BUSINESS

এবার মোবাইলে

SIBL e-Account

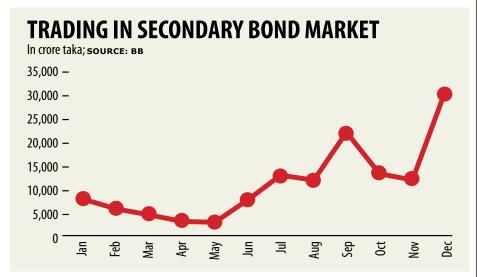
ব্যাংক অ্যাকাউন্ট খুলুন



■ DHAKA FRIDAY FEBRUARY 5, 2021, MAGH 22, 1427 BS ● starbusiness@thedailystar.net

## Trade in secondary bond market hits an all-time high

Depressed credit demand, lower bank interest rate pull investors to bond market



AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

The secondary bond market in Bangladesh has boomed in recent months on the back of lower interest rates on bank deposits and a set of measures taken by the central bank.

Trading in the secondary bond market hit an all-time high in December as transaction rose 157 per cent year-on-year to Tk 29,188 crore, data from the central bank showed.



Since July, the trading of government securities has received a shot in the arm as investors are getting lower interest on deposits kept at banks than the Treasury bonds (T-bonds).

Banks now face excess liquidity in the wake of lower credit demand from both the private sector and the government, forcing them to cut the interest rates on the fixed deposit receipts.

Excess liquidity in the banking sector

surged 95 per cent year-onyear to Tk 204,700 crore in December.

Besides, the measures, including selecting benchmark Treasury bonds by the central bank, have made the secondary market vibrant. The benchmark bonds help lenders fix the interest rate of securities.

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## Mills warn of shutdown for want of raw jute

Seek removal of a bar on import

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Jute millers yesterday warned that most mills might be shut in the next one or two months suffering from a shortage of raw jute in making ecofriendly products.

Two bodies of jute millers, Bangladesh Jute Spinners Association (BJSA) and Bangladesh Jute Mills Association (BJMA), demanded that the government fully ban raw jute exports.

They also sought removal of a bar on import of the natural fibre until June 2021 in order to keep factories running, according to a letter sent to the textiles and jute ministry yesterday.

The appeal came as prices of the natural fibre shot up to as much as Tk 4,500 per maund, the highest on record, in the face of a scarcity in the market resulting from a floodinduced production decline.

Prices of raw jute began rising after the harvesting of raw jute in the July-August period last year.

By the end of September prices had crossed Tk 3,000 per maund for stockpiling by middlemen and slow release by farmers seeking to profit amid speculations that production had fallen short of the requirement.

Jute mill owners said farmers do not have raw jute anymore in their stocks and a section of middlemen and stockists were hiking prices reducing supplies.

As result of the exorbitant prices, production in factories reduced substantially and many jute mills are shutting production, said the letter adding that 95 per cent of jute mills might be forced to stop

The caution comes at a time when export receipts from jute



Prices of the natural fibre shot up to as much as Tk 4,500 per maund, the highest on record, amid a shortage in the market resulting from a flood-induced production decline.

and jute goods have been soaring, driven mainly by spiraling prices.

Export earnings by jute and jute goods shot up 27 per cent yearon-year \$765 million in the July-January period of fiscal 2020-21 from that a year ago, showed data from Export Promotion Bureau.

Questions regarding raw jute production estimate

In the letter to the ministry, the BJSA and BJMA said mills required 60 lakh bales of raw jute for processing to make yarn, twine, bags, sacks and other goods mainly to export and make sales in the domestic market.

In addition, 5 lakh bales of raw jute are used for household purposes while 8 lakh bales exported annually.

In total, 73 lakh bales of raw jute are needed yearly in the country, said the two bodies of jute millers

Quoting the Department of Jute (DoJ) estimate of jute production to be 74 lakh bales last season, millers said 40 lakh bales of raw of jute should have been available in the country, as factories processed 30 lakh bales and traders exported 4 lakh bales of the natural fibre in the first half of the year.

"But scarcity and an usual price spike showed that the production estimate is baseless. Jute industry faces deep trouble because of the faulty estimate," said the BJMA and BJSA in the letter.

The letter, by BJMA Chairman Mohammed Mahbubur Rahman Patwari and BJSA Chairman Md Zahid Miah, urged the government to ensure that no raw jute trader could stock more than 500 maunds of raw jute for more than a month.

Millers also urged conducting mobile court drives to prevent the illegal hoarding of raw jute.

## auction held in Sreemangal

Tk 85 lakh worth of tea leaves sold

OUR CORRESPONDENT,

Around 50,000 kilograms of tea leaves were sold at around Tk 85 lakh in the country's 17th tea auction at Sreemangal Tea Auction Centre on February 3.

Two things happened for the first time this year: Brindaban Tea Garden of Habiganj sold white tea, and Panchagarh tea garden owners came all the way to Moulvibazar to take part in the event

A total of 60,000 kgs of tea from various gardens were extracted and up for sale at the auction where white tea had the highest price tag.

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## Maiden white tea Lafarge seeks arbitration to end gas price row with Jalalabad

LafargeHolcim Bangladesh said yesterday it decided to go to arbitration to settle a dispute with Jalalabad Gas Transmission and Distribution Systems after the state company charged higher than the agreed price for natural gas.

The sales deal came into effect in 2003 for the cement company's plant located at Chhatak in Sunamganj.

And the listed multinational company in a posting on the website of the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) said that its board of directors had passed a resolution on Wednesday that it would issue a notice of arbitration.

"A dispute has arisen between the parties in relation to the price of gas," it said, adding that the notice of arbitration had been issued in line with the agreement.

The agreement is valid until the end of 2025, said the cement maker in response to an email from The Daily Star.

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## Daikin launches ACs in partnership with Transcom Electronics

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Japanese air-conditioner maker Daikin has rolled out a host of inverter and non-inverter split air-conditioning units in Bangladesh in partnership with Transcom Electronics Ltd. The global leader in

conditioning, Daikin launched nine models, targeted for each consumer segment, as it looks to grow and serve the room air-conditioner business. All nine models are locally assembled, according to a press release.

"As responsible Japanese AC leaders, we are aware that rampant use of refrigerants has contributed to extreme weather patterns, causing destruction of crops and property and massive flooding followed by draughts. So, HFC-32 is the only solution to protect our future," said Manoj Agarwal, vice-president of Daikin, while addressing the launch



#### ADVANTAGES

Low carbon dioxide emission

Zero ozone depletion potential

High energy efficiency

at the Pan Pacific Sonargaon Dhaka

Daikin products, using HFC-32 (difluoromethane), bear only onethird of the global warming potential when compared with R-410A and R22 refrigerants. In addition, HFC-32 can help curtail greenhouse gas

Furthermore, it is also a refrigerant that reduces the amount of refrigerant needed per air-conditioning unit, has the advantage of enabling components such as heat exchangers, and is suitable for refrigerant recycling.

