

## Brexit turmoil drives UK towards recession

AFP, London

Britain's economy unexpectedly shrank in the second quarter of the year on Brexit turmoil, official data showed yesterday, placing the country on the verge of recession and sending the pound tumbling to a 2.5-year low.

Gross domestic product (GDP) fell 0.2 percent in the April-June period, the first time the economy has contracted in almost seven years, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement, blaming a dramatic slump in the construction and manufacturing sectors.

The data, which was worse than market expectations for zero growth and also reflects global economic strains, sent the pound diving to \$1.2056 -- the lowest level since early 2017.

Another contraction in the current third quarter would put Britain in an official recession, ahead of the nation's expected withdrawal from the EU at the end of October.

"The latest data reveal an economy in decline and skirting with recession as headwinds from slower global economic growth are exacerbated by Brexit-related paralysis," said IHS Markit economist Chris Williamson.

The result contrasted with 0.5-percent expansion in the first quarter, when activity was boosted by companies stockpiling ahead of Brexit.

Output was buoyed in the first

three months of 2019 because Britain had initially been scheduled to leave the European Union at the end of March.

"GDP contracted in the second quarter for the first time since 2012 after robust growth in the first quarter," said Rob Kent Smith, ONS head of GDP.

"Manufacturing output fell back after a strong start to the year, with production brought forward ahead of the UK's original departure date from the EU.

"The construction sector also weakened after a buoyant beginning to the year, while the often-dominant service sector delivered virtually no growth at all," he added.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson replaced Theresa May in July after winning the governing Conservatives' leadership contest on a pledge to take Britain out of the bloc on October 31 with or without a divorce deal.

Brexititeer Johnson, a pivotal 'Leave' campaigner in the 2016 EU exit referendum, has repeatedly insisted that Britain can make an economic success of Brexit.

New finance minister Sajid Javid yesterday said that the global economy was slowing, but highlighted other recent positive data for the UK.

"This is a challenging period across the global economy, with growth slowing in many countries," said Javid.



Members of Santal community stage demonstrations on Gobindaganj-Dinajpur road yesterday demanding filing of a fresh charge sheet in the case filed over the killing of three Santals and torching of their homes in the upazila in 2016. The protest was organised on the occasion of the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples.

PHOTO: STAR

## Venezuelan troops in anti-smuggling ops at Colombia border

AFP, Ureña

Venezuela has deployed around 3,500 soldiers and police to its border with Colombia to combat fuel and drug smuggling, a top military official said.

Caracas broke off ties with Bogota in February over its support for opposition leader Juan Guaido in his power struggle with President Nicolas Maduro that has ground to an impasse.

Thursday's deployment in the western state of Tachira was part of an operation being carried out across the country, head of operational strategic command Admiral Remigio Ceballos told reporters from the Tienditas border bridge, which has been closed since February.

"We will continue to carry out operations to fight against drug and fuel traffickers," Ceballos said, adding that 20 tons of drugs had been seized throughout the country.

The current exercises began shortly after a massive blackout in Venezuela on July 22, which Maduro blamed on an "electromagnetic attack" by the United States.

## US slaps

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businesses, in violation of prohibitions barring his involvement with US persons or companies.

"His sentencing and the \$50 million forfeiture in this case are just the latest public examples of the Department of Justice's ongoing efforts to disrupt and dismantle Hezbollah and its support networks," said Assistant Attorney General Brian Benzckowski.

Tajideen, who operated a network of businesses in Lebanon and Africa, was extradited to the United States in March 2017 after his arrest overseas, according to the department.

Hezbollah has been a US designated terrorist group since 1997 and fights alongside the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in the country's civil war.

## Ensure our land

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indigenous population.

"The theme for the year 2019 is 'Indigenous Languages' and will focus on the current situation of indigenous languages around the world.

## Sales yet to pick

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guardians are yet to come," said Kazi Lutfor Rahman who has brought 20 bulls to Dupkhola playground cattle market.

Traders said several lakhs of sacrificial animals have been put on sale at 24 temporary cattle markets in the capital.

According to statistics of the Department of Livestock (DLS), there are more than 1.17 crore cattle, including cows, bulls, buffaloes, goats and sheep, which can be slaughtered during this Eid.

Last year, there were 1.15 crore cattle and about 1.05 crore of those were slaughtered.

