

STOCKS		COMMODITIES		ASIAN MARKETS				CURRENCIES			
DSEX	CSCX			MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI	USD	EUR	GBP	CNY
▼ 0.32%	▼ 0.37%	Gold	Oil	▲ 0.73%	▲ 1.78%	▲ 0.31%	▼ 0.53%	BUY TK	83.95	98.22	110.47
4,833.69	8,434.90	\$1,870.71	\$44.81	43,593.67	25,349.60	2,713.28	3,342.20	SELL TK	84.95	102.02	114.27
		(per ounce)	(per barrel)								12.55
											13.19

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and MD FAZLUR RAHMAN

Investment has not picked up in Bangladesh despite the reopening of the economy five months back largely due to the deep uncertainty caused by the coronavirus pandemic which continues to creep along.

Several entrepreneurs and economists now say the investment would not return to the pre-pandemic level until the crisis comes under control.

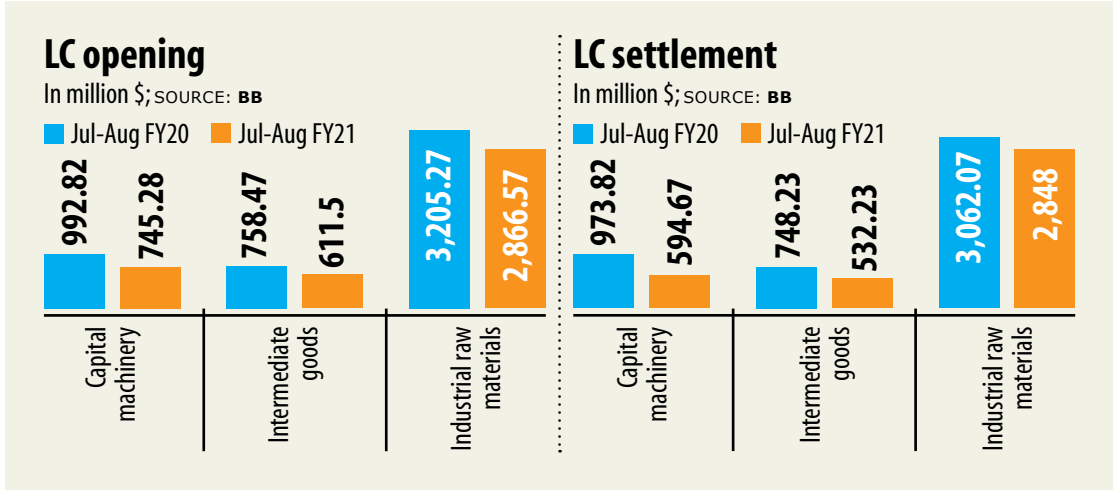
The opening of letters of credit for importing capital machinery, one of the major indicators to gauge investment sentiment in Bangladesh, plunged 24.93 per cent year-on-year in the July to August period of the current fiscal year. Correspondingly, the LC settlements plunged 38.93 per cent.

The opening and settlements of LCs for intermediate goods dipped 19.38 per cent ad 28.87 per cent respectively, showed data from Bangladesh Bank.

The opening of LCs for raw material import dropped 10.57 per cent while its settlements declined 6.99 per cent.

Disbursement of industrial term loans, another indicator, stood at Tk 28,063 crore in the April to June quarter, down 34.99 per cent from Tk 43,154 crore year-on-year.

Although the latest data is not available, the LC openings and settlements may have fallen in the entire first quarter of the current



fiscal year as shown in the trend of imports, which declined 11.47 per cent year-on-year.

Asif Ibrahim, vice-chairman of the Newage Group of Industries, one of the leading garment exporters, said the drop in capital machinery import and disbursement of term loans were mainly due to the lack of confidence of investors due to the global coronavirus pandemic.

“Although Bangladesh performed remarkably compared to other countries in terms of GDP growth, investors will open up once the pandemic is on a downward spiral.”

He anticipated that by the end of spring 2021, these figures would again pick up gradually.