ACs with Japanese "Daikin technology are finding a huge acceptance among Bangladesh consumers, and we are in the process of increasing our product range, Agarwal added.

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#### NBR to sue Paperfly for VAT evasion



STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The VAT Intelligence is taking preparations to sue logistics service provider Paperfly on allegations of value-added tax

The field office of the National Board of Revenue (NBR) said it found through primary probe that the logistics firm did not deposit the indirect tax on Tk 5.77 crore collected as charge from delivery of goods in November and December.

A 15 per cent VAT is payable on the amount, said Moinul Khan, director general of VAT Audit, Intelligence and Investigation Directorate (VATAIID), in a press release.

The NBR's field office said Paperfly got VAT registration as an online courier service and it has 87 delivery centres across the country. The firm delivers goods to customers who buy from online marketplaces.

As per rule, firms are required to deposit VAT of a month within 15 days of the next month, but the company did not do so, according to the VATAIID.

#### Sanofi workers threaten hunger strike

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

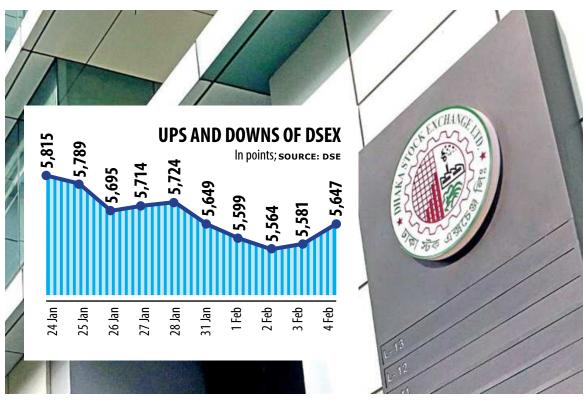
The employees of Sanofi Bangladesh yesterday threatened to go on a hunger strike from Saturday the company's management fulfills their demands.

The Sanofi Bangladesh Limited Workers-Employees (SBLWEA) Association again alleged that the Sanofi Bangladesh was exiting the country without paying any compensation to its employees.

The SBLWEA made this announcement at a press conference held at the Economic Reporters Forum in Dhaka yesterday.

The briefing came after Beximco Pharmaceuticals recently announced that it was set to acquire a 54.6

## Stocks on the rise again



STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Stocks continued to rise for the second consecutive day following a couple of weeks of profit booking after the market regulator's announcement that it is working on reducing corporate tax for listed companies.

DSEX, the benchmark index of the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE), rose 65 points, or 1.17 per cent, to 5,647 yesterday.

On February 2, Prof Shibli Rubayat Ul Islam, chairman of the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC), said they will ask the government to widen the gap of corporate taxes between listed and non-listed companies in the next budget in order to attract well-performing companies to the

Now, the average difference is 7.5 per cent but the stock market regulator wants it to rise up to 15 per cent by reducing the tax for listed companies.

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Lawmaker AKM Bahauddin and Abul Kalam Hasan Tagar, chairman of Halima Group, attend the launch of Halima

HALIMA GROUP

Faruq Mainuddin, managing director of Trust Bank, attends an annual conference on "Prevention of Money Laundering and Combating Financing of Terrorism" arranged by the bank's anti-money laundering division at its head office in Dhaka yesterday.

Trust Bank Compliance for Business

## India lines up deepwater port for rice

Mobile's first two mobile phone models T-1 and H-1 at an event in Cumilla on Wednesday.

Exports to surge amid global shortage

REUTERS, Mumbai

India's southern state of Andhra Pradesh will use a deepwater port to export rice for the first time in decades amid a global shortage of the grain, according to a government order seen by Reuters, which could raise shipments this year by a fifth.

The order, issued late on Wednesday, allows Kakinada Deep Water Port to handle rice until more capacity is created at the adjoining Anchorage Port.

Congestion at the Kakinada Anchorage Port, India's biggest rice-handling facility, had led to a waiting period of up to four weeks compared with the normal wait of about a week, raising costs for shippers and limiting exports, said B.V. Krishna Rao, president of the Rice Exporters Association of India.

The government blamed the congestion on a surge in demand, driven by production shortfalls in other rice-producing countries. Thailand and Vietnam are the other big suppliers, but their production has fallen in recent months because of excessive rains or drought, sending their prices to multi-

More shipments from the world's biggest rice exporter could cool global prices.

The move means monthly exports from Andhra Pradesh alone will double to 650,000 tonnes, Rao said, adding that rice shipping would begin in the deepwater port within days.

India's rice exports this year could rise to a record 16 million to 17 million tonnes from last year's 14.2 million, Rao said.

The government also thinks rice exports, excluding the premium basmati variety, could rise by 2 million to 3 million tonnes this year, said Pawan Agarwal, special secretary, logistics, at the federal Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

"We are also investing to expand capacity at the old Anchorage Port," Agarwal told

The South Asian country has a massive surplus for export and prices are competitive, but some international buyers switched to Thailand and Vietnam because of the shipping delays, said a Mumbaibased dealer with a global trading firm, who declined to be identified because of the sensitivity of the matter.



REUTERS/FILE

A worker packs a sack filled with rice on the outskirts of Ahmedabad.

# জীবনের জন্য বিজ্ঞান



"বিসিএসআইআর ঢাকা ও চট্টগ্রাম কেন্দ্রে নিরাপদ ও স্বাস্থ্যকর শুটকী মাছ প্রক্রিয়াকরণ এবং ইনডোর ফার্মিং গবেষণা সংক্রান্ত সবিধাদি স্থাপন" শীর্ষক প্রকল্প, বিজ্ঞান ও প্রযুক্তি মন্ত্রণালয়

নংঃ ৩৯.০২.০০০০.০৩০.০৫.০০৩.২০/০৩৫

তারিখঃ ০৫.০১.২০২১

#### Corrigendum (Time Extension)

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Tender ID	Name of work	Tender closing & opening
		date and time
528707	Construction of Civil, Electrical and related works steel shade 20200 square feet, steel super structure building 4-storied 22500 square feet (approximate).	14 February, 2021 at 15:00

মোঃ রেজাউল করিম প্রকল্প পরিচালক GD-241

#### Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Office of the Executive Engineer, DPHE Bagerhat District, Bagerhat Memo No. 46.03.0100.061.07.032.15-326/50

শেখ হাসিনার মলনীতি গ্রাম শহরের উন্নতি Dated: 04/02/2021

e-GP Tender Notice No. 18(2020-21)

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) for the procurement of the following works. Details are given below:

The interested persons/firm may visit the website www.eprocure.gov.bd to get the details of the

torroom					
1	Ministry/Division	Local Government Division.			
2	Implementing agency	Department of Public Health Engineering.			
3	Project/program name	Government Primary School-1 (GPS-1) Project, DPHE, Dhaka.			
4	e-Tender IDs	541756, 541755, 541753, 541751, 541750, 541749, 541748,			
		541747, 541746, 541745			
5	Description of works	Construction of 2-storied RCC WASH Block for MT & boys and FT & girls at different upazila in Bagerhat district including all associated construction sanitary plumbing & electrical works under GPS-1, FY-2020-21.			

