

STOCKS		COMMODITIES		ASIAN MARKETS				CURRENCIES			
DSEX	CSCX	Gold	Oil	MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI	USD	EUR	GBP	CNY
▼ 0.44%	▼ 0.59%	\$1,840.40	\$60.94	▲ 0.43%	Closed	Closed	Closed	BUY TK 83.95	100.75	115.37	12.85
5,485.01	9,585.07	(per ounce)	(per barrel)	51,531.52				SELL TK 84.95	104.55	119.17	13.51



# Star BUSINESS

DHAKA FRIDAY FEBRUARY 12, 2021, MAGH 29, 1427 BS • starbusiness@thedailystar.net

## Administrator appointed to Delta Life Ins

### Case filed over Tk 35.18cr VAT evasion

AHSAN HABIB

The Insurance Development & Regulatory Authority (IDRA) yesterday appointed an administrator with immediate effect to one of the sector's leading entities, Delta Life Insurance Company, explaining that it was

to protect policyholders' interests.

Meanwhile, the VAT Audit, Intelligence and Investigation Directorate filed a case against the Delta under the VAT act alleging that it had evaded paying Tk 35.18 crore in VAT.

The insurance regulator's logic behind appointing Sultan-ul-abedin Mollah, a former IDRA member, was the unearthing of many rule and regulation breaches, which came to light through special and investigative audits.

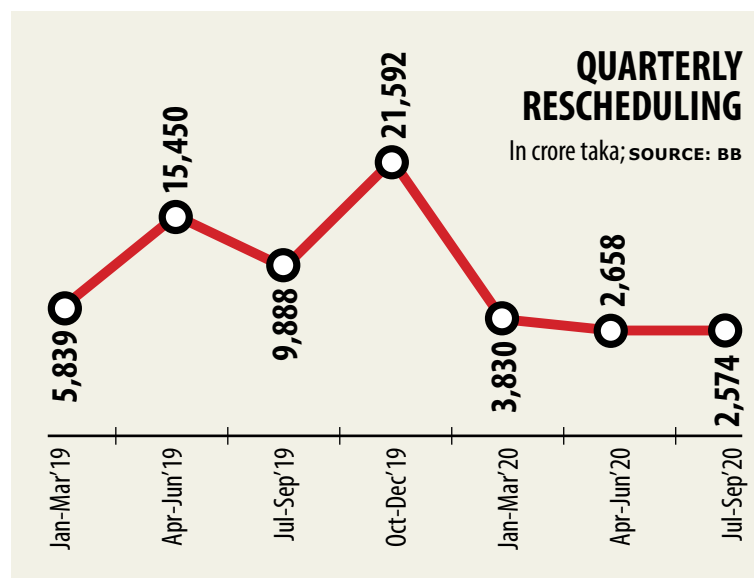
The IDRA ran the special audit through the Howladar Yunus & Co in 2019 and then the investigative one through the Fames & R Chartered Accountants to verify allegations of shareholders and policyholders.

"On the basis of the Delta's answer on audit objections, we found that there were breaches of rules and regulations in at least 22 ways," the IDRA said in a show cause notice.

In some cases, the company's answers were not acceptable to the auditor. Moreover, in cases where the company did acknowledge breach of rules, there were no statements on when and how it will be corrected, read the notice.

The Fames traced 25 specific ways through which interests of policyholders have been impacted. It recommended running more investigations encompassing 10 ways through which there has been a breach of rules, said the IDRA.

## Tk 12,140cr defaulted loans rescheduled, written-off



### LOANS WRITTEN OFF

In crore taka; SOURCE: BB

Quarter	Value (In crore taka)
Q1'19	557
Q2'19	674
Q3'19	409
Q4'19	957
Q1'20	33.49
Q2'20	992
Q3'20	2,083

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

Banks swept under the rug Tk 12,140 crore in defaulted loans in the nine months to September last year by rescheduling and writing those off.

Had such instruments not been used, the banking industry's defaulted loans would have shown up to be much higher.

Non-performing loans (NPLs) stood at Tk 88,734 crore as of December, down 5.93 per cent year-on-year, showed data from Bangladesh Bank.

The central bank unveiled a moratorium facility for 2020 to insulate borrowers from the economic hardship caused by the coronavirus pandemic, in a move that reined in the escalation of defaulted loans and brought them down.

The central bank is yet to prepare the statement of rescheduled and written-off loans for the last quarter of 2020.

The amount of rescheduled and written-off loans rose last year as the majority of banks used the two tools to reduce defaulted loans in the

October to December quarter.

Some banks were also forced to classify a large amount of delinquent loans between January and September as per instructions of the central bank.

The central bank asked lenders to classify the loans after carrying out routine and special inspections, pushing the defaulted loans up, said some central bank officials.

Some banks hid defaulted loans by showing them as unclassified in violation of banking norms.

Banks have classified some loans as defaulted assets on their own as the recovery has been feeble for years, said three managing directors, wishing not to be named given the sensitivity of the matter.

This indicates that the asset quality of banks weakened in a true sense last year despite the moratorium, they said.

The amount of rescheduled loans stood at Tk 9,063 crore in the nine months to September, down 68 per cent year-on-year.

The figure of written-off loans surged 140 per cent year-on-year to Tk 3,077 crore during the same period.

Writing off allows banks to clean their balance sheet of toxic assets. Lenders have to keep 100 per cent provisioning against the delinquent loans.

As there is no realistic prospect of recovering them, these loans are shifted to off-balance sheet records. A majority of loans are held by the habitual defaulters.

Writing off loans has become a better tool than rescheduling as some defaulters frequently regularise NPLs by taking advantage of the relaxed facility, said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh.

"Defaulted loans may escalate this year after the central bank lifted the loan moratorium. This will fuel both rescheduled and written-off loans," he said.

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## Top taxpayers honoured

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

It was a day of recognition for tax compliance and the joy of being honoured. This recognition came from the National Board of Revenue (NBR).

In a bid to encourage compliance and bring more people under the tax net in a country where avoidance and evasion are rampant, the NBR yesterday honoured the highest taxpayers with tax cards and crests for abiding the rules.

Including the 141 highest taxpayers at the national level, the NBR honoured a total of 665 individual taxpayers throughout the country. Of them, 524 were awarded for becoming the highest and longest time taxpayers for fiscal 2019-20.

"We are really delighted. Our family has been paying taxes for many years and becoming honoured. Seven of our family members have become top taxpayers in various categories this year," said Rubaiyat Farzana Hussain after being presented with a tax card and crest at a ceremony at the NBR headquarters for being the highest taxpayer in the salaried individual category.

Hussain is general manager of Drug International. Along with her sister, Hosne Ara Hussain, also general manager of Drug



**Md Kaus Mia, second from right, who has been the highest taxpayer for a decade, receives a token of appreciation from State Minister for Public Administration Farhad Hossain and NBR Chairman Abu Hena Md Rahmatul Muneem at a function at NBR office in Dhaka yesterday.**

International, were recognised by the NBR at the event where State Minister for Public Administration Farhad Hossain was present.

Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal joined the event virtually to greet the winners for fiscal 2019-20. NBR Chairman Abu Hena Md Rahmatul Muneem chaired the event.

"This recognition will inspire

us to feel an obligation that we are a real partner of the country's development," said SK Bashir Uddin, managing director of Akij Group, one of the largest business houses, after receiving a card on behalf of Sheikh Akij Uddin Limited.

Akij is one of the highest taxpayers out of the 141 taxpayers for last fiscal. It got recognition in

the others category.

In addition to the others category, the NBR honoured a total of 76 individuals and 53 companies as the biggest and compliant taxpayers out of around 25 lakh regular taxpayers who file annual income tax returns.

Shehzad Munim, managing director of British American Tobacco Bangladesh, said businesses got a lot of support during the difficult days of pandemic after receiving the award.

Yasir Azman, chief executive of Grameenphone, said they could resolve a number of disputes in 2020.

Syed Abul Hossain, former communications minister, who became one of the top taxpayers among businessmen, said the recognition will encourage taxpayers to pay more taxes.

At the event, the tax authority also honoured Md Kaus Mia, who has been topping the position of highest taxpayers for a decade. It awarded Laila Hussain, another highest taxpayer in the women's category.

Among companies, the NBR honoured Unilever Bangladesh and Standard Chartered Bangladesh.

Field offices of tax honoured the rest of the highest taxpayers in their respective offices yesterday.

## Kamal irked by delays in NBR's automation

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal yesterday expressed his disappointment to the taxmen for failing to keep the promise he made to the prime minister to automate the tax collection system.

"I promised the prime minister and the people that the tax system would be automated soon but there is no progress in the process," he said at a programme organised by the NBR to honour top taxpayers.

Kamal said that despite being the finance minister, he could not automate the National Board of Revenue because of the delays caused by a section of officials of the tax administrator, which is also the implementing agency of the automation system. He also expressed anger at the event that the NBR organises every year at its office in Dhaka to disburse tax cards among the best tax payers.

"I am saying again that the people of the country want to pay tax but we are failing to collect it. Now, we will have to collect the tax money from the people," Kamal added.

The country's tax-GDP ratio has



**AHM Mustafa Kamal**

remained the same at 10 per cent for some years, he said, adding that if tax collection is not improved, the dream of becoming a developed country will remain a dream only.

He urged the NBR officials to stop being lazy and take steps to automate the tax collection system without further delay.

Tax leakage has reduced to some extent thanks to the installation of cash register machines across the country, he said while asking the NBR to instal more such machines to boost revenue collection.

## Bangladesh, Maldives look to enhance trade

### Will sign MoUs soon, says foreign ministry

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh and Maldives will establish two regular consultation mechanisms as the two South Asian nations aim to boost cooperation on trade and business.

The two mechanisms include a joint commission for comprehensive cooperation led by the respective foreign ministers and annual foreign office consultations led by the respective foreign secretaries.

The two countries also agreed to establish a direct shipping line through a shipping agreement to further increase bilateral trade.

READ MORE ON B3



## We Mourn

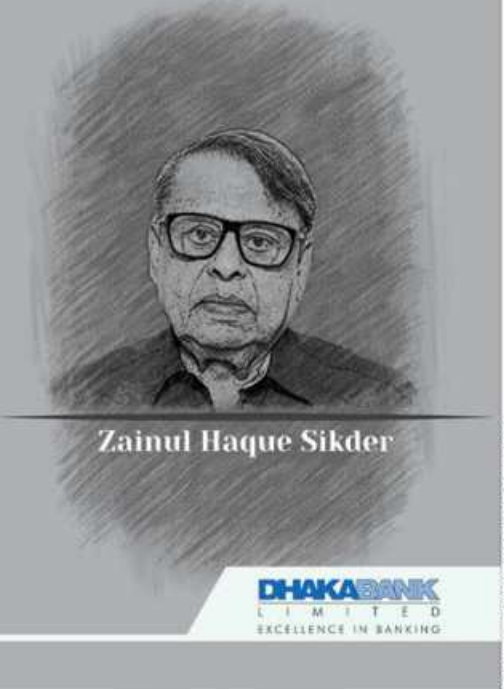
We deeply mourn the sad demise of valiant freedom fighter Zainul Haque Sikder. It is an irreparable loss for the country and business community.

He was one of the renowned business personalities of the country. He founded National Bank Ltd. and Sikder Group. His farsighted vision has taken Sikder Group to the pinnacle of success.

Dhaka Bank family is profoundly shocked at the demise of Zainul Haque Sikder and pray for the eternal salvation of his departed soul.

May The Almighty Allah give strength and sabr to the family to bear the loss.

www.dhakabanktd.com



**Zainul Haque Sikder**

**DHAKA BANK LIMITED**  
EXCELLENCE IN BANKING

Specialized Loss Bureau/Dhaka Bank/February 2021



# Over 40pc Britons struggling financially amid pandemic, says UK regulator

REUTERS, London

More than 40 percent of Britons are struggling financially or suffering poor health, a sharp increase from last year driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, Britain's Financial Conduct Authority said on Thursday.

The FCA said there are now 27.7 million adults in Britain affected by low financial resilience, poor health or other recent negative life events, up from 24 million in February 2020, a month before the country went into its first lockdown to fight the pandemic. Britain's total population is 67 million.

Having just one of the characteristics puts a consumer at greater risk of harm, the FCA said in the latest findings of its regular Financial Lives survey.

The survey contacted 16,000 people between August 2019 and February 2020, with a follow up survey of 22,000 people in October last year.

Consumers with too much debt to manage or low levels of savings or erratic earnings rose from 10.7 million to 14.2 million during 2020, the FCA said.

Over 13 million people are expected to struggle to make ends meet, with many saying they are expected to take on more debt, cut back on essentials, or use a food bank, it said.

"The pain is not being shared equally with a higher than average proportion of younger and BAME adults becoming vulnerable since March," said Nisha Arora, the



REUTERS/FILE

## Consumers with too much debt to manage or low levels of savings or erratic earnings rose from 10.7 million to 14.2 million during 2020 in Britain.

FCA's director of consumer and retail policy.

"It is likely the picture will have got worse since we conducted the survey," she said.

To ease the financial pain of COVID-19, which caused the worst economic slump in 300 years, the government told banks to offer payment "holidays" lasting many months on mortgages, credit cards and other forms of credit.

One in six mortgage borrowers or 3.2 million people took up a payment deferral.

The expiry of relief measures this year is likely to trigger more financial difficulties for people, with Bank of England Deputy Governor Sam Woods warning last week that the worst was yet to come for banks, which had provided the measures.

