the first time.

Any business entity will be allowed to transfer Tk 10 lakh and conduct a maximum of 20 transactions per day under inter-bank internet banking, the central bank notice said.

The increased ceiling set by the central bank has pushed the internet banking transaction up further, the Bangladesh Bank official said.

Something fishy about Fine Foods' quarterly reports

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For a company's earnings to fall to such an extent is not normal, a merchant banker said on condition of anonymity.

Fine Foods recorded over Tk 2 crore in profits up till the third quarter but this fell to Tk 26 lakh by the end of the year, according to the quarterly reports.

"This is fishy," he said, adding that the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC) should investigate whether the fluctuation in earnings is actually genuine.

With paid-up capital of Tk 13.97 crore, Fine Foods witnessed a sudden increase in its share price last year even though it has provided 2 to 3 per cent dividends since 2015-16. In July, Fine Foods' stock was traded at Tk

40, which almost tripled to Tk 101 before last September.

Only 5.09 per cent of the company's shares are held by its directors. Its managing director holds a 5.05 per cent stake while the chairman holds 0.01 per cent of the shares, data from the Dhaka Stock Exchange shows.

An auditor of the company also provided a qualified opinion on its financial report for not following accounting standards.

For 2019-20, Fine Foods announced 1 per cent cash dividend. The company's main fish related project is located in Kishoreganj while another one is in Mymensingh.

Investors purchase stocks after reviewing the company's quarterly earnings and so these reports should be accurate, said Akbor Ali, a stock investor.

Since quarterly reports are not audited, some companies deliberately change their earnings.

"It seems this might be the case for Fine Foods. So the market regulator should investigate it," Ali added.

It is difficult to understand a company's motives by their quarterly reports alone as these reports are not audited, said a senior official of the BSEC.

"We will try to investigate Fine Foods' business reality for the year, he added.

Md Sohel Hossain, company secretary of Fine Foods, answered The Daily Star's call for a comment but declined to say anything on the matter at that moment.

However, Hossain did respond to any follow-up attempts to make contact by the time this report was filed.