



Agriculture Minister Muhammad Abdur Razzaque poses with winners of Standard Chartered Bank - Channel i Agrow Award at The Pan Pacific Songargaon Dhaka recently.

Bourses await funds from new insurers

FROM PAGE B1 issue rules which states that a company cannot raise funds of less than Tk 30 crore from the stock market through fixed price method.

The 26 non-listed insurance companies are allowed to raise funds of a minimum of Tk 15 crore, according to the notification.

The 18 life and remaining eight non-life insurance companies are exempted from some of the clauses of the public issue rules, it read.

As the finance minister directed all the insurance companies to offload shares, they are trying to come over, said a top BSEC official.

Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal in September 2019 gave the order for all insurers to get listed with the stock market within three months. He warned that their licences would be cancelled otherwise.

Crystal Insurance and Express Insurance then complied with the directive.

In tune with requests by the remaining companies, the BSEC decided to exempt them from the clause so that every issuer comes over to the market, said the official.

The minimum 20 per cent equity investment requirement will give a boost to the country's capital market, he added.

Sheikh Kabir Hossain, president of Bangladesh Insurance Association, said some insurance companies have already got listed while others were trying.

"It is usual for some to take a bit of time to get listed," he said.



Ashraf Haq Chowdhury Bank Asia director made European Economic Development Council representative

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Ashraf Haq Chowdhury, managing director of Star Infrastructure Consortium and a director of Bank Asia, has been appointed special trustee and representative of European Economic Development Council (EEDC) with effect from January 1.

Headquartered in Madrid, the EEDC is one of the world's leading development agencies. The non-bureaucratic, non-political, non-governmental international organisation works on faster solutions for public and private sector funding needs for socio-economic development and industrial growth.

Its operational activities encompass almost all the countries over Latin, South and Central America, Caribbean, Europe, Africa, Middle East, Central, East and South East Asia and the Pacific Rim.

Its Executive Board, Board of Trustees and Advisory Group comprise high profile dignitaries and experts in various development fields, said an EEDC statement.

With Chowdhury's appointment, the EEDC now considers Bangladesh as a focus country for its constant socioeconomic and industrial growth.

Ashraf is an expert in trade, investment and telecommunications sectors with 32 years' experience.

Exporters seek extension of loan moratorium, repayment periods

FROM PAGE B1 In a WhatsApp audio message to The Daily Star, she also demanded 36 months for the loan repayments instead of 24 months, pointing at the tough times the garment sector has been going through for the pandemic's second wave.

"That even will help us. But at this moment it would be very difficult for us to start paying back the loan," Huq also said.

Earnings from apparel shipments, which typically account for 84 per cent of national exports, dropped 2.99 per cent year-on-year to \$15.54 billion in July-December 2020, according to data from the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB).

Of the export receipts, \$8.52 billion came from knitwear, up 3.9 per cent, while that for woven declined 10.22 per cent to \$7.01 billion.

Despite the pandemic, knitwear shipments rose as people mostly opted for casual wear as they stayed indoors and worked from home because of the health crisis.

Merchandise exports in December declined 6.11 per cent year-on-year to \$3.3 billion. Last month's receipts were 6.13 per cent shy of the monthly export target of \$3.5 billion.

Garment export was down 9.64 per cent in December as the pandemic continues to batter the global economy. Last month, woven garment export posted the worst performance since June, plummeting 18.07 per cent. Knitwear export fell 0.45 per cent.

Overall, garment exports witnessed an unprecedented 16.94 per cent year-on-year decline in 2020, according to exporters.

Overall merchandise shipment declined 0.36 per cent year-on-year to \$19.23 billion in July-December 2020 as Bangladesh's major export destinations continued to struggle to tame rising coronavirus infections, showed official data.

Backing the extension demand, Md Saiful Islam, president of the Leathergoods and

Footwear Manufacturers & Exporters Association of Bangladesh, reasoned that they received 30 per cent fewer work orders for next season.

In April and May last year, there was almost no commercial production in factories but expenses had to be borne for wage payment.