Finance minister Rishi Sunak is under pressure to do more to protect the economy and fund the fight against Covid-19 in his March 3 budget, having already increased spending and cut taxes by over 280 billion pounds (\$385 billion).

# Shell to invest \$5-6b annually in green energy

AFP, London

Anglo-Dutch oil giant Shell will invest up to \$6 billion (4.9 billion euros) per year in green energy after its oil output peaked in 2019, the group said Thursday.

The energy major outlined extra cash for biofuels, electric car charging and renewables and said the group's crude oil production was gradually declining.

"Shell today set out its strategy to accelerate its transformation into a provider of net-zero emissions energy products and services," it said in a statement.

The company "confirmed its expectation that total carbon emissions for the company peaked in 2018, and oil production peaked in 2019".

Energy companies worldwide are accelerating plans to transition into greener energy, which demands big investments at a time when the oil majors are looking to make sizeable savings.

"Our accelerated strategy will drive down carbon emissions and will deliver value for our shareholders, our customers and wider society," Shell chief executive Ben van Beurden said. "We must give our customers the

products and services they want and need -- products that have the lowest environmental impact. "At the same time, we will use our established strengths to build on our competitive portfolio as we make the transition to be a net-zero emissions business in step with society," van Beurden added.

The update came one week after Shell posted huge annual losses as the coronavirus pandemic slashed energy demand and prices in 2020.

Shell dived into a net loss of \$21.7 billion (18.1 billion euros) last year as factories shut and planes were grounded.

The Anglo-Dutch group's loss compared with a net profit of \$15.8 billion in 2019.


Shell's results and large job cuts mirrors the situation elsewhere in the energy sector. British rival BP, which is cutting around 10,000 roles, reported a 2020 net loss of \$20.3 billion.

US giant Exxon Mobil suffered an annual loss of \$22.4 billion. Meanwhile French peer Total on Tuesday said it was changing its name to TotalEnergies to reflect a move away from fossil fuels, alongside news it had posted a \$7.2-billion net loss last year.

After lockdowns began to spread towards the end of last year's first quarter, oil prices dropped off a cliff, even briefly turning negative.

Prices have rebounded sharply however to 13-month highs and levels seen before the pandemic took hold.





**Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board**  
Engineering Section  
Rangamati

Memo No. 29.31.0000.011.07.726.18-57, Date: 09-02-2021

**e-Tender Notice**  
(Limited Tendering Method)

This is to notify all concerned that the following tenders have amendment through e-GP Portal:

Tender ID & Package No.	Description	Publication date & closing date
540078 & CHTDB-RANG/2020-2021/221001100-46	Construction of Shree Shree Jagadatri Matrimondir Sadhu Nibas of Rangamati Sadar upazila under CHTDB Rangamati.	09-Feb-2021 09:00 & 25-Feb-2021 12:00
544963 & CHTDB-RANG/2020-2021/221001100-47	Supplying equipment and furniture for Rangamati various media organization under CHTDB Rangamati.	09-Feb-2021 09:00 & 25-Feb-2021 12:00
544968 & CHTDB-RANG-RR/2020-2021/5	Re-construction of road from Jhograbil main road to Thangyapara of Rangamati Sadar upazila under the project of repair of road constructed by CHTDB in various upazila of Rangamati Hill District.	09-Feb-2021 09:00 & 25-Feb-2021 12:00
544970 & CHTDB-RANG/2020-2021/221001100-48	Supplying of furniture and electronics equipment for various media institution of Rangamatizila under CHTDB Rangamati.	09-Feb-2021 09:00 & 25-Feb-2021 12:30
544981 & CHTDB-RANG/2020-2021/221001100-49	Construction of road from Dr. Maniklal Dewan Garden to Oghoiya Monpara at Sapchari union of Rangamati Sadar upazila under CHTDB Rangamati.	09-Feb-2021 09:00 & 25-Feb-2021 12:30

The interested firms/persons may visit the website: [www.eprocure.gov.bd](http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) to get the details of the tender. This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk ([helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd](mailto:helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd)).

SD/-  
**Md. Mozibul Alam**  
Executive Engineer  
Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board  
Rangamati

GD-291

## ArcelorMittal names founder's son new CEO

AFP, Luxembourg

Steel giant ArcelorMittal announced Thursday that Aditya Mittal, the son of company founder Lakshmi Mittal, will replace him as the group's chairman and CEO.

The elder Mittal will become executive chairman of the Luxembourg-based company while the younger, currently chief financial officer, will run the management team.

The announcement came as the company said it had reduced its net loss in 2020 by a factor of three to \$733 million, even though sales dropped by a quarter.

Despite the worldwide coronavirus slump, ArcelorMittal returned to profit in the fourth quarter of last year.

Looking forward to 2021, the company expects global steel demand to increase by between 4.5 and 5.5 percent, after it dropped by one percent in 2020.

Lakshmi Mittal said he was proud of the group's performance and that he was pleased to be handing on the reins "in a position of relative strength."

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh  
Department of Immigration and Passports (IP)  
Agargaon, Dhaka-1207  
[www.dip.gov.bd](http://www.dip.gov.bd)

### Invitation for Expression of Interest (EOI)

1. Ministry/ Division	Security Service Division, Ministry of Home Affairs
2. Agency	Department of Immigration and Passports
3. Procuring Entity Name	Director General
4. Procuring Entity Code	N/A
5. Procuring Entity District	Dhaka, Bangladesh
6. Expression of interest for selection of	Selection of service provider to collect printed passports from Personalization center Uttara and Agargaon, Dhaka and distribute those to Bangladesh Missions (BM) in abroad.
7. EOI Ref No	58.01.0000.102.07.035.19.86 . Date: 11/02/2021
8. Date	Dispatch Date: 11/02/2021
9. Procurement Method	Least. Cost Based Selection (LCBS)
10. Budget and source of Funds	Government of Bangladesh (GoB)
11. Development Partners (if applicable)	None
12. Project/Program Code (if applicable)	Not applicable
13. Project/Program Name (if applicable)	Not applicable
14. EOI Closing Date and Time	(21-days)- 03/03/2021, 12.00 noon

