

## 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.

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# 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



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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.

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Sonia Bashir Kabir

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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.