While calculating the demand for sacrificial animals, the DLS usually adds five lakh to the number of cattle slaughtered the previous year. So, the demand this year is 1.10 crore.

## Airfare shoots up amid mad rush home

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Ticket price on Dhaka-Rajshahi route will cost around Tk 8,200 to Tk 8,800 to go to Rajshahi on August 11. During normal time, the price is Tk 2,600 to Tk 2,700.

Airfare on Dhaka-Sylhet and Dhaka-Cox's Bazar routes has also gone up by two to three times. But the fare on Dhaka-Chattogram route has not risen comparing to that of other domestic routes as travel by road has become smooth in recent times.

To meet the holidaymakers' Eid rush, all three private airlines have increased the number of flights on different routes.

Holidaymakers started leaving the capital on Wednesday.

Different airlines say holidaymakers now prefer travel by air to road to avoid hassle and save time.

"People's financial capacity has increased several times comparing to last four to five years. Many middle-class people now opt for travel by air to have a hassle free journey," Mesbahul Islam, head of marketing

and sales of Novo Air, told this correspondent.

He added that improvement of people's financial condition as well as reasonable airfare had considerably boosted domestic air traffic in the last four to five years.

Ashish Rai Choudhury, chief operating officer of Regent Airways, said more people were choosing to travel by air as airfare had become reasonable in recent years. Besides, saving time was also a big factor for many holidaymakers.

Ariful Islam, a banker living in the capital's Jigatola, said he would go to Jashore during Eid vacation by air as it might take huge time and it was tiring to travel by road due to tailbacks at ferry ghats.

Biman, US-Bangla and Novo Air operate on all seven domestic routes -- Cox's Bazar, Chattogram, Sylhet, Saidpur, Jashore, Rajshahi and Barisal. Regent Airways operates only on Cox's Bazar and Chattogram routes.

Biman operates 25 flights (to and from Dhaka) every day on seven

routes with two 74-seater Dash-8 and one 162-seater Boeing 737-800 aircraft, said sources at Biman.

US-Bangla operates over 36 flights on the routes with four 164-seater Boeing 737-800 aircraft and three 74-seater Dash-8 aircraft, said Shekh Saadi, head of media and communications.

Novo Air operates 48 flights on the routes with five ATR 72-500 having 68 seats, Mahfuzul Alam, senior manager, marketing, informed.

Regent Airways operates 30 flights (to and from Dhaka) on Dhaka-Cox's Bazar and Dhaka-Chattogram routes with Boeing aircraft with a capacity of accommodating 126-183 passengers, said an official.

Domestic air traffic has increased considerably in the last couple of years.

Kazi Wahidul Alam, an aviation expert, said the number of domestic air passengers increased by about 64.73 percent in the last five years.

In 2013, the number was 648,019, which increased to 106,7,537 in 2017, he added.

## Woman tied

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hours, said locals who witnessed the incident.

Hearing about it, Zahangir Alam, a ward member of Betgari Union Parishad, rescued the woman and sent her to Gangachara Upazila Health Complex.

Later, the husband filed the case against six people and police arrested the woman's brother-in-law and his brother on Thursday night, said Sushanta Kumar Sarkar, inspector (Investigation) of the police station.

Police were trying to arrest the other accused, the inspector said.

The woman was released from the hospital and is now in her home, said her husband.

## Oldest fossil

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the Jianchuan and Yongchuan clay quarries have branchless trunks and leafy crowns, similar to a modern day palm tree.

The study's authors believe the trees grew in coastal environments prone to flooding.

"It might also be that the Xinhang lycopsid forest was much like the mangroves along the coast, since they occur in a similar environment and play comparable ecologic roles," said Deming Wang, a professor in the School of Earth and Space Sciences at Peking University.

Scientists found the trees above and below a 4m thick sandstone bed, within the quarries.

Structures which were similar to pine cones were also discovered. "Jianchuan quarry has been mined for several years and there were always some excavators working at the section," said Wang. "The excavations in quarries benefit our finding and research. When the excavators stop or left, we come close to the high walls and look for exposed erect lycopsid trunks."

The study's authors acknowledged that it was difficult to mark and count all the trees without missing some details.

## Fugitive

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The body was sent to Gaibandha Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy. Later, police handed it over to family members in the evening.

