

Tk 600cr project to speed up automation in insurance

IDRA chairman says at a roundtable

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

An ongoing big project worth over Tk 600 crore taken by the government will ensure faster upgradation and automation of the insurance sector, said M Mosharraf Hossain, chairman of the Insurance Development and Regulatory Authority (IDRA).

"The true purpose of insurance will be served only if we can make the service faster and smoother, which can be ensured through automation," he said.

He was speaking at a



roundtable on "Insurance: transformation around the world and case of Bangladesh" jointly organised by DublinP, Guardian Life Insurance and the IDRA through a digital platform on Saturday.

"We are prioritising

The project will also help improve monitoring, ensure transparency and accountability, build IT infrastructure and establish distance learning centres

claim settlements. As it is a contractual obligation, we are trying to mitigate the risks and negativities. Even a client with a small claim should be given high priority," said Hossain.

The project money will also be spent for the upgradation of the insurance regulator, better monitoring of the companies to ensure better service for clients, ensuring transparency and accountability, building IT infrastructure and establishing distance learning centres.

Considering the ongoing

pandemic, more product and process innovation are needed to improve customer experience and that can be achieved through digital transformation, said MM Monirul Alam, CEO of Guardian Life Insurance.

Moving towards innovation will help in serving the marginal segment of the society, which will not only bring in revenues for the industry but also boost penetration to a great extent, said Farzanah Chowdhury, CEO of Green Delta Insurance.

Insurance is basically a risk

transfer mechanism, said Md Apel Mahmud, CEO of Prime Islami Life Insurance.

"We want to give uncertain people certainty. We want to create more awareness. As a service industry, we have to fight and give the right kind of service to our customers at the right time," he said.

Things are rapidly changing in the life insurance sector after the pandemic, said Md Apel Mahmud, CEO of Prime Islami Life Insurance.

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Standard morphing into Shariah-based bank

Will remain shut for 4 days for conversion



STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Standard Bank will suspend operations for four days to make a transition from traditional core banking solutions to Islamic ones.

The lender will stop its banking transactions ranging from Bangladesh Automated Clearing House (BATCH) and Bangladesh Electronic Fund Transfer Network (BEFTN) to digital banking and Real-Time Gross Settlement (RTGS).

The services will be paused from 6pm on December 30 to 10pm on January 4, according to a central bank notice.

Banks settle inter-bank cheques through the BATCH while conducting inter-bank financial transactions, of both small and large scale, through the BEFTN and the RTGS respectively.

Earlier this year, the central bank gave its approval to the bank's intent to make the conversion to a shariah-based lender from a conventional one.

This takes the tally of Islamic lenders in Bangladesh to 11.

19 businesses to get president's industrial dev awards

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Nineteen businesses are set to receive the President's Industrial Development Award 2018 tomorrow from the industries ministry for their quality and contributions to developing this commercial sector of Bangladesh.

Industries Minister Nurul Majid Mahmud Humayun as chief guest is scheduled to hand over the crests and certificates among the firms through a programme at Pan Pacific Sonargaon Dhaka.

Among the winners, four are under a large industries category, four under medium, three small, three micro, three cottage and two hi-tech.

They scored the highest under a 100-point evaluation

PRESIDENT'S INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT AWARD 2018		
CATEGORY	NAME OF COMPANY	POSITION
Large industry	British American Tobacco Bangladesh	1st
	Incepta Pharmaceuticals	2nd
	Energypac Engineering	3rd
	Olympic Industries	3rd
Medium industry	Tafriid Cotton Mills	1st
	Sheltech Technology	2nd
	Echotex	2nd
	Envoy Fashions	3rd
Small industry	Concept Knitting	1st
	APS Design Works	2nd
	Summit Oil & Shipping Co	3rd
Micro industry	Trim Tex Bangladesh	1st
	Masco Overseas	2nd
	Crimson Rosella Seafood	3rd
Cottage industry	Classical Handmade Products	1st
	Intelligent Card	2nd
	Rupkatha Jubo O Mohila Unnayan Sangstha	3rd
High-tech industry	ServicEngine	1st
	Metatude Asia	2nd

system formulated by a special committee.