Humayun Rashid, managing director of Energypac Power Generation, said there had been a

liquidity crunch in the banking sector since January. Besides, the bank interest rate had been high.

“So, investors did not go for expansion in a bigger way. The pandemic dealt another blow, slowing down many projects.”

Some projects of Energypac had also slowed after the crisis hit Bangladesh in March. Now, the implementation of the projects has started resuming, he said.

The company is importing some capital machinery that would help product automation. Some of the electrical products being manufactured would be exported to regional markets such as India, Pakistan and Nepal, said Rashid, also the president of the International Business Forum of Bangladesh.

Zaid Bakht, chairman of state-run Agrani Bank, blamed the 9 per cent lending rate ceiling, which has been in place since April this year, for the fall in industrial term loans.

“Private commercial banks are very conservative in lending at 9 per cent. They are giving loans on a priority basis. They don’t want to take any risks.”

The banks with excess liquidity are investing in the treasury bills, said the former research director

of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies.

As a result, many entrepreneurs who usually do banking with private banks are coming to state-run banks for new loans. Agrani Bank’s credit growth is 17 per cent even during the pandemic, he said.

“The machinery import has gone up in recent months,” said Abdul Halim Chowdhury, managing director of Pubali Bank, a private commercial bank.

“This would be reflected in the quarterly report in December,” he said, adding that some clients have opened LCs with Pubali Bank.

Chowdhury also said banks were cautious in lending so that none could take out funds through forgery.

He said industries have received funds under the stimulus package introduced by the government. So, they did not apply for new loans.

“Banks also worried about the threat of the second wave of coronavirus. We are not sure how deep the effects would be. So, many banks have adopted the wait-and-see approach.”

Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist of the World Bank’s

Dhaka office, said the significant decline in LC settlements for import of capital goods, disbursement of long-term loans and LC openings for the import of capital goods indicate continued weakness in investment.

He said investment recovery was stunted by lingering uncertainty on the trajectory of the domestic and international economy. These uncertainties are rooted in the unpredictability of the trajectory of the pandemic and how long it would take to be tamed once and for all.

“Investment is all about confidence which has remained fragile in Bangladesh for quite a while now.”

According to Hussain, returns on investment are hard to assess in an environment where both sales and costs are hard to project as economies all over the world struggle to crawl back from the pandemic-induced recession.

Simply lowering the costs of financing, as appear to be happening recently due to an abundance of liquidity in the banking system, does not do much to bolster the animal spirits in such an environment.

“Excess liquidity itself is in part a consequence of the lack of demand for investments.”

There are structural impediments to investment that hinder initiatives to start and expand production activities in sectors where new opportunities are opening up.

Reforms to ease these impediments such as establishing one-stop shops, economic zones and increasing the transparency and predictability of business regulations have stumbled.

“These are areas where the policy implementors can make a difference if only they could tear apart bureaucratic red tapes and speed up decision-making,” Hussain said.

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AHSAN HABIB

GPH Ispat, one of the top steel manufacturers in Bangladesh, has made a turnaround in sales and profits in the first quarter of the ongoing fiscal year.

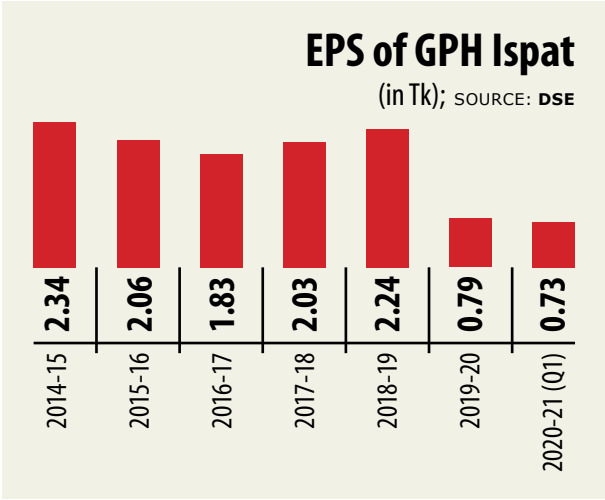
The Chattogram-based company’s sales rose 66.77 per cent year-on-year to Tk 439 crore in the July-September period.