#### Key information

15. Brief Description of Assignment	The objectives of the EOI is to select a reliable and International experienced postal/courier service provider that would collect printed passports from personalization Centre at Uttara and Agargaon, Dhaka and distribute those to 81 Bangladesh Missions (BM) in abroad. Name of the Bangladesh Missions are: 1) Ankara, Turkey, 2) Beijing, China, 3) Birmingham, UK, 4) Colombo, Sri Lanka 5) Kathmandu, Nepal, 6) Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 7) London, UK, 8) Manchester, UK 9) Muscat, Oman, 10) New Delhi, India, 11) Rabat, Morocco, 12) Berlin, Germany, 13) Brussels, Belgium, 14) Doha, Qatar, 15) Calcutta, India, 16) Male, Maldives, 17) Moscow, Russia, 18) Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 19) The Hague, Netherlands, 20) Tripoli, Libya, 21) Washington, USA, 22) Tokyo, Japan, 23) Paris, France, 24) Los Angeles, USA 25) Bangkok, Thailand, 26) Brunei, 27) Cairo, Egypt, 28) Canberra, Australia, 29) Hanoi, Vietnam, 30) Jakarta, Indonesia, 31) Thimphu, Bhutan, 32) Seoul, South Korea, 33) Singapore, 34) Stockholm, Sweden, 35) Pretoria, South Africa, 36) Agartala, India, 37) Amman, Jordan, 38) Islamabad, Pakistan, 39) Jeddah, KSA, 40) Karachi, Pakistan, 41) Manama, Bahrain, 42) Rome, Italy, 43) Riyadh, KSA 44) Tehran, Iran, 45) Abu Dhabi, UAE, 46) Hong Kong, 47) Kuwait, 48) Madrid, Spain, 49) Manila, Philippine, 50) Nairobi, Kenya, 51) New York, USA 52) Ottawa, Canada, 53) Yangon, Myanmar, 54) Istanbul, Turkey, 55) Milan, Italy, 56) Baghdad, Iraq, 57) Athens, Greece, 58) Kabul, Afghanistan 59) Freetown, Sierra Leone , 60) Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 61) Bucharest, Romania, 62) Vienna, Austria, 63) Warsaw, Poland, 64) Copenhagen, Denmark, 65) Mumbai, India, 66) Abuja, Nigeria, 67) Kunming, China, 68) Port Luis, Mauritius, 69) Lisbon, Portugal, 70) Beirut, Lebanon, 71) Mexico City, Mexico, 72) Algiers, Algeria, 73) Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 74) Chennai, India, 75) Guwahati, India, 76) Sydney, Australia, 77) Florida, USA 78) Khartoum, Sudan, 79) Geneva, Switzerland, 80) Dubai, UAE, 81) Toronto, Canada.
16. Experience, Resources and Delivery	<p><b>Services to be delivered:</b></p> <p>The services include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) To collect passports from personalization Centre at Uttara and Agargaon Department of Immigration and passports (DIP), Dhaka and deliver intact packets which contained printed passports to respective Bangladesh mission in abroad.</li> <li>2) To provide different sizes of packets to Personalization Center for packing printed passports as per DIP requirement.</li> <li>3) Service provider will attach tag at proper level in the front side of the packets.</li> <li>4) Service provider will provide proper secured vehicle for carrying passports.</li> <li>5) Service provider will provide proper security during carrying and delivery of passports to the Bangladesh Missions.</li> <li>6) Service provider will bear all expenses for carrying and clearing from respective customs department of concern countries.</li> <li>7) Service provider will have sufficient and skilled manpower for service delivery.</li> <li>8) In case of miss delivery, the service provider will recollect passport and deliver to proper Mission at their own cost without charging any extra fee.</li> <li>9) Service provider will provide sufficient access in favor of concerned DIP/Mission official to the system deployed for this purpose.</li> <li>10) Service provider will maintain the collection and delivery system throughout the contract period and hand over the system after the end of the contract.</li> <li>11) Service provider will response real time basis to DIP/Mission's authorized personnel on any queries related to shipment and delivery of passports.</li> <li>12) Online tracking system shall be established at DIP by service provider for getting information about Shipment and delivery status at any passport.</li> <li>13) 24*7 call center services should be in place in Bangladesh, to get any information which is required by DIP &amp; BM.</li> <li>14) Service provider shall deliver passport to the concerned Bangladesh Mission within 48-96 hrs. from the receiving time at DIP.</li> <li>15) All relevant expenses including vat and customs duty for the purpose of service delivery shall be borne by the service provider.</li> <li>16) Service charge will be deducted at certain percentage mentioned in the particular condition of the contract for the delay of delivering services from bill of service provider.</li> <li>17) In case of passport missing, service provider will compensate equivalent to passport fee and carrying charge.</li> </ol>
17. Other Details (if applicable)	Envelope containing the applications (EOI) along with the relevant supporting documents to be marked with Expression of Interest for selection of service provider to collect and deliver printed passports to Bangladesh Missions in abroad..
18. Association with foreign firms	Association with foreign firms may be allowed.
<b>Procuring entity Detail:</b>	
19. Name of Official Inviting Expressions of Interest	Deputy Director (Establishment) For Director General.
20. Designation of Official Inviting Expressions of interest	Deputy Director (Establishment) Department of Immigration & Passports, E-7 Agargaon, Dhaka.
21. Address of Official Inviting Expressions of Interest	E-7, Agargaon, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka, Bangladesh.
22. Contact details of Official Inviting Expressions of interest	Phone: 02-9134011, Fax: +88029123399 <a href="mailto:dadmin@passport.gov.bd">dadmin@passport.gov.bd</a>
23. Place of receiving the EOI	Deputy Director (Establishment), Room No-4006, Department of Immigration and Passports, E-7, Agargaon, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Dhaka, Bangladesh.
24. Special instructions	Total work plan and methodology shall be submitted along with EOI.
Procuring entity reserves the right to reject all EOIs or annul the proceedings.	

  
 (Tariq Salim)  
 Deputy Director (Establishment)  
 For Director General  
 Phone: 02-48119850



# Investors lukewarm on Tesla's \$1.5b bitcoin splurge

REUTERS

Investors in high-flying electric carmaker Tesla Inc are questioning whether Elon Musk's \$1.5 billion outlay into bitcoin will be as good for the company as it has been for the cryptocurrency.

Tesla's disclosure on Monday that it had moved nearly 8 per cent of its reserves into bitcoin sent the price of the cryptocurrency to all-time highs, up more than 16 per cent this week, while Tesla's shares are down nearly 6 per cent.



Elon Musk

"This is better for bitcoin than it is for Tesla."

Gary Black, former chief executive of Aegon Asset Management and now a private investor who has been bullish on Tesla since 2019, on Monday announced here on Twitter that he had sold his Tesla shares.

He cited the absence of a 2021 delivery target

and the company's riskier capital allocation strategy, among other reasons.

Black also tweeted here on Monday: "\$TSLA has always been higher risk, but investing \$1.5B in #Bitcoin makes it more risky." He did not respond to a request for comment.

The difficulty of valuing the notoriously volatile cryptocurrency over the long term was also a cause for concern to investors.

"Elon Musk has exposed Tesla to immense mark-to-market risk," Peter Garnry, head of equity strategy at Saxo Bank, wrote in a research note, referring to an accounting method designed to measure the fair value of accounts -- assets and liabilities -- in order to provide a measure of current financial performance.

Tesla did not respond to a request for comment. Garnry also wrote that investors with concentrated positions in Tesla, such as ARK Invest, are at risk. Tesla is the top holding of the flagship ARK Innovation Fund ark-funds.com/arkk#holdings, representing 8.75 per cent of the portfolio.