Points were awarded based on annual turnover (12 points), regular revenue deposit (15), domestic raw material use (10), export income and production of import alternatives (10) and labour training and welfare measures (8).

Another 5 points were earmarked for each of employment creation, social responsibility, worker safety, environmental protection, new innovation, product quality and efficient organisational management, quality control laboratory, and development and research.

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GLOBAL BUSINESS

US jobless benefit cut-off pushes millions to financial cliff-edge



Volunteers from Forgotten Harvest food bank sort and separate different goods before a mobile pantry distribution ahead of Christmas, amid the coronavirus disease pandemic in Warren, Michigan, US.

REUTERS

When the U.S. Congress passed a pandemic aid bill on Monday, Meghan Meyer, a single mom from Lincoln, Nebraska, thought she would get some respite from the daily struggle to feed and house her two kids during an unprecedented health and economic crisis.

But the next day President Donald Trump declared the long-awaited relief package "a disgrace" and said he would not sign it into law, decrying some of its spending measures while also demanding it include bigger stimulus checks for most Americans.

By the weekend, he had refused to budge.

That leaves Meyer, who has been on unpaid medical leave from her customer service job at retailer TJ Maxx since May because she

is at risk of severe COVID, facing a financial cliff edge. She is one of roughly 14 million Americans whose emergency unemployment benefits, introduced by Congress when the pandemic took hold in March, ended on Saturday.

"I don't know what I'm going to do," Meyer, 39, told Reuters in a phone interview. To make it through 2020, Meyer said she has had to lean on friends and charities to help put food on the table, pay her rent, cover the family dog's medical expenses, and buy Christmas presents for her kids.

"I have held out and held out," she said.

The new relief bill would extend through mid-March programs that support self-employed workers and those unemployed for more than half a year. It also gives an

additional \$300 a week through mid-March to all those receiving jobless benefits, some 20.3 million people. And it extends through January a moratorium on evictions due to expire on Dec. 31 and provides \$25 billion in emergency rental assistance.

Many economists agree that the aid is insufficient and more will be needed after Democratic President-elect Joe Biden takes office on Jan. 20. Biden has called the bill a "downpayment."

Negotiated by Trump's own Treasury secretary, Steven Mnuchin, and the Republican Party's congressional leaders, the bill has been flown to the president's Florida beach resort where he is staying for the holiday, awaiting his possible signature. In tweets on Saturday, Trump signaled he

was still unwilling to sign the bill, despite pleas from lawmakers to show goodwill at Christmas time.

"I simply want to get our great people \$2000, rather than the measly \$600," he tweeted Saturday, referring to the bill's stimulus checks, while he also continued to rail about the November election as he made baseless claims about election fraud.

Trump had not criticized the aid package's terms before it went before the House of Representatives and the Senate for a vote.

As pandemic lockdowns hammered the economy in March, Congress rushed through emergency unemployment benefits as part of the \$2 trillion CARES Act. At the time, lawmakers did not envisage the aid would be needed beyond Christmas and, until last weekend, they could not reach a deal to extend the benefits.

Meyer, like others, has watched her benefits dwindle over the past six months after a CARES program that gave her \$600 a week in supplemental jobless payments expired in July and she went on to exhaust her allowance of Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation.

That left her with extended benefits of just \$154 a week up until Saturday, which would increase to \$454 if Trump relents and signs the bill. If he doesn't, Meyer will get nothing.

"It's the difference between whether we have enough groceries or not, whether I can pay my car insurance, whether I can have gas to go to a food bank," she said.

Meyer said she voted for Trump in 2016 but was quickly turned off by his behavior in office, and described his opposition to the relief package as "mean-spirited."

U.S. job growth has slowed after an initial rebound when stay-at-home orders were lifted over the summer, and a new wave of coronavirus infections now threatens to dent the recovery.