Profits jumped 67.5 per cent to Tk 27.47 crore at the same time, according to its quarterly report.

“Sales have grown mainly due to an increased share of the domestic market, where we provide higher quality products for the same price as others,” said Kamrul Islam, executive director for finance and business development at GPH Group.

“Our plan for the last two years was to sell more of the products from the new plant. Now, we are getting the result,” he added.

The company’s annual billet production capacity rose from 2.1 lakh tonnes in 2018 to more than 10 lakh tonnes this year.



Rod production capacity grew from 1.5 lakh tonnes to 7.60 lakh tonnes over the same period thanks to the new facility.

“As our new plant’s production has started, our plan has been working. So, you will see higher sales in the coming years,” Islam said.

Product deliveries disrupted in the fourth quarter (April-June) of the last fiscal year when a nationwide lockdown was declared by the government in a bid to stop the spread of the Covid-19.

The deliveries were executed in the first quarter of the current fiscal, boosting sales, the executive director said.

GPH Ispat also produces low and medium carbon and alloy billets, which are raw materials of steel.

Last month, the company exported 25,000 tonnes of mild-steel (MS) billet worth \$10.17 million to China.

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MOHAMMAD SUMAN, Chattogram

The price of edible oil has risen in local markets amid stockpiling by large economies owing to the potential threat of a second wave of the coronavirus and a rising cost of all products worldwide, according to market prices.

Besides, edible oil prices have fluctuated over the past few months due to decreased production in exporting countries, weakening of the global supply chain and stockpiling amid the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

The price of soybean oil at Khatunganj, a wholesale market in Chattogram, has increased by Tk 500 per maund (37.3 kilograms) to about Tk 3,650.

Similarly, palm oil now costs around Tk 3,250 to Tk 3,270 per maund, an increase of about Tk 450.

“The price of these products is higher as the supply of oil is less as per the market demand,” said Abdur Razzak, a wholesale trader in Khatunganj market.



The price of edible oil has seen a Tk 450 to Tk 500 rise per maund in a month amid a potential threat of a second wave of the coronavirus. The photo was taken from Chattogram’s Khatunganj wholesale market.

RAJIB RATHAN

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Habiganj Agro, a sister concern of Pran-RFL Group, has taken an initiative to strengthen its foothold in the Tk 15,000 crore market for aquatic and livestock feed.

Pran-RFL Group, one of the biggest business houses of the country, recently signed a deal with listed National Feed Mill to produce fish, cattle and poultry feed at its factory.

Under the agreement, Habiganj Agro will produce about 24,000 tonnes of feed annually using the mill, the latter said in a post on the Dhaka Stock Exchange website yesterday.

“The tenure of the manufacturing agreement is of two years,” it added.

Stocks of the aquatic and livestock feed producer dropped yesterday as the announcement did not bring cheer to investors.

Pran said it entered into an agreement with the mill to cater to the burgeoning domestic market for feed.

“We have been doing test marketing of feed for the last two years based on agreements with several other firms as we do not have our own facility yet. We want to expand,” said Chowdhury Kamruzzaman, director of marketing of the conglomerate.

“It is a big market,” he added, citing that the market’s annual turnover is around Tk 15,000 crore thanks to Bangladesh’s gigantic poultry industry, expanding aquaculture, dairy and cattle farming.

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REJAUL KARIM BYRON and JAGARAN CHAKMA