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copy will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal is required.

Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and e-GP

help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

Size: 4"x3

GD-243

**Executive Engineer** DPHE, Bagerhat

## Unilever's back-to-the-future goals disappoint

REUTERS

Unilever restored its pre-pandemic sales growth target on Thursday, underwhelming investors seeking more ambitious goals amid strong consumer demand for plant-based food products and home care

The Ben & Jerry's ice cream and Dove soap maker said it would be "laser focused" on driving top line sales growth and would invest 1 billion euros in each of 2021 and 2022 in high growth areas including business to business e-commerce retailing, plant-based food and beauty products.

This would help Unilever to achieve a long-term underlying sales growth target of 3 per cent to 5 per cent, restoring a previous forecast set in 2020 but pulled in April due to uncertainty caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

Unilever shares were down about 4 per cent.

"Even though we have come close to hitting the 3-5 per cent target range in 2020, it is not enough," Unilever chief executive Alan Jope said. Jope also said the company

would be focused on making acquisitions in hygiene, skin care, functional nutrition and plant Rival consumer goods group

P&G last month raised its fiscal 2021 sales growth forecast to a range of 5 per cent to 6 per cent, from 3 per store in Johannesburg, South Africa.

back of a strong first half.

The coronavirus pandemic has boosted sales of packaged food companies such as Unilever, Nestle sales growth as we move beyond and Kraft Heinz, but there have also been sharp declines in foods served in public places such as on beaches and at restaurants.

Unilever Chief Financial Officer Graeme Pitkethly said the company expected the food service business to continue to be hit in Europe, where a spike in cases has led to stringent lockdowns.

Pitkethly also said he expects a mid-to-high-single digit rise in raw material costs in the first half

offset by raising prices.

"Looking forward the group sees a return to more predictable the pandemic later this year," Steve Clayton, fund manager at Hargreaves Lansdown said. "Ongoing restructuring to

position the group further toward digital commerce will hold back earnings in the near term, perhaps explaining the market's lack of enthusiasm for the numbers this morning," Clayton said.

Unilever's full-year underlying sales growth came in at 1.9 per cent, in-line with market estimates.

cent to 4 per cent, mainly on the of 2021, which Unilever hopes to Emerging market sales rose 1.2 per cent in the full-year.

China returned to growth in the second quarter as restrictions were eased, while India returned to growth in the third quarter. Sales accelerated into the high single digits in the fourth quarter in these two markets. "Slower EM's (emerging markets)

in Q4 is the root cause of the top line miss to Jefferies estimates, playing out against a background of extended lockdown activity worldwide," Jefferies analysts wrote in a note. The brokerage expected fourth quarter underlying sales growth of 4.4 per cent. Developed market sales rose 2.9

per cent in 2020, driven by strong demand for in-home foods, icecream and hygiene products in North America. In Europe, sales were driven by home care products.

The company's results end a historic year for the company which in November ditched its Anglo-Dutch dual-headed structure in favor of a single corporate entity based in London.

Turnover for the quarter came in at 12.1 billion euros (\$14.53 billion), versus analysts' estimates of 12.16 billion euros. Full-year 2020 turnover came in at 50.7 billion euros, slightly lower than the 50.81 billion euros, analysts had expected.

Adjusted earnings per share for the year were 2.48 euros, one cent lower than analysts' estimates.

#### After years of restructuring, Siemens has a new CEO

German industrial giant Siemens turned a page Wednesday as a new chief executive followed a restructuring drive after a year marked by falling sales due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Joe Kaeser handed the CEO baton to his deputy, Roland Busch at the end of a seven-year tenure marked by slimming down and spinning off assets to refocus as a technology company. "Our company has a decade of opportunities before it," Busch told an online shareholders meeting, paying tribute to Kaeser's run.

After reporting full-year to September earnings down by a quarter as the coronavirus battered the global economy, Siemens said it had turned a corner in the first quarter of its financial year.

The Munich-based group, which makes products ranging from trains to factory equipment, saw a 38-percent surge in net profit to 1.5 billion euros (\$1.8 billion) in the three months to December. "We made Siemens robust these last years," Kaeser told the meeting.

Kaeser, 63, announced in March that he would not be pursuing a contract extension and would pass the reins to Busch, 56, who has been a Siemens director since 2011 and served as Kaeser's number two since October 2019. "Siemens is in a better position today than a few years ago," Busch told the daily Sueddeutsche Zeitung in December,

defending Kaeser's stewardship during a tumultuous era. At the end of September, Siemens divested its Energy division, which includes oil and gas operations, and in October it sold components subsidiary Flender to USbased Carlyle for 2.0 billion euros.

Siemens Energy, in which the group still holds a 35.1-percent stake, this week announced it would slash 7,800 jobs over the next four years to cut costs in a rapidly changing market. Despite the ongoing impact of the virus, the group lifted its growth forecast for the year to "average or higher", with strong prospects for its software and industrial automation activities.

Kaeser's tenure was marked by turmoil rarely seen since the group's founding in 1847.Like many sprawling industrial conglomerates with diverse activities, Siemens has been forced to adapt to an economy in which specialisation is king.

Kaeser's increasing attention to software, automation and "industry 4.0" meant that the group's footprint decreased on his watch. Annual turnover, around 76 billion euros in 2013, came in at 57.1 billion euros last year.

The listing in recent years of the Energy and Healthineers units accompanied major downsizing operations that eliminated tens of thousands of jobs. The moves came in for sharp criticism from trade unions which accused the company of putting the interests of shareholders ahead of staff.