China's industrial profits grow robustly, seventh straight rise

REUTERS, Beijing

Profits at China's industrial firms grew robustly in November for a seventh month of gains, supported by strong industrial production and sales, as manufacturers continue their recovery from the COVID-19 downturn.

Profits at Chinese industrial firms rose 15.5 per cent from a year earlier to 729.32 billion yuan (\$111.50 billion), easing from October's three-year high 28.2 per cent, data from National Bureau of Statistics showed on Sunday.

China's industrial sector has seen a strong rebound from the shock of the COVID-19 pandemic, aided by a stunning export comeback as factories ramp up to meet demand overseas. Factory-gate prices, a gauge for profitability, fell less than expected last month.

The pullback of growth in November was mainly due to a higher base a year earlier, said Zhu Hong, a senior statistician at the statistics bureau.

"Profits at some traditional industries have showed improvement. With the approach of heating season, demand for thermal coal has risen and prices

have increased, leading to an accelerated recovery in the coal sector," Zhu said in a statement.

Coal industry profits rose 9.1 per cent in November, the first increase this year.

"Industrial profits are expected to maintain double-digit growth over the next few months, driven by low base effects, domestic economic recovery, improvements in overseas demand and the rebound in commodity prices benefiting the upstream sector," said analyst Zhou Maohua at China Everbright Bank.

For the January-November period, industrial firms' profits rose 2.4 per cent from a year earlier, accelerating from the 0.7 per cent gain recorded for the first 10 months.

Earnings at China's state-owned industrial firms were down 4.9 per cent for January-November, narrowing from the 7.5 per cent decline in the first 10 months.

Private sector profits grew 1.8 per cent in the January-November period, up from 1.1 per cent in January-October.

The industrial profit data covers large firms with annual revenue of over 20 million yuan from their main operations.



A worker pours molten iron into a mould at a mill manufacturing marine engine components in Huaian, Jiangsu province, China.

REUTERS/FILE

PM sold out fish in Brexit trade deal, fishermen say

REUTERS, London

British fishermen said on Saturday that Prime Minister Boris Johnson had sold out fish stocks to the European Union with a Brexit trade deal that gives EU boats significant access to the United Kingdom's rich fishing waters.

Some British politicians also said the deal added up to a sell-out.

The United Kingdom will leave the EU's Common Fisheries Policy on Dec. 31, but under the trade deal agreed on Christmas Eve the current rules will remain largely in place during a 5-1/2-year transition period. After that period, there will be annual consultations to establish the level and conditions for EU access to British waters.

The National Federation

of Fishermen's Organisations said the fishing industry had been sacrificed by Johnson. For example, it said, the UK's share of Celtic Sea haddock will increase to 20 per cent from 10 per cent, leaving 80 per cent in the hands of EU fleets for a further five years.

"In the end-game, the prime minister made the call and caved in on fish, despite the rhetoric and assurances," the

group said. "There will of course be an extensive public relations exercise to portray the deal as a fabulous victory, but it will inevitably be seen by the fishing industry as a defeat."

The British government said the trade deal reflected the United Kingdom's new position as a sovereign independent coastal state and provided for a significant uplift in quota for UK fishers, equal to 25 per cent

of the value of the EU catch in UK waters.

"This is worth 146 million pounds for the UK fleet phased in over five years," the British government said. "It ends the dependence of the UK fleet on the unfair 'relative stability' mechanism enshrined in the EU's Common Fisheries Policy, and increases the share of the total catch taken in UK waters taken by UK vessels to circa two

thirds."

But Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, the leader of the Scottish National Party, said Johnson had "sold out Scottish fishing all over again."

"Promises they knew couldn't be delivered, duly broken," Sturgeon said.

"This is a massive sell-out," said Ian Blackford, the SNP party leader in the British Parliament. "Boris Johnson's UK

government have signed a deal that guarantees long-term access for EU boats."

Fishing contributed just 0.03 per cent of British economic output in 2019, but many Brexit supporters see it as a symbol of the regained sovereignty they say leaving the EU brings.

Combined with fish and shellfish processing, the sector makes up 0.1 per cent of the United Kingdom's GDP.