# Uber posts big loss as pandemic clobbers ridesharing

AFP, San Francisco

Uber on Wednesday reported another hefty loss in the final three months of 2020, though the company's food delivery operations partly offset the hit taken from the decline in ridesharing during the pandemic.

Thanks to that offset, the loss of \$968 million was narrowed slightly from \$1.1 billion in the same period a year earlier, according to Uber.

Revenue in the quarter was \$3.2 billion, a 16-percent decrease from the same period a year earlier. "While 2020 certainly tested our resilience, it also dramatically accelerated our capabilities in local commerce," Uber chief executive Dara Khosrowshahi said.

Uber said its "mobility" segment, which includes ride-hailing, was down 52 percent from a year earlier, while its delivery operations -- including its Uber Eats meal service -- saw a revenue jump of 224 percent.

This has the potential to be a "banner year" for Uber, as vaccination programs get people back to summoning rides and the company expands its delivery of alcohol and groceries as well as take-away restaurant meals, according to eMarketer analyst Eric Haggstrom.

Uber early this month announced it was acquiring Drizly, a startup specializing in delivery of beer, wine and spirits, for some \$1.1 billion and would integrate it with Uber Eats.

The two firms said Drizly, which operates in some 1,400 US municipalities and one Canadian province, would become a subsidiary of Uber and that its services would be available via Uber Eats as well as the separate Drizly app.

Uber last year introduced a grocery delivery service through another acquisition, Cornershop. "Uber's continued expansion

into alcohol and grocery delivery will help capture even more consumer spending in two large, rapidly digitizing markets," Haggstrom said.

Khosrowshahi was optimistic about the road ahead for Uber, expecting new users won by its restaurant meal delivery service would become ride-share customers after pandemic lifestyle restrictions ease.

"We have proven in big markets in Brazil and Australia that as these markets open up the mobility business comes back, and it will start growing again," Khosrowshahi said on an earnings call. "There is no doubt in my mind that in 2022 and 2023 our mobility business will grow at substantial, double digit rates." Khosrowshahi has lobbied for Uber drivers to be made part of the Covid-19 vaccination effort, being given inoculations and then providing rides in the broader effort.

Daniel Ives at Wedbush Securities said the results represent "another major step in the right direction" and suggest an improving picture as Uber emerges from the pandemic.

"The company is clearly seeing a rebound in ridesharing metrics and coupled with a leaner expense structure is setting a stage for snapback in growth and profitability," Ives said in a research note. Uber has been buckling down endure the pandemic.

The San Francisco-based firm sold its air transport unit to flying taxi maker Joby Aviation in a deal that closed last month.

Joby acquired Uber expertise and software, and the ability to offer its all-electric, vertical take-off and landing passenger aircraft on the ride-hailing giant's app.

While financial terms of the deal were not disclosed, they included Uber investing \$75 million into Santa Cruz-based Joby, which has said it hopes to have its flying taxis in operation as early as 2023.

# Administrator appointed to Delta Life Ins

FROM PAGE B1

The notice asked the company why its board of directors should not be suspended for four months and an administrator appointed. A reply was sought within January 28, 2021.

The IDRA extended the deadline to February 11 following a prayer of the company.

But the insurer finally informed that it would file a writ petition rather than provide an explanation to the IDRA, said the letter over the administrator's appointment.

But the High Court will not hear the petition and so it is a responsibility of the IDRA to take up the initiative of issuing a show-cause notice abiding by the insurance act, the letter said.

According to the insurance act 2010, there are many reasons validating such an appointment of the IDRA for managing an insurer.

"If an insurer carrying on insurance business is acting in a manner likely to be prejudicial to the interest of holders of insurance policies or failing to fulfil the solvency margin requirements..." reads one reason.

"...in this case, it may, after giving opportunity to the insurer to be heard, suspend the Board of Directors and appoint an Administrator to manage the affairs of the insurer under the direction and control of the Authority," it says.

Last year the IDRA had suspended the board of directors of BAIRA Life Insurance Company and appointed an administrator.

The Delta administrator will run an audit

through a renowned firm and an actuary firm along with continuing to run the business. The administrator will also have to submit a report to the IDRA within four months, reads the appointment letter.

"The government gave me the responsibility to protect policyholders' interests," said Mollah in a press briefing yesterday.

The appointment is a result of the company not assisting the IDRA-appointed auditors and the subsequent audits finding the rule and regulation breaches, he said.

"To submit the IDRA report, we will appoint two leading auditors," he said, adding "Our activities will help protect interests of policyholders and shareholders."

In another press briefing last Sunday, former Delta CEO Adeeba Rahman said they had "objections on the auditor's findings".

Moreover, one auditor is not enlisted with Bangladesh Bank, she said.

In the meeting, the insurance company accused IDRA Chairman M Mosharraf Hossain of demanding Tk 50 lakh in bribes in exchange for approving the reappointment of the company's CEO and refraining from appointing an administrator.

The insurer filed this complaint with Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) on December 7, 2020 alleging the bribe demand and sent another letter to the commission on December 9 alleging that Hossain was pressing for it.

Afterwards, Hossain filed a general diary

with Motijheel Police Station stating that one official of the insurance company tried to bribe him and that all recordings of mobile conversations provided as evidence had been tampered with.

The chairman also filed a court case against six Delta officials. The court had ordered the Police Bureau of Investigation to investigate the case and submit a report last Wednesday. Sources said it was yet to be complied with.

DELTA VAT EVASION CASE

A team led by Saima Parveen, the directorate's assistant director, investigated the insurance company's financial transactions from January 2013 to December 2017 based on specific allegations of VAT evasion, said the directorate in a statement.

Afterwards, the team prepared a report by verifying data obtained from copies of treasury invoices and other documents submitted by the institution at different times, it said.

During the period, the company was found to have evaded paying VAT of Tk 35.17 crore, including tax.

The investigation team further said to have unearthed that the company resorted to various forms of fraud and deception to refrain from paying the VAT, which is a punishable offence under the VAT act.

The administrator, Sultan-ul-Abidin Mollah, said he was yet to know of the case and would take steps after consultation with the IDRA and lawyers.

# Bangladesh, Maldives look to enhance trade

FROM PAGE B1

Necessary memorandums of understanding (MoUs) will be signed during Maldives President Ibrahim Solih's visit to Dhaka in March to join the celebrations of the birth centenary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the golden jubilee of the independence of Bangladesh.

These decisions were taken at a meeting between Bangladesh Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen and his Maldivian counterpart, Abdullah Shahid, during the latter's visit to Dhaka between February 8-11 at the invitation of Bangladesh, according to a joint communique issued by the foreign ministry yesterday.

Maldivian foreign minister held a meeting with his Bangladeshi counterpart, paid courtesy calls to President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and visited the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum during his stay.