Police filed two cases regarding the "gunfight".

## Anger builds in Kashmir

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concerned about the situation in Kashmir, the cause of two of three wars between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan.

Wang met Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi in Beijing and assured him that China would continue to support Pakistan to safeguard its legitimate rights and interests, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

Meanwhile, the Indian Foreign Ministry yesterday urged Pakistan to accept reality and stop meddling in India's internal affairs.

Addressing a press briefing, Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Raveesh Kumar claimed that India's decision on Jammu and Kashmir has made Pakistan "nervous".

"They feel that development activities and overall welfare of the people of Jammu and Kashmir will nullify their justification for cross-border terrorism. They will not be able to incite separatist activities. They will not be able to support terrorism. They will not be able to mislead people," news agency ANI quoted him as saying.

He also condemned Pakistan's move to downgrade diplomatic and trade ties, which included expelling the Indian envoy and halting cross-border railway services.

The United States yesterday called on India and Pakistan to maintain calm and restraint.

"It's something that we've called for calm and restraint by all parties. We want to maintain peace and stability, and we, of course, support direct dialogue between India and Pakistan on Kashmir and other issues of concern," the State Department Spokesperson Morgan Ortogus said.

There have been no major protests in Kashmir so far, barring sporadic instances of stone-throwing in the last few days, but several residents and a police official told Reuters resentment against the decision was building.

"There is a lull right now...the situation can go out of control," said the police official, who declined to be named as he was not authorised to speak to the media.

Policemen in riot gear were posted every few metres around the Jama Masjid mosque in Srinagar's old quarter. One officer said he faced regular attack from young people throwing stones.

India's National Security Adviser, Ajit Doval, met the governor of Jammu and Kashmir and "expressed satisfaction regarding the overall situation, which is, by and large, peaceful," the state government said in a statement.

Thousands of additional paramilitary troops flooded into Kashmir, already one of the world's most militarised regions, ahead of Monday's announcement of the change in constitutional status.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government also broke up the state into two federal territories, a step regional leaders decried as a further humiliation.

In a narrow alley behind the Srinagar mosque, 32-year-old Tariq Ahmed warned of a backlash against the Indian government once it relaxed the curbs on movement in the city.

"If they (authorities) have used force on unarmed Kashmiris, we will also react with force," said Ahmed, a university worker.

"We have no faith in the Indian government. They should let us protest. Otherwise, the only option is armed struggle."

Modi's decision will benefit Kashmiris and the government would move to create more economic opportunities, he said in a speech on Thursday.

Some in Kashmir did not agree. "They are thinking that they will be able to keep people suppressed," said Owais, 29, a government employee who gave only his first name. "This strategy will backfire."

## Hundreds pray in Malaysia for missing Franco-Irish teen

AFP, Seremban

Hundreds of Muslims yesterday held a special prayer session for a Franco-Irish teen who went missing from a Malaysian resort, as a massive search team scoured the jungle for a sixth day.

Nora Quoirin, a 15-year-old with learning difficulties, disappeared Sunday a day after checking into the resort with her London-based family.

They believe she was abducted, but police have classified it as a missing person case.

A search team of over 250 people, backed by helicopters, drones and sniffer dogs, is hunting through dense jungle next to the site in southwestern Malaysia but have not found any trace of the teenager.

Some 300 people, many wearing Muslim prayer caps, knelt in prayer during the session dedicated to the teen in the afternoon at a mosque in a nearby town.

"What we're doing today is to help our friends in the search effort," said Mohamad Taufek Awaludin, who led the session.

"We hope that the family... will be patient. This is a test from Allah."

Several police officers and firefighters were among the group. Over two-thirds of Malaysia's 32 million inhabitants are Muslim.

Officials have been playing a recording of the schoolgirl's mother, Meabh Quoirin, calling out "Nora, Nora darling, Mummy's here" through loudspeakers in the hope of drawing her out of the jungle, if she is still there.

The daughter of a Franco-Irish couple went missing from the 12-acre (five-hectare) Dusun Resort, about an hour outside Kuala Lumpur and in the foothills of a mountain range and next to a forest reserve.

Her family has said it would be extremely unusual for the reserved youngster to have wandered off on her own. While officially treating it as a missing person case, police say they have not ruled out any other possibilities.

They have questioned around 20 people and are examining fingerprints found on a window pane.