And again when the factories were trying to recover, a second wave arose from November last year, affecting production and sales in factories, he said. As supply chains and demand dwindled, Bangladesh missed some great sale bonanzas in Europe and the USA.

For instance, Bangladesh could not latch on to the Christmas and Thanksgiving Day sales momentum as many important export destinations went into fresh lockdowns to counter the second wave, Islam told The Daily Star over the phone.

"We may come back in business at the end of June this year as the vaccine for curing the patients from the virus is already in the market. The central bank should address the issue as soon as possible," he said.

"Nobody has the capacity to repay the loan now. The government should also give another stimulus package to retain the jobs of workers as the profit margin and orders have declined," Islam also said.

Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute, was against any moratorium extension, explaining that many factory owners would face difficulties in starting repayments all of a sudden once the dues piled up for, say, 12 months.

"So the moratorium is not good for the business," he said.

He, however, supported extending the loan repayment tenure to at least five years, reasoning that many, especially micro, cottage, small and medium enterprises, do not have adequate work orders to make a profit and repayments at this moment.

The banking sector will not face any difficulty

if the government extends the repayment period for five years, Mansur said.

"And also the government should provide another stimulus package to the export oriented sectors so that they can cope with the fallouts of the second wave as many have faced work order cancellations, deferred payments and a lot of other challenges," he said.

The second stimulus package should be limited in size, not as big as the first one, he said.

The government can provide not more than Tk 5,000 crore as a second stimulus package for businesses to continue paying workers' wages, Mansur added.

Mohammad Hatem, senior vice-president of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said many small and medium enterprises would become bankrupt without a moratorium extension and at least five years' loan repayment period. M Shahadat Hossain, chairman of the Exporters Terry Towel & Linen Manufacturers & Exporters Association, echoed the other exporters.

"We need at least one year as moratorium and three years' repayment tenure for the loan," he said.

Private firms get nod to import another 3.45 lakh tonnes of rice

FROM PAGE B1 The government started buying rice from the international market because of the low progress in procurement of rice and paddy during the current Aman paddy harvesting season amid a lack of interest from farmers and millers, as the market prices were higher than the official rate.

Until January 7, the food office could buy less than 1 per cent of 2 lakh tonnes of paddy purchase target and 5 per cent of 6 lakh tonnes of rice procurement goal, data from the food ministry showed.

Alternative meat -- transforming the food industry in a big way

FROM PAGE B4 This is still in the development phase but is expected to get the nod from the regulators by 2021. The Singapore Food Agency has approved cell-cultured chicken, making the country the first in the world to give its go-ahead for selling meat created in a lab.

According to Barclays, the market for meat alternatives could be worth \$140 billion within the next decade, or about 10 per cent of the \$1.4 trillion global meat industry. One report estimates that 35 per cent of all meat will be cultured by 2040.

This development would certainly help the world resolve many of its challenges by eliminating the need to breed, raise and slaughter animals for food.

Figures suggest that cell-based meat has the potential to reduce agricultural greenhouse gas emissions by 78-96 per cent while also using 99 per cent less land and 82-96 per cent less water.

It can create additional health benefits like extra nutrients or fewer contaminants like antibiotics, pathogens or microplastics. In the future, consumers could choose to eat chicken with added vitamins or beef with omega-3 fats.

Not everyone believes that lab meat is the ultimate solution as there are obviously a few things to yet be tested, like mass scale production capacity and distribution.

The other critical challenge lies with product cost and whether the vast majority of the world would be

able to afford alternative meat.

Another important factor is the consumers' acceptance, which varies geographically. A global survey funded by the Animal Advocacy Research Fund revealed that 29.8 per cent of consumers in the US, 59.3 per cent of the Chinese consumers, and 48.7 per cent of the Indian consumers would be willing to regularly purchase cell-based meat.

This bold innovation is certainly going to be a big stepping stone towards addressing the world's most critical challenge -- ensuring food and nutrition for all.

(Views expressed here are personal) The author is chairman and managing director of BASF Bangladesh

High prices tempt farmers to cultivate more Boro

FROM PAGE B1 "We want to ensure surplus production of rice," he said.