Maldives is home to some 90,000 Bangladeshi migrants, a large portion of who are undocumented, while there are also a good number of Maldivian students in Bangladesh.

The average volume of the country's exports to Maldives is \$6 million while imports amount to \$50 million. The two countries want to augment their cooperation on climate issues, tourism, trade and human resources development.

Momen proposed to regularly hold commerce secretary level meetings between Bangladesh and Maldives in order to address trade issues in detail, comprising representatives from various line ministries. The Maldives side welcomed the proposal.

He also expressed Bangladesh's interest to sign a preferential trade agreement (PTA) with Maldives within the purview of WTO provisions, with a view to harnessing the trade potential.

He called upon the Maldives side to source world-class healthcare,

garments, processed food, agro products, household appliances, construction materials, eco-friendly jute, leather, plastic, ceramic and light-engineering products from Bangladesh at competitive prices.

He also sought Maldivian investment in a joint package on tourism and suggested collaboration for market development, sharing of best practices and exchange of expert tour operators between the two countries.

The minister particularly urged for the promotion of coastal and river tourism between Male, the capital of Maldives, and Chattogram.

He expressed Bangladesh's willingness to offer training courses to the UN peacekeepers of Maldives in Bangladesh.

The two sides stressed on supporting each other in different negotiating platforms on climate change and implementing the Paris Agreement as well.

Migrant welfare The Bangladeshi minister asked Maldives to regularise the remaining undocumented Bangladeshi expatriates at an accelerated pace.

In response, the Maldivian minister Shahid said the goal of the regularisation programme that began in 2019 is to legalise and provide jobs to those who wish to stay in Maldives while assisting those who wish to return to home voluntarily.

He said that undocumented workers are vulnerable to violation of their rights and requested Bangladesh to facilitate the repatriation of Bangladeshis who wish to return.

Shahid said a moratorium on recruitment of new unskilled workers may be in place until the regularisation of existing undocumented expatriates was completed.

However, Maldives would continue to welcome skilled workers from Bangladesh as before.

He also proposed signing an MoU to resolve the challenges of migrant workers between the two countries. Bangladesh's side agreed to hold internal stakeholder consultations on the matter.

Momen then suggested the recruitment of Bangladeshis through agencies nominated by the government and endorsed by the Bangladesh High Commission in Male.

The Maldives side took a positive note on the suggestion.

Shahid thanked the government of Bangladesh for the support provided to Maldives amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, including the deployment of a medical team from Bangladesh to help Maldives in its efforts to combat the crisis.

Meanwhile, Momen appreciated Maldives' decision to vaccinate all expatriates free of cost.

## Bida widens coverage for investors

FROM PAGE B4

Addressing the signing ceremony, Bida Executive Chairman Md Sirazul Islam urged the service providers to bring a change to their "authoritative mindset" when providing service to investors.

He said investors were playing an important role in developing the economy while the government organisations were solely providing policy support to promote them.

"Bida is dedicated to providing an effective and efficient One Stop Service as part of its overall effort to simplify the processes investors must follow to do business in Bangladesh," said Islam.

"We are working closely with our partners to achieve the target of delivering 154 services of 35 agencies through the One Stop Service," he added.

create tremendous pressure for the banking industry in the days ahead as they will find it difficult to keep assets of a strong quality.

Ensuring corporate governance will highly be important in tackling the pressure stemming from defaulted loans, according to analysts.

Salehuddin Ahmed, a former governor of the central bank, said habitual defaulters should be barred from rescheduling delinquent loans.

"Wilful defaulters frequently misuse the facility to take fresh loans," he said.

# Tk 12,140cr defaulted loans rescheduled, written-off

FROM PAGE B1

The banking industry has been struggling to rein in the defaulted loans for a couple of years because of poor corporate governance.

Defaulted loans surged to Tk 116,288 crore in September 2019, prompting the central bank to come up with the relaxed rescheduling policy as per government instruction.

Under the policy, defaulters can reschedule classified loans by making a down payment of 2 per cent instead of the existing 10 per cent to 50 per cent.

A maximum 9 per cent interest rate was charged on the rescheduled loans in 2019 instead of 12 per cent to 16 per cent, the rate banks levied at the time. Besides, the repayment tenure was set at 10 years with a one-year grace period.

As a result, a record Tk 50,186 crore of defaulted loans were rescheduled in 2019, halting the rise of the toxic assets for the time being.

The moratorium has also curbed the upward trend of defaulted loans.