TRESemme products, a Unilever Plc brand, are seen on a shelf at a

#### জেলা পরিষদ কার্যালয়

REUTERS/FILE

চাঁপাইনবাবগঞ্জ

www.zpchapainawabganj.gov.bd e-GP Notice No. 01/2020-2021

(Limited Tendering Method)

শেখ হাসিনার মূলনীতি গ্রাম শহরের উরুতি

স্মারক নংঃ ৪৬.৪৩.৭০০০.০০২.৩৫.০০১.২০-৫৮(৩০)

২০ মাঘ, ১৪২৭ বঙ্গাব্দ ০৩ ফেব্রুয়ারি, ২০২১খ্রিঃ

e-Tender are invited in the National e-GP System Portal (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) for the procurement of the below 542330, 542347, 542446, 542453, 542454, 542460, 542461, 542462, 542463, 542464, 542465, 542466 542467, 542468, 542469 & 542556

These are online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be epiteu.
To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal (<a href="http://www.eprocure.gov.bd">http://www.eprocure.gov.bd</a>) is required Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and Portal and from help desk

(helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd). 02-02-21

Md. Mohaedul Islam Assistant Engineer Zilla Parishad, Chapainawabgar E-mail: ae@zpchapainawabganj.gov.bd



GD-242

#### বাংলাদেশ চা বোর্ড

প্রকল্প উন্নয়ন ইউনিট শ্রীমঙ্গল, মৌলভীবাজার



#### সংস্কার কাজের দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি

۵	মন্ত্রণালয়/বিভাগ	বাণিজ্য মন্ত্রণালয়।				
٦	এক্লেপী	বাংলাদেশ চা বোর্ড।				
9	সংগ্রহকারী সংস্থার নাম	প্রকল্প উন্নয়ন ইউনিট (পিডিইউ), বাংলাদেশ চা বোর্ড (বিটিবি)।				
8	সংগ্রহকারী সংস্থার অবস্থান প্রীমঙ্গল, মৌলভীবাজার।					
œ	আহবানকৃত দরপত্রের নাম পিডিইউ, ব্যারাকের সংস্কার কাজের দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি।					
৬	সংগ্ৰহ পদ্ধতি	উন্মুক্ত দরপত্র পদ্ধতি (ওটিএম)।				
٩	দরপত্র নং	পিডিইউ/মেরামত-৫৯২/২০০২(ভলি-০৬)-১৮৮০(২)(২) তারিখঃ ০৪/০২/২০২১ইং				
ъ	অর্থের উৎস	পিডিইউ, বাংলাদেশ চা বোর্ডের সংশ্লিষ্ট উন্নয়ন খাত হতে।				
ه	দরপত্র সিডিউল বিক্রয়ের তারিখ ও স্থান	০৭/০২/২০২১ হতে ২২/০২/২০২১ তারিখ অফিস চলাকালীন সময় পর্যন্ত। স্থানঃ প্রকল্প উন্নয়ন ইউনিট, বাংলাদেশ চা বোর্ড, শ্রীমঙ্গল, মৌলভীবাজার।				
20	দরপত্র গ্রহণের তারিখ, সময় ও স্থান	২৩/০২/২০২১, দুপুর ১২:০০ ঘটিকা, প্রকল্প উন্নয়ন ইউনিট, বাংলাদেশ চা বোর্ড, শ্রীমঙ্গল, মৌলভীবাজার।				
77	দরপত্র খোলার তারিখ, সময় ও স্থান	২৩/০২/২০২১, দুপুর ১২:১০ ঘটিকা, প্রকল্প উন্নয়ন ইউনিট, বাংলাদেশ চা বোর্ড, শ্রীমঙ্গল, মৌলভীবাজার।				
>>	দরপত্রদাতাদের যোগ্যতা	সংগ্রিষ্ট ঠিকাদারী প্রতিষ্ঠানের হালনাগাদ নবায়নকৃত ট্রেড লাইসেন্স, আয়কর পরিশোধের হালনাগাদ প্রমাণক, ভ্যাট নিবন্ধনকরণ সনদপত্রের কপি, ব্যাংক সলতেন্সি সাটিফিকেট এবং টেভার সিভিউলে উল্লিখিত অভিজ্ঞতার সনদ, এনুয়াল টার্নওভার ও লিকুইড এসেট এর তথ্যাদি দাখিল করতে হবে।				
১৩	দরপত্র দলিলের মূল্য	৫০০/- টাকা (অফেরতযোগ্য) প্রতিটি।				
۶٤	কার্যের পরিচিতি	কাজের অবস্থান	টেভার সিকিউরিটি	কার্য সম্পাদনের সময়		
	পিডিইউ'র ব্যারাক সংস্কার কাজ	ব্যারাক, পিডিইউ, বাংলাদেশ চা বোর্ড, শ্রীমঙ্গল, মৌলভীবাজার	৪০,০০০/- (চল্লিশ হাজার) টাকা	৪৫ (পঁয়তাল্লিশ) দিন		
7@	টেভার সিকিউরিটির অর্থ	ক্ষেরতযোগ্য হিসাবে সরকার অনুমোদিত যে কোন তফসিলী ব্যাংক হতে পরিচালক, পিভিইউ, বাংলাদেশ চা বোর্ড এর অনুক্লে উক্ত টাকার ভিডি/পে-অর্ভার দরপত্রের সাথে দাখিল করতে হবে।				
26	দরপত্র আহবানকারীর নাম, পদবী ও যোগাযোগের বর্ণনা	ভ. এ কে এম রফিকুল হক, পরিচালক (ভারপ্রাঙ), ফোনঃ ০৮৬২৬-৭১২৬৩, মোবাঃ ০১৭১১- ৮৬৭৪৮৪, E-mail: <u>directorbtbpdu@gmail.com;</u> ওয়েৰসাইটঃ <u>www.pduteaboard.gov.bd</u>				
۶۹	বিশেষ নিৰ্দেশনা	ক) দরপত্র সংক্রান্ত যে কোন তথ্য অফিস চলাকালীন সময়ে জানা যাবে। খ) কোন কারণ দর্শানো ছাড়াই কর্তৃপক্ষ যে কোন দরপত্র গ্রহণ অথবা সকল দরপত্র বর্জন করার পর্ব ক্ষমতা সংরক্ষণ করেন।				



Yeamin Sharif Chowdhury, director for operations at Transcom Electronics, and Manoj Agarwal, vice president at Daikin, attend the launch of inverter and non-inverter split air conditioning units of Japanese brand Daikin at an event in Dhaka. Daikin launched nine models of ACs for Bangladesh in partnership with Transcom Electronics.

## BCIM business leaders explore ways to boost cooperation in trade, logistics

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Business leaders of Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar (BCIM) are exploring ways of cooperation in trade and logistics in the sub-region under the Covid-19 epidemic situation.

The development comes at BCIM Business Council Meeting through a digital platform where participants reviewed and summarised key tasks in 2020 and discussed promotion projects of the council in 2021.

