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BANGLADESH ECONOMY 2020

RISING from the rubble

Table with GDP Growth in Asia 2020 for various countries including Bangladesh, India, Kuwait, Myanmar, Thailand, Saudi Arabia, China, Singapore, Japan, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan.

REJAUUL KARIM BYRON and MD FAZLUR RAHMAN

The year 2020 began with a cloud of uncertainty hanging over the horizon. The novel coronavirus was spreading in Europe, the destination of over 60 percent exports from Bangladesh, after wreaking havoc in China, its largest trading partner.

Bangladesh felt the heat of a looming global crisis though the virus had not yet made its way into the country.

The bad news came a couple of months later. On March 8, the authorities confirmed the maiden case of Covid infection in the country. A week later, the first death from the virus was reported.

Soon, the country's economy, one of the

shining stars in Asia, came almost to a halt as the government imposed countrywide lockdown to contain the spread of the virus.

The main index of the stock market dropped by 15 percent in less than 10 days in the second half of March.

During the nationwide lockdown, millions lost jobs, poverty rate doubled and many businesses folded up. Income of the vast majority of the population shrank.

Exports hit rock bottom as the importing countries themselves were finding it difficult to keep their economies afloat. The country was staring at an unprecedented three-pronged crisis: health, economic and food.

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A DEHUMANISING YEAR

For a more inclusive world in 2021

MAHFUZ ANAM

Along with the world Bangladesh also struggled to make sense of the all-pervasive disruptions caused by Covid-19. Again, as the rest of the world, we in Bangladesh struggled to rebuild our society, our economy, our education system, our basic services, in fact every aspect of our lives as far as possible. What we failed to do, as the rest of the world, was to hold on to our human values as we heard thousands dying and saw our near and dear ones perish and we could not come to their aid or even express sympathy in person. It was psychologically debilitating. The very fabric of society appeared to tear away, reduced to family-based islands of desperate and isolated microcosms of society surviving, interacting and somehow living out our lives courtesy the internet, the lifeblood of the virtual world.

As the world economy stood shattered and thousands died in countries that we thought had a robust health system, we did not know what was in store for us. Given the density of our population, level of health consciousness, living conditions and nutritional level and development challenges, we feared the worst. We are usually at the receiving end of nature's wrath in the forms of floods, cyclones, etc., but this time around nature appears to have worked in unknown ways to save us from the severest impact of the current pandemic.

It remains a mystery as to what worked for us. Was it our early immunisation programme, our peasants' and farmers' natural immunity, Vitamin D from exposure to the sun, our lifelong struggle with pollution of all sorts, our natural resilience? We are quite unaware of why Covid-19 did not wreak havoc

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DHAKA-SILIGURI Direct bus service on the cards

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The New Year brings good news for Bangladeshi travellers.

People can go to Siliguri in India directly by bus as the neighbouring countries have agreed to open a new Dhaka-Siliguri-Dhaka bus route, officials said.

Officials concerned are now working on the protocol and the agreement to be signed by the countries, and hope to start bus services soon after land connectivity between Bangladesh and India resumes.

Once the operation starts, it will be the sixth direct bus route between the countries.

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COVID FOOD AID FOR 50 LAKH PEOPLE

Seven lakh OMS cards found fake

Food minister tells JS standing committee

RASHIDUL HASAN

Food Minister Sadhan Chandra Majumder has admitted that seven lakh fake OMS cards were distributed during the Covid-19 lockdown in the country last year.

The minister said this during a meeting of the parliamentary standing committee on the food ministry on September 24, according to minutes of the meeting.

This newspaper has obtained a copy of the meeting minutes. The minutes were approved by the parliamentary body at its following meeting on Wednesday.

"A total of 50 lakh OMS [open market sale] cards were distributed during the coronavirus situation. Of them, seven lakh have been found to be fake," Sadhan told the meeting.

The minister said an initiative was taken to make smart OMS cards through the government's Information and Communication Technology department to curb various irregularities and corruption.

Talking to reporters on Wednesday, he said they have collected relevant

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Schools won't open now: PM

Textbook distribution starts

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said educational institutions will not reopen before the pandemic is contained.

Inaugurating the distribution of free textbooks for all school students, she also asked everyone to strictly adhere to the health guidelines when they hand out the textbooks.

Instead of celebrating the Textbook Festival on January 1 like the previous years, the government decided to distribute the books among students in phases so that the schools do not get crowded.

National Curriculum and Textbook Board Chairman Professor Narayan Chandra Saha told The Daily Star that the distribution of textbooks would start today.

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Fireworks explode over the Sydney Opera House and Sydney Harbour Bridge during downsized New Year's Eve celebrations due to an outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Sydney, Australia, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

MANAGING DHAKA'S 26 CANALS, BOX CULVERTS

Charge goes to two city corporations

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The capital's city corporations yesterday formally took over the management and maintenance responsibilities of 26 canals and 10 kilometres of box culverts from Dhaka Wasa, raising hope that the city's long-standing waterlogging problem would be solved.

Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) had been responsible for the 26 canals (84.5km) and the 10 box culverts (around 10km) since 1988. It also looks after 385km of storm water drainage.

The DNCC and DSCC has been managing 2,200km of pipe and surface drains.

Chief Executive Officer ABM Amin Ullah

Nuri of Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC), his Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) counterpart Md Selim Reza, and Managing Director of Dhaka Wasa Taqsem A Khan signed an MoU on behalf of their organisations at a city hotel yesterday.

LGRD Minister Md Tazul Islam at the ceremony said, "From today the two city corporations will have the responsibilities of solving the waterlogging problem of Dhaka city and they will have to do the work taking help from other agencies and residents of Dhaka city."

He said they had held a meeting on the issue last month and formed a technical committee. With the committee's

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Advertisement for Alesha Mart featuring a large graphic of a shopping bag and text in Bengali. The text includes details about online shopping, delivery services, and contact information. It mentions 'Click. Relax. Enjoy.' and 'Alesha Mart'.