Both the relaxed rescheduling facility and the loan moratorium will

## Rabindra University, Bangladesh

### Shahjadpur, Sirajganj

#### Request for Expression of Interest (EOI)

1. Ministry/Division	Ministry of Education	
2. Agency	Rabindra University, Bangladesh	
3. Procuring Entity Name	Planning & Development Office, Rabindra University, Bangladesh, Shahjadpur, Sirajganj.	
4. Procuring Entity Code	Not Applicable	
5. Procuring Entity District	Sirajganj	
6. Expression of Interest for Selection of	Firm for Development, Implementation and Maintenance of Examination Management Information System (EMIS) for Rabindra University, Bangladesh	
7. EOI Ref. No.	বিকাশ/পড়/ই/এম আই/এস সফটওয়্যার ডেভ/১২/২০২১/০৮	
8. Date	11.02.2021	
<b>KEY INFORMATION</b>		
9. Procurement Method	Quality and Cost Based Selection (QCBS)	
<b>FUNDING INFORMATION</b>		
10. Budget and Source of Funds	GOB	
11. Development Partners (if applicable)	Not Applicable	
<b>PARTICULAR INFORMATIONS</b>		
13. Project/Program Code (if applicable)	Not Applicable	
14. Project/Program Name	Not Applicable	
15. Receiving EOI Document	Liaison Office : House : 65/A, (Flat : 5/B), Road : 6/A, Dhanmondi, Dhaka 1209. Rabindra University, Bangladesh	
	<b>Date</b>	<b>Time</b>
16. EOI Closing Date and Time	28.02.2021	3:00 pm
17. EOI Opening Date and Time	28.02.2021	3:30 pm
<b>INFORMATION FOR APPLICANT/VIATION</b>		
16.	Brief Description of the Assignment > To Development, maintain and support of Examinations management and information system (EMIS) to operate examination process automatically according to exam rules and regulation of RUB. > The departments or divisions like VC, Registrar, Exam Controller, student's faculty course evaluator, exam committee etc. stake holder which are involved in all academic evaluations in all subjects of every student will proceed the tasks like internal exam, final exam evaluation and giving certificates through the operation of EMIS. Objectives of the assignment: > To perform all the activities related to the examination of the Controller of Examinations automatically; > To perform the activities related to the official examination with precision and accuracy. > To develop a standard form of Examination Management Information System (EMIS) > To offer a lump sum reimbursable cost of all the abstract and material services.	
17.	Experience, Resources & Delivery Capacity Required: 1. The Consulting Firm (Lead bidder in case of JVCA) must have minimum 10(Ten)years of working experiences on University/College/Educational Institutions' Comprehensive Academic Solution in Bangladesh. 2. Should have successfully executed at least 2 (two) projects of similar nature of work in minimum 2 (two) reputed University/College/Educational Institutions' in Bangladesh in the last 5 (five) years. 3. Must have similar Experience in design, development and implementation of 1 (one) Software Projects for Government Institution, where minimum Project Value is 1(One)Crore taka in last 3 (Three) years. (Completion Certificate must Provide with Proposal). 4. Experience of installing large scale web based Educational Management System/Learning Management System in any one College/University/Educational Institution with minimum 20,000 or more users will be given preference. 5. Live Mobile App of Educational Institute Management System/Exam Management System/Result Management System with minimum 20,000 download will be given preference. 6. Liquid asset/ credit line facility/ free cash fund not less than 50 (fifty) Lakhs. Bank documents in support of liquid asset must be submitted. 7. The Consulting Firm should have BASIS Membership (Must), CMMI Level 3/5 & ISO 9001 Certification is Preferable. 8. The Consulting Firm should have own Server/ rented cloud where Project will be hosted with Remote access facility through public IP. 9. The Consulting Firm must have sufficient personnel capacity (at least 30 full time ICT Personnel ) for execution of the service and development. A complete List of ICT Personnel with Name, designation, years of experience, expertise etc. should be submitted along with the proposal. 10. Must submit valid Trade License, TIN, VAT Certificate along with Audit Reports of previous 2 years and Logistical capabilities of the firm. 11. EOI shall be submitted in sealed envelope, delivered to the address of the undersigned. The Firm must submit 01 (One) Original + 01 (One) Copy of the EOI Proposal. 12. The Procuring Entity reserves the right to accept or reject any or all EOI's without assigning any reason whatsoever.	
18.	Others details (if applicable) Not Applicable	
19.	Association with Foreign firms Not Allowed	
<b>PROCURING ENTITY DETAILS</b>		
20.	Name of the Official inviting EOI Md. Sibbi Mahubub	
21.	Designation of the Official inviting EOI Deputy Director (Current Charge) Office of the Planning and Development	
22.	Address of the Official inviting EOI Liaison Office : House : 65/A, (Flat : 5/B), Road : 6/A, Dhanmondi, Dhaka 1209. Campus office: Kandapara, Shahjadpur, Sirajganj.	
23.	Contact Details of the Official inviting EOI Telephone (office) : 0752764207, 01791606815	
24.	The procuring entity shall reserve the right to accept or reject all EOI's.	
25.	Website : www.rub.ac.bd	

Md. Sibbi Mahubub  
Deputy Director (Current Charge)  
Planning and Development Office  
Rabindra University, Bangladesh

GD-298



## ONE STOP SERVICE Bida widens coverage for investors

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (Bida) yesterday signed five memoranda of understanding (MoU) to deliver 17 more dedicated services on its website to fast facilitate investors with necessities to implement their projects.

The MoUs were inked with the Bangladesh Fire Service and Civil Defence, Directorate of Registration, Dhaka WASA, Bangladesh Telecommunications Company and Jalalabad Gas Transmission and Distribution System at the Bida auditorium in Dhaka.

Launched on February 24 in 2019, Bida's One Stop Service (OSS) web portal had been providing 41 information-related services until now.

The dedicated services are all part of ongoing reforms for Bangladesh to rise to a double-digit spot from the current three-digit one in the World Bank's ease of doing business index.

Bangladesh had first advanced one place to take up the 176th position in the 2019 assessment before making a jump to become 168th among 190 countries in the 2020 index.

READ MORE ON B3



# Tea gardens opt for new pruning method as harvest begins

MINTU DESHWARA

With winter coming to an end, farmers have begun to harvest their tea trees. As a result, long rows of leafless shrubs can be seen from a distance at the country's 167 tea gardens.

There are several methods to harvest a tea plant depending on its condition.

For example, a plant is either heavily, moderately or slightly pruned according to its age and productivity in order to ensure quality as well as maximise yields.

Recently though, a new method of pruning has gained traction among rented tea gardens, where one branch is left untouched instead of pruning the whole tree.

This is done to control the plant's growth and shape.

Experienced tea workers were seen engaged in this form of pruning at the Baramchal Tea Garden in Kulaura upazila of Moulvibazar district.

During a recent visit to the plantation, Agnu Das, the garden's head of staff, who are called Sardar in Bangla, was seen directing his workers on how to perform pruning.

Asked about the process, Das said each tree is roughly 40 inches long and pruning is done up to 26-30 inches. However, young tree plants are pruned less; up to 16-18 inches.

The age of each tree varied from section to section with some being between 5 to 10 years old.

Meanwhile, another Sardar, Mohan Gonju, said some of the trees were between 20 to 50 years old.

When a tea tree reaches the age of 60 though, then it loses its production capacity and must be removed to make way for new



There are several methods to harvest tea plants depending on their condition. Plants are either heavily, moderately or slightly pruned according to their age and productivity in order to ensure quality and maximise yields.

PHOTO: STAR

## Sonia Bashir joins Dell's CXO advisory board

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Tech giant Dell Technologies has appointed Sonia Bashir Kabir to its Asia Pacific & Japan (APJ) CXO advisory board. Twenty-two members across Asia have been chosen to join Dell's APJ CXO advisory board.

The appointment was confirmed on February 4, according to a press release.

The CXO advisory board is an engagement platform for select senior leaders representing a range of industries and verticals that collaborate together with executives from Dell Technologies to explore business, cultural and technology issues with the goals of advancing technology, solving business problems, and furthering business value for each of the board's members.

READ MORE ON B3



Sonia Bashir Kabir

*Recently a new method of pruning has gained traction among rented tea gardens, where one branch is left untouched instead of pruning the whole tree. This is done to control the plant's growth and shape.*

saplings, he added.

About 50 workers are currently engaged in pruning at the Baramchal Tea Garden, where a single worker prunes 150 saplings daily.

The different forms of pruning come in various names, like Collar Prune, Medium Prune and Light Prune.

Shah Alam, chairman of the Bangladesh Tea Sangsad, an association of tea garden owners, told this correspondent that leaving a single branch untouched on the plant is known as the Breather method.

This method involves placing an extra branch on the trees that are pruned 24 inches from the

ground.

The benefit of this method is that it allows the plant to continue receiving essential nutrients from the sun through photosynthesis.

Dr Mohammad Ali, director of the Bangladesh Tea Research Institute, said when new buds form a month after pruning the bush, the extra twigs left from before are cut off.

"It is unlikely that these young tea plants will die since they get a chance to grow completely new leaves," he added.

Ali went on to say that the necessary irrigation arrangements should be taken into consideration after pruning.