BCIM Business Council Yunnan Office organised the meeting hosted by the China Chamber of International Commerce, The Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), the Confederation of Indian Industry and Republic of the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and

FBCCI President Sheikh Fazle Fahim said regional value chain initiatives were focused and targeted sectoral ecosystem of industries.

"We may strategise regional value chain initiatives with raw materials, knowledge,

expertise from BCIM member countries for respective domestic industry while maximising production competitive edge of Bangladesh, export to BCIM market and beyond, maximising our value chains with global implications based on shared resources and knowledge," he said.

said energy, multi-modal transportation, joint seed development, agri-mechanisation, mechanisation agro-food components, processing, MSMEs, startup ecosystem, health tech, fin tech, edu tech, construction, shipbuilding, high value textile, jute, durable consumer goods, service cooperation in logistics, light engineering, automobile and motorbike components, defense armament, software, hardware, cyber security equipments, hospitality etc. are some of the highly prospective areas for joint ventures.

BCIM Business Council aims at establishing a consultation mechanism for the industrial and commercial circles in the region, giving play to the leading role of pragmatic cooperation, and promoting communication and cooperation among the four countries' chambers of commerce and industry.



#### Evaly gets new chief operating officer

STAR BUSINESS DESK

HM Tarikul Kamrul has recently joined Evaly as the chief operating officer.

Prior to joining the e-commerce platform, he worked as chief marketing officer of Link3 Technologies, according to a statement.

Previously, he worked at British American Tobacco, Robi Axiata, MGH Group and Transcom Ltd.

Kamrul completed his MBA from the Institute of Business Administration, Dhaka University.

## Daikin launches ACs in partnership with Transcom Electronics

The new range of split air-conditioners from Daikin offers a host of features that help create an ambient cooling environment for a comfortable experience. The models also boast of new designs matching the local aesthetics.

Daikin, armed with more than 150 trained installers across all major cities in the country, will ensure proper installation and troubleshooting for all customers.

The new inverter split ACs are available at a starting price point of Tk 68,500.

Yeamin Sharif Chowdhury, director for operations at Transcom Electronics Ltd, said: "When it comes to air-conditioning, Daikin ACs powered by Japanese technology have become a premium, reliable and one of the most sought-after names across Bangladesh market.'

Saikat Azad, deputy general manager for marketing at Transcom Digital, said consumers were definitely the beneficiaries of such developments as they could purchase reliable products at competitive

International brands are investing in their manufacturing or assembly plants in Bangladesh through partnerships with local companies, which are also benefitted from the shared technology.

"We started assembling last year and brought the products to the market. We did not launch officially due to the pandemic,"

According to him, importers had to pay 211 per cent customs duty previously, while local assembly brought it down to 40 per

"This helps the local manufacturers and assemblers build up their capacity to ensure quality products at competitive prices," Azad said.

Daikin is doing everything to provide premium air-conditioning experience to customers, the press release said.

From its advanced filter-cleaning technology, refrigerant, service quality to other useful features, used in providing the best possible quality of air, Daikin and Transcom Electronics are committed to taking the partnership to next level, it

## Lafarge seeks arbitration to end gas price row with Jalalabad

The notice has been filed as per the terms of the agreement and expectations are for it to be resolved through arbitration, it said.

"The matter is sub judice, and the precise terms of the agreement are confidential, and LafargeHolcim Bangladesh is unable to disclose the details," it added.

Stocks of LafargeHolcim, one of the biggest cement makers, fell 2.32 per cent to Tk 54 vesterdav.

"We found the arbitration notice from LafargeHolcim Bangladesh," said Md Shahidul Islam, the gas distributor's general manager.

The company does not want to pay according to the price fixed by the energy regulator of the country, so the dispute arose, he said, adding has been caused by profit booking that he would no more talk on it as it was now under a legal process.

Under the contract signed with

name used by LafargeHolcim period of last year compared to the Bangladesh, the natural gas was priced at approximately Tk 7.80 per cubic metre, said a top official of the gas distribution company seeking anonymity.

The energy commission, however, set gas prices for such industrial metre with effect from 2019, the official added.

Natural gas has various advantages over coal as a fuel, said a top official of an asset management company also preferring anonymity.

If the price rises, then cement production costs will be impacted, so the stock price fell, he said, adding that the stock price was higher a few days ago so this drop

The cement maker's sales dropped 13.8 per cent to Tk 1,142 Lafarge Surma Cement, the former crore during January to September

same period of the previous year. Meanwhile, its profits rose 27 per cent to Tk 149 crore.

Recently, it made a foray into the aggregate business. Aggregate is a broad category of coarse particulate material used in construction, consumers at Tk 10.70 per cubic including sand, gravel, crushed stone, slag, recycled concrete and

geo-synthetic aggregates. LafargeHolcim Bangladesh commenced commercial production of clear-size graded aggregate, the company said in a filing on the DSE last month.

The company has set up a crushing unit with ancillary equipment on the premises of its existing integrated clinker and cement manufacturing plant in Chhatak, Sunamganj.

It can produce 12 lakh tonnes of clear-sized graded aggregate per

#### Elon Musk turns his support to Dogecoin

REUTERS, London

Cryptocurrency Dogecoin surged more than 50 per cent on Thursday after billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk tweeted his support for it, two days after he said he was to take a break from Twitter "for a while".

Dogecoin jumped to \$0.05798 according data on blockchain and Coindesk. Musk
"Doge" cryptocurrency website Musk first immediately followed it up with "Dogecoin is the people's crypto".

The Tesla chief's tweets about certain companies and cryptocurrencies have sent their prices soaring in recent weeks. Shares in GameStop, Etsy and CD Projekt have jumped following comments on his Twitter account about them.

## Stocks on the rise again

FROM PAGE B1

If this happens, then listed companies' corporate tax would be 17.5 per cent while it is now 25 per cent, said a stock broker. With the corporate tax drop, general

investors will be benefited as the listed companies' net profit will rise and subsequently, dividend payout.

"It was the main influencer of the last two day's index rise," the stock broker

The BSEC chief also announced that they would hold a road show in the US, EU, and middle-eastern countries to attract nonresident Bangladeshi and foreign investors to the stock market.

This announcement also impacted the market positively, according to analysts.

Meanwhile, the regulator decided in a recent commission meeting to allow four companies that were previously listed in the over-the-counter market to return to the main market.

companies are Tamijuddin Bangladesh Mononspool Paper Manufacturing, Paper Processing and Packaging and Mono Fabrics.

As the companies' business performance

improved, the regulator approved the relisting, according to a press release.

However, turnover, an important indicator of the market, dropped 10.2 per cent to Tk 713 crore yesterday. Among major sectors, food and allied,

life insurance and bank sectors advanced while cement, engineering and travel and leisure sectors faced corrections.