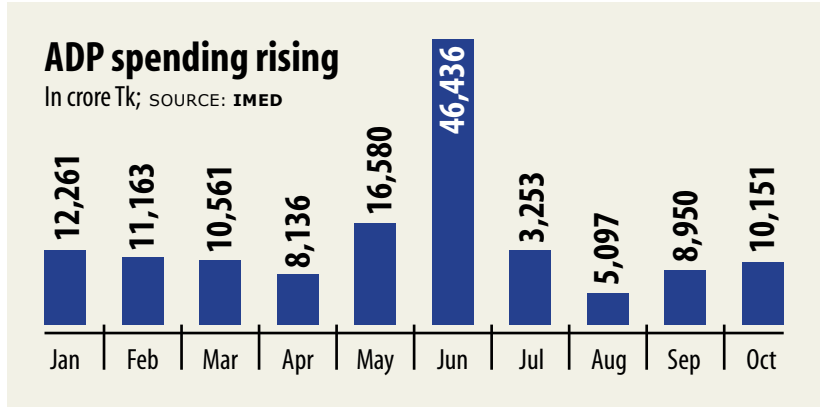
Development spending rose to a four-month high of Tk 10,151 crore in October as the government accelerated expenditure to revive the economy reeling under the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic.

The outlay under the annual development programme, is, however, down 23.72 per cent from the Tk 13,308 crore spent in the same month last year, data from the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division showed yesterday.

From July to October, the first four months of the fiscal year, the ADP spending stood at Tk 27,453 crore, down 10.43 per cent year-on-year.

The uptick in the ADP implementation may be attributed to the softening of the government stance on the fund going to low-priority projects.

In July, the government had restricted the disbursement of funds for the low-priority projects to free up funds for the productive sectors amid widening revenue shortfall caused by the devastating impacts of the



pandemic.

Recently, the finance ministry has softened its stance, giving in to pressures from line ministries and also for improvements in revenue collection.

Now, 25 per cent of the allocation from the ADP would remain halted for the ministries because of the lingering pandemic, down from 30 per cent previously.

Ministries and divisions could utilise Tk 7,050 crore of the

government fund in October. It was Tk 9,648 crore in the same period last fiscal year.

On the other hand, they were able to spend Tk 2,827 crore from the foreign aid portion this year. It was Tk 3,410 crore in the same period last fiscal year.

The overall ADP implementation during the July to October period fell to 12.79 per cent, the lowest in the past five fiscal years.

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REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Apex Tannery Limited (ATL) sank to losses in the first quarter of the fiscal year due to a drop in sales of leather goods amid the Covid-19.

Its earnings per share (EPS) stood at Tk 2.25 in the negative in the July-September quarter while it was Tk 0.35 in the positive during the same period the previous year, according to the company’s disclosure posted on the Dhaka Stock Exchange website yesterday.

The tannery’s net asset value per share was Tk 61.73 as of September 30, 2020, while it was Tk 63.89 as of June 30 in 2019.

The company also informed that

its EPS and consequently, gross profit, operating profit, profit before income tax and profit after tax decreased due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic compared to a year earlier.

The net operating cash flow per share decreased as collections from



turnover and bills receivables fell by 30 per cent at the same time.

Meanwhile, payment for the purchase of leather, chemicals, spare parts, creditors and other expenses decreased by 18 per cent.

And so, the company’s overall net operating cash flow per share was impacted negatively, Apex Tannery said in its disclosure.

Syed Nasim Manzur, managing director of Apex Footwear, a sister concern of ATL, said the global

demand for finished and crust leather has crashed due to a collapse in demand for non-essential goods, especially in the EU, Japan and the US.

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Online system to be launched today to weed out fake audited accounts

NBR, ICAB team up for the initiative

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

If you enquire at the apex body of the chartered accountants about the companies and firms its members audit and sign annually, you will get to know the number is about 16,000.

But if you check with the National Board of Revenue (NBR), you will come to know that roughly 35,000 firms furnish their income tax and audited statements yearly as part of tax compliance.

The gap clearly shows that there is something very fishy: a group of people have been involved in preparing fake audited financial statements and are submitting them to evade paying actual amount of tax.

"We are going to stop this. This affects our good will," said Mohammed Forkan Uddin, vice-president of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Bangladesh (ICAB).

He said the ICAB has developed a Document Verification System (DVS) to stop the preparation of fake and multiple financial statements by unruly firms.

The ICAB and the NBR are expected to sign an understanding agreement today to launch the DVS in order to prevent the practice of submission of fake audited financial statements.