## GLOBAL BUSINESS

# German govt angers farmers with new insect protection bill

AFP, Frankfurt Am Main

The German government on Wednesday proposed legislation to halt a dramatic decline in insect populations, but drew immediate fire from farmers who said the new measures threatened their livelihoods.

The "insect protection" law, which aims to restrict the use of pesticides, is the result of two years of wrangling within Chancellor Angela Merkel's coalition government.

Hundreds of farmers drove their tractors into central Berlin this week to protest against the legislation, which still needs to pass through parliament. "No farmers, no food, no future"

read a sign fixed to a tractor demonstrating near Berlin's Brandenburg Gate on Tuesday.

The policy package's flagship measure is the phasing out of the controversial weedkiller glyphosate by the end of 2023.

It also bans the use of herbicides and insecticides in national parks and includes rules for reducing light pollution at night.

"People can't live without insects," said Environment Minister Svenja Schulze, calling the law "good news for insects and the future of our ecosystems".

The legislation also limits the use of pesticides near major bodies of water, but the final version of the text leaves it up to Germany's individual

states to set out detailed requirements.

Agriculture Minister Julia Klöckner said some crops grown in protected areas would be exempt from the tougher rules, and there would be exception for vineyards.

But the president of the German Farmers Association (DBV), Joachim Rukwied, slammed the plans as "shortsighted" and a "bad signal for the cooperation between the agricultural industry and nature conservationists". "The legislation poses an existential risk to many farming families," he said.

German environmental group BUND welcomed the law. "Every kilo of pesticide saved, every square kilometre of pesticide-free land and every light source saved are positive for insects and nature," it said in a statement.

Biologists have long warned that plummeting insect populations impact species diversity and damage the ecosystem by disrupting natural food chains and plant pollination.

A 2017 study in Germany was one of the first to raise global alarm about the loss of insects. It found that the biomass of flying insects across German nature reserves had declined by more than 75 percent in 27 years, triggering warnings of an "ecological apocalypse".

The gulf between farmers and environmentalists has widened in Europe's top economy in recent years, where nature protection has shot to the top of the political agenda, partly spurred by the Fridays for Future strikes.

The opposition Green party now regularly comes second in opinion polls after Merkel's conservative bloc, and it could well end up in a coalition government following September's general election. The shift in the public mood has spurred Merkel's government to act on animal welfare, leading to recent pledges to stop the culling of male chicks and end the practice of castrating piglets without anaesthetic.



AFP/FILE

Hundreds of farmers drove their tractors into central Berlin to protest against the government's 'insect protection' draft law.

## RCEP unlikely to benefit developing members in short term: analysts

REUTERS

The Regional Cooperation Economic Partnership (RCEP) is unlikely to bring immediate significant benefits for its developing member countries in terms of flow of goods and services or major infrastructure investments, analysts and economists said.

The pact needs to be ratified by all countries, which may take time, and has different levels of tariff reductions for each country and product, the experts told the Reuters Global Markets Forum.

That means labour-intensive countries may get more imports than exports, particularly during the pandemic, over the short-term.

The RCEP is seen as a China-backed alternative to the U.S.-led Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).

The pact has no provisions to improve

within the region.

"(RCEP) helps to harmonize the rules of origin when trading within the region ... so long as inputs of a product are imported from RCEP members, the product will (qualify) for tariff waiver," Yao said.

Based on this, Yao predicted Vietnam, Indonesia and Malaysia to benefit the most in the long term.

China's large global footprint in digital technology and services along with its "Made in China 2025" strategy, which prioritises 10 key sectors including robotics, aerospace and clean-energy cars, will likely help it take advantage of these shifting supply chains.

Joanna Konings, senior international trade economist at ING, said the "Made in China 2025" strategy is aiding Chinese production move up value chains, while holding on to low value-added activity through automation.

The RCEP pact makes it easier for



REUTERS/FILE

A man walks past stack of shipping containers in Singapore.

labour rights in member countries, which has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic to justify reductions in formal wages and conditions, said Kate Lappin, Asia Pacific regional secretary at Public Services International.

"The agreement might not be good for governments and workers, but still deliver profits for foreign investors," Lappin said.

Lappin said she expected RCEP to benefit countries with developed industrial policies - namely China, Japan, Korea and Australia, along with New Zealand in terms of agricultural products - that support growth of higher value industries.

Aidan Yao, senior emerging Asia economist at AXA Investment Managers, said a long-term positive will likely be businesses building supply chain networks

Chinese companies to run regional supply chains more efficiently, said Chris Rogers, research analyst at S&P Global Market Intelligence unit Panjiva.

In return, ASEAN countries get better access to China, South Korea and Japan, and therefore, "the politics and economics are well-balanced," Rogers said.

Rogers said he did not expect RCEP to facilitate a big increase in infrastructure investment, but more corporate investment in supply chains.

Deborah Elms, founder and executive director at the Asian Trade Centre, said she was concerned RCEP did not provide investment protection against government expropriation.

"Given the size of many infrastructure projects, this may be a problem for many firms," she said.

## Oil majors suffer massive losses in 2020

AFP, Paris

Already under pressure due to climate change, the world's top listed oil firms suffered historic losses in 2020 as the Covid-19 pandemic sent demand and prices tumbling.

The oil majors -- BP, Chevron, ExxonMobil, Shell and Total -- suffered \$77 billion in losses for the year.

Shell CEO Ben van Beurden called 2020 an extraordinary year.

Total's Patrick Pouyanné said: "All of us will remember 2020 as a landmark year that brought unexpected challenges and led to significant changes.

"While much of the losses were accounting charges to record the drop in the value of their assets, the drop crude oil prices -- which briefly

turned negative in 2020 for the first time ever -- caused real pain.

The spread of the coronavirus and the lockdowns meant to slow it caused massive slowdowns in economic activity, with international air travel coming to a near standstill.

This dampened demand and as oil producing nations didn't immediately cut production, crude prices plummeted.

The crisis called further into question the financial model of the oil majors, which already face a longer-term threat from a shift away from fossil fuels to combat climate change.

S&P Global Ratings said last month that it "believes the energy transition, price volatility, and weaker profitability are increasing risks for oil and gas producers.

"It placed the shares of Chevron, ExxonMobil, Shell, Total as well as the Chinese oil company CNOOC on watch for a ratings downgrade.

The oil majors "are skating on ever-thinning ice as the effects of climate change combine with other events like the Covid-19 pandemic" said Professor David Elmes at the Warwick Business School. "The pressure to diversify is rising," he added.

European oil majors have recognised this and have begun to diversify their operations including investing in renewable energy despite their efforts cut costs.

Total even plans to change its name to TotalEnergies to better reflect its involvement in various energy sources. The move follows Norway's Statoil rebranding itself Equinor.

Renewable energies offer more stable revenue than oil and gas, which are volatile.