Jute Spinners topped the gainers' list with a 9.94 per cent rise followed by Prime Insurance, Prime Finance, Sunlife Insurance and British American Tobacco Bangladesh.

Beximco topped the turnover list with shares worth Tk 85 crore changing hands followed by British American Tobacco Bangladesh, Robi Axiata, LankaBangla Finance, and Beximco Pharmaceuticals.

Mir Akhter Hossain Limited shed the most, falling 9.98 per cent followed by Energypac Power Generation, MI Cement, Matin Spinning and Robi Axiata.

At the DSE, 133 securities gained value, 106 declined, and 116 remained unchanged.

The port city bourse also rose vesterday. CASPI, the general index of the Chattogram Stock Exchange, rose 164 points, or 1.02 per cent, to 16,331.

Among 233 traded companies, 101 advanced, 68 fell and 64 remained the

## Trade in secondary bond market

What is the secondary bond market?

T-bonds are the securities issued by the government that have maturities spanning from two years to 20 years. Bondholders earn interest semiannually until maturity.

The government issues the securities to mobilise funds to manage its deficit financing. The bonds are sold through auctions every month at the central bank headquarters, and banks are the main clients.

But, the secondary bond market is the marketplace where investors can buy and sell

The proceeds from the sale of bonds in the secondary market go to the counterparty, which could be an investor or a dealer. In contrast, in the primary market, money from investors goes directly to the issuer.

Why is the secondary bond market booming? In November last year, the central bank selected 30 types of securities as the benchmark bonds to allow lenders to set the interest rate of the 269 bonds that have been issued by the government and are now available in the market.

The central bank also asked the primary dealer banks to declare the two-way price quote (selling and buying) for all bonds. The PD banks have to announce the prices at the central bank's market infrastructure module, which is linked with a virtual trading platform, Government

Securities Order Matching (GSOM).

Individuals and corporate entities can monitor the price trend through the GSOM before buying and selling securities.

The excess liquidity in the banking sector is another reason for the higher trading in the secondary market.

Arif Khan, managing director of IDLC Finance, said many banks and non-bank financial institutions were now embracing the secondary market to invest surplus funds.

The lower demand for loans has encouraged lenders to invest in the secondary market. Lenders have turned to the window to make a profit in the wake of business slowdown deriving rom the coronavirus pandemic, he said.

Corporate entities now prefer government securities as the interest rate on the FDRs has nosedived due to the lower credit demand They also see the bond market as the safest investment destination as the financial health of many banks has deteriorated because of the business slowdown.

Banks with higher credit rating offer a maximum of 3-4 per cent interest rate on FDRs, whereas investors now earn 3 to 6 per cent in interest from the T-bonds, whose maturity ranges from two to 10 years.

Besides, the government has recently capped the investment in savings certificates, which provide interest ranging from 11.04 per cent to

A person cannot invest more than Tk 50 lakh in the savings instruments. Under joint names, the investment limit is Tk 1 crore, a cap that discourages wealthy people from putting in too much money in the high-interest-bearing savings instruments. There is no such investment ceiling in the

T-bonds, encouraging individuals and corporate entities to pour money in the tools The ongoing vibrancy in the secondary market

may not sustain when the economy makes a turnaround from the slowdown, Khan said. Mirza Elias Uddin Ahmed, managing director

of Jamuna Bank, said it was very encouraging that trading in the secondary bond market had got momentum, which would give a breathing space to the government to manage its budget.

PD banks have to purchase T-bills and bonds. So, they usually face liquidity shortage when borrowing by the private sector and the government goes up, Ahmed said. But a vibrant secondary bond market will

resolve the problem as the investors of the secondary market supply the required fund to the government. In recent months, the interest rate on government securities has declined due to increased trading in the secondary market,

"This has helped the government to cut its cost to mobilise funds.

#### Sanofi workers threaten hunger strike

FROM PAGE B1

per cent stake in Sanofi Bangladesh for about Tk 400 crore as it looks to expand its product base and diversify into new areas.

With this, the French pharmaceuticals giant will exit Bangladesh, ending its presence in the country that spans more than six decades, as it has been struggling to compete with local companies.

There are around 1,000 employees working for Sanofi Bangladesh.

"Sanofi is leaving the country by selling its shares but they will not give any kind of financial compensation to its staff," said Sanjib Kumar Chakraborty, general secretary of the SBLWEA.

However, the company has assured that it would provide all necessary compensation before completing the hand over.

In a statement issued late last month, Sanofi Bangladesh said it consistently reaffirmed that its employees' interests would be integral in the final selection of the buyer of the stake. Sanofi said its employees will continue

operations on the current terms and

conditions that have been in place for three years until the transaction is closed. The employees will also continue to receive the same benefits. Sanofi Bangladesh had initially

committed to a 12-month collective employment guarantee, said the statement. However, SBLWEA President Md Nuruzzaman Raju said the management of Sanofi Bangladesh is yet to respond to their demands and have not shown any interest

in discussing the issue as of yet.

### NBR to sue Paperfly for VAT evasion

Contacted, Paperfly's Chief Marketing Officer Rahath Ahmed said the company followed regulations in terms of VAT and other guidelines and paid the dues

He said the Paperfly team was already in discussion with the VAT office to understand further about the issue of

unpaid VAT.

There has been no case filed or any demand placed to us and we are confident that we shall be able to prove our points," he said in emailed reply.

Last month, Indian e-commerce logistics solution provider Ecom Express acquired a majority stake in Paperfly spending around

## Maiden white tea auction held in Sreemangal

"The main attraction of the auction was the white tea," said Helal Ahmed, managing director of Sreemangal Tea

White tea was auctioned off through Sreemangal Tea Brokers, and Selim Tea House bought the tea at Tk 5,010 a kg, he said. It takes about 12 kgs of high-quality tea leaves to

beneficial for human body, he said. "Brindaban Tea Garden has been working for a long time to produce white tea," said Nasir Uddin Khan, manager of the garden.

produce one kg of white tea, which is very expensive and

Only human labour is used to produce the special tea leaves, and no machine is involved in the whole process, "I, along with the assistant managers, picked the leaves

and hard work. We produced only 10 kgs this year." Sreemangal Tea Brokers and Ruposhi Bangla Tea Brokers also participated in the auction.

from the garden. That is why the quality and taste of this tea

is extraordinary. White tea is the result of my long research

### Bank of England cuts outlook despite vaccines rollout

AFP, London

The Bank of England left interest rates and stimulus unchanged Thursday, but cut its 2021 growth forecast owing to the deadly coronavirus crisis -- despite a global vaccine

BoE policymakers voted to keep borrowing costs at a record-low 0.1 per cent, after their first monetary policy meeting since Britain's divorce from the

European Union at the start of January. The bank also cut its 2021 gross domestic product growth forecast to 5.0 per cent from 7.25 percent, while hinting at the possibility of implementing negative interest rates later this year. "Covid-19 vaccination programmes are under way in a number of countries, including the United Kingdom, which has improved the economic outlook," the BoE said. "Nevertheless, recent UK and global activity has been affected by an increase in Covid cases, including from newly identified strains of the virus, and

the associated reimposition of restrictions. Much of the UK re-entered lockdown in early January to curb variant strains that are deemed more transmissible, with restrictions similar to initial Covid curbs imposed in the second quarter of 2020. However, more than 10 million people in the UK have now received a first dose of a Covid-19 vaccine.