The thrust on increased acreage of hybrid, which offers higher yield than improved varieties, comes at a time when prices of the staple grain are ranging high.

Prices of coarse grain, the cheapest compared to medium and fine grains, was up 46 per cent to Tk 45-Tk 50 per kg in Dhaka city markets yesterday from Tk 30-Tk 35 a year ago, showed data of the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh.

Prices of paddy also shot up. And the effect of higher prices of the staple grain are also being felt by farmers.

Farmer Abdur Rouf Mondal of Gobindaganj upazila under Gaibandha district was already growing paddy on 20 bighas of his land. He has added another 10 bighas to it on lease.

"But prices of everything is going up day by day," he said, citing that it had occurred in the case of seeds.

The farmer also alleged that he had to buy 50 kgs of triple super phosphate fertiliser at Tk 1,400 during the potato plantation period this year, which was

up from Tk 1,100 a year ago.

The cost of labour has also gone up by 25 per cent to Tk 500 now from Tk 400 the previous year.

"I am in a bit of a dilemma over cultivating paddy on more land this year," he said.

While leasing out the land, the landowners are demanding more this year. Rent was only Tk 400 per decimal for two crops last year.

It increased 25 per cent to Tk 500 per decimal this year, said Abdul Hamid Mondal, another farmer of Gobindaganj.

LPG prices rise as global markets heat up in winter

FROM PAGE B1 The price went down to Tk 750 per 12kg cylinder in April to May.

But the price rose by Tk 300 per 12kg cylinder from May to January, in keeping with the rising rates in international markets.

In Bangladesh, the LPG price is revised on the first day of every month based on the average international rate of the benchmark fuel and the foreign exchange rate in the preceding month.

In Asia, it is usually linked to the

price of crude oil.

"We increased the rate to adjust to the price in the international market," said Jakaria Jalal, general manager at Bashundhara LP Gas, the market leader with 24 per cent share.

Nayan Kanti Das, a retailer in Cox's Bazar, said the price increased at least by Tk 100.

Sugata Chakma, a user in Khagrachhari, said he bought a 12kg cylinder at Tk 750 in May. Last week, it was retailed at Tk 930. The price was Tk 1,200 a year ago.

Ghulam Rahman, chairman of the Consumers Association of Bangladesh, said the price hike was not logical as a case on fixing the price was pending with the High Court.

"We don't want to hamper the LPG business. Rather, we want a transparent and logical system that will ensure quality products and protect the interest of both consumers and businessmen," Rahman added.

The number of LPG users reached 20 million in Bangladesh last year.

Sacked Bata workers want job back

FROM PAGE B4 "I would have received around Tk 40 lakh in retirement but was given only Tk 10 lakh. The benefits we were not in line with the labour law," he said.

"We want either our job back or our children in the same post," he added.

His peer, Jakir Hossain, told The Daily Star that the family members of the sacked workers were also worried sick due to the current situation.

"I appeal to the prime minister to intervene and solve the matter," he added.

A total of 11 workers filed 11 cases with the labour court accusing Bata, the management and CBA leaders of carrying out the sacking ignoring the labour act 2006, said Supreme Court advocate Fahad Mahmood Khan who is representing the workers.

On being contacted, Iftekhar Mallick, Bata marketing manager,

suggested talking to Malik Kabir, head of Bata human resources (HR).

The Daily Star could not reach Kabir for comment despite repeated calls on his mobile phone. A text message was also sent but there was no response.

The same occurred when this newspaper attempted to reach Assistant Manager (HR) Enamur Rahman and Ahmed Ali, president of Bata workers' union.

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার স্থানীয় সরকার, পল্লী উন্নয়ন ও সমবায় মন্ত্রণালয় পল্লী উন্নয়ন ও সমবায় বিভাগ প্রশাসন শাখা-১ (www.rcd.gov.bd) অফিসিয়াল মালামাল ক্রয়ের (উন্মুক্ত দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি) Table with 2 columns: স্লট নং and বিবরণ, listing items and their details.