The ICAB said financial documents endorsed by third person to mislead the regulating authorities and stakeholders will not be possible after the launch of the DVS, which will allow taxmen to check authenticity of financial statement submitted by



firms along with their income tax returns.

"This will help the government get an increased amount of revenue," said Uddin, adding that the online audited accounts verification systems will also enable the government to know the actual number of companies operational in the country.

Bangladesh has more than 180,000 officially registered companies.

Uddin, also the convener of the ICAB Taskforce on DVS, said the online-based audited accounts verification system will help the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms get more revenue.

Under the online system, ICAB's practicing members will give five key financial data such as profit, turnover, asset and liability of a company, generate an 18-digit document verification code (DVC),

write the DVC in the audited financial statements and sign the report.

The financial documents submitted to the revenue authority, banks and non-bank financial institutions could be verified through the search option on the DVS Portal by sharing a few information such as the name of person, organisation, the purpose of verification, unique code of documents, mobile number and email address, said the ICAB.

Uddin said partners of chartered accounting firms will have to start generating the DVC and sign the audited financial statements from December 1.

"We want to sign an agreement with the Bangladesh Bank too in order to ensure that actual audited financial statements are submitted by firms to apply for loans," he said.

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Investment to lead to large-scale job creation, curing fallouts

Say speakers at BIIS webinar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Experts yesterday emphasised large-scale job creation with increased investment in the public and private sectors to overcome the Covid-19 fallouts on the economy.

They also stressed diversifying export markets while extending share in the existing destinations.

The suggestions came at a webinar titled "Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Bangladesh: Options for Building Resilience" organised by the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIIS).

Addressing as chief guest, Mashiur Rahman, economic affairs adviser to the prime minister, emphasised diversifying to increase export growth, enhancing domestic demand and production growth and expanding technical education.

Domestic investment needs to be enhanced for domestic production growth, he said.

He, however, believes that private sector investment would not see an increase anytime soon.

Terming the increase in remittance "good", he stressed on the need for expending it conservatively since the pandemic was not ending soon and uncertainties remained on sending more people to the global market.

Prof Mostafizur Rahman, a distinguished fellow of the Centre of Policy Dialogue (CPD), said the economy's capacity to absorb shocks was evident when the Covid-19 set in.

How the government reacted and

RECOMMENDATIONS		
➤ Social safety net strategy for those who are not below poverty line but their income has been highly compromised	➤ Diversifying export goods as well as market destinations	➤ Regaining confidence of foreign investors
➤ Employment creation should be kept at the centre of recovery	➤ Enhancing negotiation capacity in the context of foreign relation	➤ Digitisation need to be given priority to make the economy to be competitive
➤ Proactive foreign trade policy is needed to promote bilateral free trade agreements	➤ Covid vaccines need to be provided to the developing countries for free at the earliest	➤ Re-skilling migrant workers for domestic and global market
➤ Government and NGO should help small and medium entrepreneurs to get bank loans	➤ Social safety net strategy should involve employment generation, skill formation and training plans	

tried to address the situation was also visible, he said.

Poverty reduction and employment creation elasticities of Bangladesh's growth had already been slowed down, he said, adding that large-scale employment creation can only be sustained through diversification, if more investments can be made.

Both public investment and stimulation of private sector investment are very important, said Prof Rahman.

In this time of crisis, economic policies have to be pursued which create employment through investment. With regard to resilience, the important factor was how government investment did stimulate and incentivise private sector investment, he said.

He mentioned that microfinance

played a very important role, particularly in stimulating SMEs which was very much an employment-intensive sector.

Prof Rahman said microfinance was also a very good way of offloading the delivery burden that the government has on non-state actors.

"We will have to diversify not only our exports but also our markets," said the economist.

"The 21st century will be Asian century and there will be demand. India imports \$480 billion and China imports \$2,200 billion and if we take even these two countries, we have a market of \$3,000 billion."

Currently the government is taking several initiatives with India and China as special economic zones are being set up, he said.

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DSEX falls despite a bright day for mutual funds

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

In a rare instance, all 37 listed mutual funds rose at the Dhaka Stock Exchange yesterday although the benchmark index of the premier bourse fell.