The BoE meanwhile noted Thursday that Britain and the European Union reached a trade agreement that has applied since January 1, averting a chaotic no-deal Brexit. And it signalled that Britain would likely avoid a double-dip recession with marginal growth expected in the final three months of last vear.

The BoE also declared Thursday that it "appropriate" to start preparations for the potential introduction of negative interest rates in six months' time. A negative interest rate would likely see retail banks further cutting their own borrowing costs, which would be unwelcome news for savers but a boost for borrowers.

## Ishwardi EPZ yet to reach potential

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, back from Ishwardi, Pabna

A couple of decades ago, incomes of the people of Ishwardi upazila of Pabna and adjoining areas were mostly dependent onNorth Bengal Paper Mill and Alhaj Textile Mills.

Now they are availing new job opportunities brought by Ishwardi Export Processing Zone.

Over 12,000 workers, mostly from Ishwardi and adjacent districts such as Natore and Kushtia, have availed job opportunities in the Ishwardi EPZ although 40 per cent of the EPZ area is yet to be utilised two decades past its inception.

Established in 2001, Ishwardi EPZ at Pakshey has 290 industrial plots. Of them 60 per cent have already been allotted to investors.

Had all the plots been allocated, 25,000 to 30,000 people could have been employed, bringing about a revolutionary change in the socioeconomic field in this region, according to Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (Bepza).

A total of 19 export-oriented factories are running in full swing in Ishwardi EPZ. Of the factories running, nine are foreign, eight local

and two joint ventures.

Most of the foreign investments have come from South Korea, India, China, Japan, Hong Kong and Marshall Islands.

They are producing electronics and electrical goods, footwear and leather goods, wigs, tents, batteries, denim products, industrial gloves, garments and accessories, yarn, plastic goods, jute products, chemicals and

There are another 12 factories under construction which would start operations very soon.

The new investors from the United Kingdom, China, Australia, and Bangladesh are going to produce knitting and textile products, garments and accessories and cigars and cigarettes with some \$16.99 million in investments.

Utility services, secured and safe workplaces, facilities ensuring uninterrupted production and bonded warehousing are the key requirements of the EPZs investors.

Bepza provides it all, said Nazma Binte Alamgir, general manager, public relations of Bepza.

However, Ishwardi EPZ could not draw the same amount of investments as had Cumilla EPZ and Uttara EPZ,

Over 12,000 workers, mostly from Ishwardi and adjacent districts such as Natore and Kushtia, have availed job opportunities in the Ishwardi EPZ although 40 per cent of the EPZ area is yet to be utilised two decades past its inception







Anticlockwise from top, Established in 2001, Ishwardi EPZ at Pakshey in Pabna district has factories running on 60 per cent of its 290 industrial plots. Tents are one of the products manufactured here. Workers, mostly from Ishwardi upazila and adjacent districts such as Natore and Kushtia, are on their way to the EPZ. AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU

all coming about around the same

Established in 2000, Cumilla EPZ secured investments of \$436.02 million, exports of \$ 3,604.49 million and employs 33,846 people.

Uttara EPZ, which was established in 2001 in Rangpur, has so far brought investments of \$208.08 million, exports of \$1,416 million and

employs 27,519 people.

some of Myanmar's top trading partners --

China, Hong Kong, Singapore and India -

If anything, "the coup will push Myanmar

even further into China's arms and the

imbalance between Chinese and Western

investments in the country will increase",

Françoise Nicolas, Asia director of the

French Institute of International Relations,

told AFP. China's monetary flex is already

apparent thanks to its "One Belt, One

Road" initiative -- an expansive vision for

maritime, rail and road projects across Asia,

Africa and Europe that features Myanmar

prominently. "I don't think they're going to

However, Japan -- which ranks as

Myanmar's third-largest trading partner

-- could waver. "The Japanese business

community has always been a bit split

and this might make it difficult in the near

Suzuki temporarily halted operations at its

two Myanmar factories, which produced

13,300 vehicles in 2019 -- almost all of

since 1998, when the country was under

iunta rule, and it is building a third

production plant. "Our decision to close the

factories was aimed at making sure that our

people could commute safely," a spokesman

said, adding that Suzuki will reopen doors

on Thursday. The only ones celebrating a

potential financial windfall from the coup

will be the military, with huge business

interests spanning jade mining, construction,

pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, insurance,

giants, who already rely on the military

Mathieson said international mining

Suzuki has had operations in Myanmar

After Monday's coup, Japanese car giant

be shaken át all," Mathieson said.

which were sold in-country.

tourism and banking.

term," he said.

analysts predict no major blowback.

As for Ishwardi EPZ, it attracted investments of \$155.75 million and enabled exports of \$1,012.02 million. connectivity. The other two have close and better connectivity with roads and river and sea ports, enabling faster access to raw materials alongside exports, said Nazma.

Although there is a domestic airport in Ishwardi, no flight connects to it. Foreigners opt for airlines although there are helicopter pads in the EPZ, she said.

There is a rail station, albeit 10 kilometres away from the Ishwardi EPZ, she added.

The dependence on road communication is costing time and money, so many investors do not prefer Ishwardi EPZ, Nazma said.

Since the locality and surrounding areas are famed for fruit cultivation, Bepza is trying to get food processors to set up facilities, she said.

However, those inside the EPZ will not get the same incentives as those outside, which puts off many investors, she said.

Addressing these issues could ensure utilising the full potential of the EPZ, she added.

#### JOB OPPORTUNITIES

Even a couple of years ago, Bilkis Begum, a middle-aged woman of Hemayetpur village in Pabna sadar, was dependent on her husband's small income.

Now she earns for the family some Tk 8,000 to Tk 10,000 a month working in a garment factory in Ishwardi EPZ.

"I come to the EPZ every day in the morning and return home in the evening working 8 to 10 hours a day. It has brought ease to my family," she told The Daily Star recently.

Like her thousands of men and women from different areas of Pabna and adjoining districts come to the EPZ for work every day.