Phoenix Finance First Mutual Fund topped the gainers' list with a 10 per cent rise. The unit price of all mutual funds rose more than 5 per cent on the day.

SEML Lecture Mutual Fund, SEMI IBBL Shariah Fund, First Prime Finance Mutual Fund, CAPM BDBL Mutual Fund, CAPM IBBL Mutual Fund, Asian Tiger Sandhani Life Growth Fund, and NLI First Mutual Fund also made it to the gainers' list.

The DSEX dropped 15.94 points, or 0.32 per cent to end the day at 4,883.69.

Most of the mutual funds traded at a discount, so investors go after the sector, said a merchant banker.

When a mutual fund unit is sold at a price lower than its net asset value, then it is considered a discount.

"Our mutual fund sector lagged behind due to their low performance," said the merchant banker.

The present commission of the stock market regulator has announced that it will bring discipline to the sector, he said.

"This announcement fuelled the stock investors' confidence in the sector."

Recently, the chairman of the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission asked investors to put money in the mutual funds.

"If the mutual fund sector runs properly, the sector will have a huge potential. So, we are investing in the sector," said Abdullah Koraishi, a stock investor.

"We hope the sector will provide good dividends in the coming years," he added.

Turnover, one of the important

indicators of the stock market, hit Tk 975 crore yesterday, up from Tk 925 crore on the previous trading day.

Beximco Pharmaceuticals was the most traded stock with shares worth Tk 112 crore changing hands, followed by Beximco Ltd, Trust Bank First Mutual Fund, Eastern Insurance and Brac Bank.

Of the total 353 companies traded, 79 advanced, 186 declined and 88 remained unchanged.

KEY POINTS

➤ BSEC approves CandleStone Rupali Bank Growth Fund

➤ Target of fund size is Tk 100cr

➤ Sponsors will invest Tk 15cr

➤ CandleStone Investments Partner is the asset manager

Bangladesh Shipping Corporation shed the most with a 9.93 per cent fall followed by Global Insurance, Bangladesh National Insurance, Agrani Insurance and Shyampur Sugar.

Yesterday, the stock market watchdog approved the draft prospectus of Candlestone Rupali Bank Growth Fund.

The fund size is Tk 100 crore and sponsors will invest Tk 15 crore. The face value of the fund is Tk 10.

Candlestone Investments Partners is the asset manager of the fund and the Investment Corporation of Bangladesh and Brac Bank will be its trustee and custodian respectively.

Daraz's Singles' Day bags record 1 lakh orders in first one hour

MAHMUDUL HASAN

Daraz registered a surge in sales during its Singles' Day shopping juggernaut as it received one lakh online orders worth Tk 25 crore in the first hour of the campaign.

The figures went past the revenues of last year's shopping extravaganza of the e-commerce platform when it sold Tk 8.5 crore worth of products within the first 45 minutes of the 24-hour shopping event.

"In the first 15 minutes of the campaign, the sales exceeded last year's figures in the first 45 minutes," a senior executive of the platform told The Daily Star.

"We witnessed 3.5 times growth compared to last year," he added.

As a part of the company's policy, Daraz does not disclose its full sales figures. More than 1 crore products from 33,000 sellers were up for customers.

The top-selling products during the campaign were Xiaomi Poco X3 NFC, Realme C12, a Sharp-branded auto washing machine, a Gree-branded air conditioner, a television model of Samsung and Walton laptop.

As the pandemic has cut peoples' income drastically, the discounted products are attracting cautious customers worldwide.

Daraz's parent company Alibaba Group said orders on its e-commerce platforms during the Singles' Day shopping extravaganza had exceeded \$56 billion by Wednesday morning, reports Reuters.

The world's biggest sales event spans four main days this year and has so far brought sellers 16



- KEY POINTS
- Daraz sold Tk 25cr products in the first hour of this year's Singles' Day
 - Sales figure was Tk 8.5cr in the first 45 minutes of last year
 - Expects to deliver over half a million products during the event
 - The company has grown 100pc annually in the last four years
 - It now makes 50,000 orders to 65 districts, up from 25,000 last year
 - Alibaba acquired Daraz in 2018 and took part in the event that year

times as many orders by value than Amazon.com Inc's two-day global Prime Day last month.

The event, launched in 2009, is usually a splashy, single-day affair with live performances and clocked a gross merchandise value of \$38.4 billion last year.

Following Alibaba's vibe, this year's 11.11 single-day campaign by Daraz was inaugurated by Cricket All-rounder Shakib Al Hasan on November 10 for the third time

since 2018 when the Chinese giant bought Daraz.

Daraz was planning to make more than half a million deliveries, making it the biggest online single-day shopping festival in Bangladesh as sales rose 10 to 12 times that of normal day deliveries.

The company now receives 50,000 orders per day. It posted a fourfold growth in sales on November 11 in 2019 and hopes to repeat the similar trend this year as well.

"Bangladesh has more than 10 crore internet users but we have so far explored only just 10 per cent of the market. So, there is an enormous opportunity for the e-commerce platform to grow and expand," said Syed Mostahidul Hoq, managing director of Daraz Bangladesh, recently.

The company has grown 100 per cent annually in the last four years in terms of customer and order numbers.

Apple launches MacBook laptops powered by its own computing chips

REUTERS, San Francisco

Apple Inc on Tuesday introduced a MacBook Air notebook and other machines with its first central processor designed in-house for Macs, a move that will tie its computers and iPhones closer together technologically.

The new chip, called the M1, marks a shift away from Intel Corp technology that has driven the electronic brains of Mac computers for nearly 15 years.

It is a boon for Apple computers, which are overshadowed by the company's iPhone but still rack up tens of billions of dollars in sales per year. Apple hopes developers now will create families of apps that work on both its computers and phones.

The MacBook Air will start at \$999, the same as its predecessor, and have up to twice the battery life, Apple said. The M1 will also power the MacBook Pro notebook, which starts at \$1,299, and its \$699 Mac Mini computer, which comes without a monitor.

The new products will be available from next week, executives said. Shares of Apple were up about 0.2 per cent as the event ended.

Patrick Moorhead, founder of Moor Insights & Strategy, estimated Apple will save between \$150 and \$200 per chip in costs by using its own central processors. "We didn't see Apple add any expensive features," he said. "They're going with a much higher margin."

In June, Apple said it would begin outfitting

Macs with its own chips, building on its decade-long history of designing processors for its iPhones, iPads and Apple Watches.

Apple executives said on Tuesday that the M1 was intended to be efficient as well as fast, to improve battery life, and that Apple's newest version of its operating system was tuned to the processor.

"This announcement underscores how important high-performance, custom processor designs will be to leading the next generation of client computing," said Jon Carvill, vice president of Nuvia, a data center chip firm founded by former Apple executives. "We think a similar trend is playing out in the future of the data center as well."

China's ByteDance challenges Trump's TikTok divestiture order

REUTERS, New York/Washington

ByteDance, the Chinese parent company of video-sharing app TikTok, filed a petition late on Tuesday with a US Appeals Court challenging a Trump administration order set to take effect on Thursday requiring it to divest TikTok.

President Donald Trump in an Aug. 14 order directed ByteDance to divest the app within 90 days, which falls on Thursday. The Trump administration contends TikTok poses national security concerns as the personal data of US users could be obtained by China's government. TikTok, which has over 100 million US users, denies the allegations.

In the petition filed with the US Court

of Appeals for the District of Columbia, ByteDance said it is seeking a court review of the divestment order, claiming that the order and a finding by a US agency that TikTok represented a security threat were unlawful and violated rights under the US Constitution.

ByteDance, which has been in talks for a deal with Walmart Inc WMT.N and Oracle Corp to shift TikTok's US assets into a new entity, also said it is requesting a 30-day extension on the Aug. 14 divestment order, so that it can finalize terms of the deal.

"Facing continual new requests and no clarity on whether our proposed solutions would be accepted, we requested the 30-day extension that is expressly permitted in the August 14 order," TikTok said in a statement.