"The EPZ has helped many like me stay clear of economic hardship," said The prime reason, as per Bepza, is Farida Khatun of Veramara in Kushtia.

#### **GLOBAL BUSINESS**

# Back to 'basket case'? Myanmar economy at risk after coup

Foreign investors flocked to Myanmar as it began its democratic transition a decade ago, but this week's military coup is likely to accelerate a trend of Western withdrawal -- and China's expansion.

Myanmar's untapped potential was up for grabs in 2011, when generals in charge of a 49-year junta loosened their iron grip, paving the way for democratic reforms and economic liberalisation in the country of more than 50 million people. Investors pumped money into telecommunications, infrastructure, manufacturing construction projects.

But the buzz was already fading by 2017 for the West, after a military crackdown on Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine state led to allegations of genocide. And the sight of generals running the show again could be the last straw for Western businesses, analysts say. "Now with the coup, the view would be: basket case, banana republic," Yangon-based analyst David Mathieson told AFP. "I think what we are going to see is a lot of Western countries going 'No way." "Panic over the return to military rule was immediate. The response reverberated from the outskirts of Yangon -- where construction work halted on a Thai-owned \$1 billion industrial estate project -- to Australia, where a Perth-based resources company developing a silver, zinc and lead mine in Shan State suspended share-trading.

In the coup's immediate aftermath, US President Joe Biden threatened to reintroduce economic sanctions that were formally removed in 2016. Some targeted sanctions were imposed on key Myanmar military personnel over the 2017 Rohingya crisis. And as the European Union considers an economic embargo, the country's rag trade industry could be at risk.

The garment sector has boomed

in recent years, bolstered by scores of international brands such as H&M, Gap and Adidas, which shifted their production to factories in Yangon's outskirts. According to Singapore-based Capital Economics, Made-in-Myanmar clothing, footwear and handbags make up three percent of the country's gross domestic product.

But with the military back in power, a Yangon-based private sector source worries for the fate of the industry's 700,000 workers. Global heavyweight clothing retailers might look for a "PR bounce" and halt sourcing from Myanmar's factories, he said, requesting anonymity owing to the sensitivity of the issue. But the unintended impact could be "malnutrition and sextrafficking" for the mostly female workers. The people who are going to suffer are the factory workers... Brash actions from multinational retailers are going to hit them hard," he told AFP.

Already, the country is reeling from the difficult economic headwinds of the coronavirus pandemic, prompting the International Monetary Fund to send Myanmar a \$350 million emergency cash package in January. The World Bank predicted the virus' impact could increase "households' vulnerability and potential unemployment". "Myanmar could lose the gains in poverty reduction achieved in the last decade," it said in a report last year./- Business as usual for some -/But for



Military supporters carry a portrait of junta leader General Min Aung Hlaing as they celebrate the coup in Naypyitaw, Myanmar yesterday.

for security, will likely be unruffled by the takeover. "This is just fewer phone calls to make," he said.

## IMF warns of 'uneven' Mideast recovery

Economic recovery in the Middle East and North Africa is expected to accelerate this year following a double whammy shock, but growth will be uneven due to unbalanced access to the coronavirus vaccine, the IMF said.

The region -- which includes all Arab countries and Iran -- suffered one of its worst economic performances last year due to lower oil prices and sweeping lockdowns to prevent the spread of

economy shrank by 3.8 percent in 2020, the International Monetary Fund expects growth of 3.1 percent this year and 4.2 per cent next year amid a rebound in oil prices and the roll out of vaccines. "This year we expect a recovery after the year 2020 that was a year like no other where the region faced one of the most severe dual shocks," Jihad Azour, director of the Middle East and Central Asia Department at the IMF, told AFP. "Of course, we are in a period of high uncertainty and the race between

recovery pace. And this recovery pace will vary between countries depending on access to the vaccine. "Many countries in the region haven't launched vaccination campaigns yet due to worldwide shortages, internal conflicts and weak finances. Wealthy Gulf states were among the first to start turbocharged programs. The UAE and Bahrain have administered two of the fastest per capita deliveries in the world. "Currently, we are seeing a great divergence between countries.

the coronavirus. But while the region's the virus and the vaccine will define the Those who are among the front runners worldwide in terms of vaccination, like UAE and Bahrain, will have a faster recovery than those who are lagging, said Azour. "Therefore it's a recovery that is uneven and uncertain." After a 4.8 percent contraction in 2020, oil-rich Gulf states are expected to grow by 2.5 percent this year, according to the IMF.

Saudi Arabia, the biggest oil exporter and largest Arab economy, is tipped to expand by 2.6 percent this year following negative growth of 3.9 percent in 2020.

## NEWS In Brief

#### Opec+ optimistic for 2021 rebound in oil demand

Members of the Opec group of oil producers and their allies met Wednesday and expressed confidence in prospects for a global economic recovery and attendant rise in crude oil demand. "As mass vaccination programmes continue and the macro-economic situation improves, there is a growing optimism over global oil demand," Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak was quoted by the Ria agency as saying.

He spoke during a videoconference meeting of Opec+'s monthly Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee (JMMC). A statement published after the meeting said all participants were "optimistic" for a "year of recovery in 2021". "The gradual rollout of vaccines around the world is a positive factor for the rest of the year, boosting the global economy and oil demand," the statement said.

That optimism has been reflected in oil markets since early November, with benchmark crude contracts now trading at around \$60 (50 euros) per barrel -- levels last seen in early 2020. Prices have also been supported by Opec+ countries agreeing to production cuts in the wake of the coronavirus-induced plunge in demand last spring.

Those cuts have continued into 2021, with a reduction of 7.2 million barrels per day in January, 7.125 million bpd planned for February and 7.05 million bpd in March. In addition OPEC mainstay Saudi Arabia has volunteered to a cut a million extra barrels per day from its

#### Reliance's unit to sell Marcellus shale assets for \$250m

REUTERS, Bengaluru

production in February and March.

Reliance Industries Ltd said on Thursday its unit will sell its interest in certain upstream assets in the Marcellus shale in the United States for \$250 million in cash to Northern

The assets, currently operated by various affiliates of EQT Corp, will be sold for the cash consideration and warrants, that will allow for the purchase of 3.25 million common shares of NOG at an exercise price of \$14 per common share over the next seven years, Reliance said.

In 2017 Reliance sold a shale oil and gas block in the Marcellus shale in northeastern and central Pennsylvania for \$126 million.

Reliance, led by billionaire Mukesh Ambani, has been diversifying away from its mainstay energy arm to consumer-facing businesses in recent years.



Labourers rest in front of an advertisement of Reliance Industries Limited at a construction site in Mumbai, India.