

STOCKS		COMMODITIES		ASIAN MARKETS				CURRENCIES			
DSEX	CSCX	Gold	Oil	MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI	USD	EUR	GBP	CNY
▲ 0.50%	▲ 0.40%	\$1,715.12	\$65.25	▼ 1.16%	▼ 2.13%	▲ 0.48%	▼ 2.05%	BUY TK 83.95	100.12	116.13	12.73
5,515.78	9,633.17	(per ounce)	(per barrel)	50,846.08	28,930.11	3,014.78	3,503.49	SELL TK 84.95	103.92	119.93	13.39



# Star BUSINESS

DHAKA FRIDAY MARCH 5, 2021, FALGUN 20, 1427 BS • starbusiness@thedailystar.net

## Cut cost of doing business to compete in post-LDC era

Says CPD at a dialogue

Among the 12 graduating LDCs, Bangladesh to face highest rise in tariffs  
Export losses will be equivalent to about 14.3% of a country's total export

### WHAT IS NEEDED

- Aggressive drive for plurilateral and mega-regional agreements
- Raise price-competitiveness through reduced costs of production
- A Technology Upgradation Fund may be created
- Attract FDI



Mustafizur Rahman, a distinguished fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), speaks at a dialogue on "Moving out from the LDC group: Strategies for graduation with momentum", organised by the CPD yesterday.

### STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh needs to reduce the cost of doing business locally to be more competitive globally in the post-LDC era as the country will face duties on exports because of the erosion of trade privileges, said a noted economist yesterday.

"Local businessmen will have to be facilitated by offsetting costs in the domestic markets so that

they can remain competitive in the international markets even after graduation from the LDC," said Mustafizur Rahman, a distinguished fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD).

As immediate measures, Bangladesh should also make a partnership with some major trading partners such as Canada, Japan, China and India to extend preferential market access similar to the EU, both bilaterally and as a member of the graduating

least-developed countries, he said. The EU will continue duty privileges for three years more after 2026.

China is giving a similar kind of duty privilege to Samoa even after its graduation as Beijing has a special agreement with the island country, according to Rahman.

Bangladesh should negotiate with the major trading partners for extending the tenure at least for five years. If it is not possible, the tenure should be for at least three years like that offered by the EU, he said.

"Similarly, Bangladesh should aggressively pursue signing of Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement with India to receive and give duty privileges," Rahman said.

READ MORE ON B3

## Govt launches national app store

### STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The government yesterday launched a national mobile application store in a bid to encourage local developers.

Mobile operator Robi will be the technology partner for the locally developed platform, which currently has over 12,000 developers, around 20 per cent of whom are women.

Around 23,000 apps are available there now. Besides, the platform offers developers the scope to upload their applications for free, unlike Google's Play Store and Apple's App Store.

In the last five years, BD Apps has disbursed more than Tk 55 crore among its developers to facilitate a self-sustaining platform for locally made mobile applications.

Through the platform, around 300 developers are now earning roughly Tk 30,000 a month while the amount is hitting as high as Tk 2 lakh for some.

State Minister for ICT Zunaid Ahmed Palak declared BD Apps as the country's official application store during a deal signing ceremony between Robi and the ICT Division at the latter's office in Dhaka yesterday.

"From now on, any app developer, be it an organisation or a network

READ MORE ON B3

## Alibaba aims big as it enters local food delivery market

### MAHMUDUL HASAN

Alibaba has entered Bangladesh's burgeoning food delivery market by purchasing HungryNaki, the country's first on-demand delivery platform, demonstrating the Chinese multinational's ongoing efforts to grab a bigger share of the local e-commerce market.

Officials of Daraz, a concern of Alibaba Group, and HungryNaki yesterday announced that the former had taken over all of the latter's tangible and intangible assets for an undisclosed amount.

HungryNaki will continue to function as usual with its existing employees as a separate brand with an independent food delivery platform owned by Daraz.

The development comes at a time when the local food delivery is expanding rapidly but still remains largely untapped.

Daraz, which has operations in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Myanmar, was acquired by Alibaba in 2018 in a surprise move.

Alibaba's financial service subsidiary Ant Group also bought a 20 per cent stake in bKash, the largest mobile financial service provider in Bangladesh, in the same year.

Daraz has long been considering a takeover of HungryNaki, even before the Covid-19 pandemic had emerged.

"We aspire to be a one-stop solution for all our customers' needs," said Syed Mostahidul Hoq, managing director of Daraz.

"So, getting into the food delivery business is a natural move," he added.

HungryNaki is the pioneer in food delivery services in Bangladesh and has a loyal customer base.

"Therefore, we believe that instead of building our own delivery business from the ground up, acquiring HungryNaki is ideal considering these two factors," Hoq said.

READ MORE ON B3

### Alibaba.com

- Alibaba acquired Daraz in 2018
- It bought a 20pc stake in bKash the same year
- Invested Tk 500cr in Daraz in 2020
- Purchased HungryNaki through Daraz

### daraz

- Operates all over Bangladesh
- Makes over 65,000 deliveries per day
- Is building a 2.5 lakh square feet sorting centre and 2.5 lakh square feet warehouse

### HungryNaki

- Launched in 2013
- Gained popularity with seamless service
- Faced tough competition from other players since 2018
- Sold its assets to Daraz for an undisclosed amount

### FOOD DELIVERY MARKET

- Annual market size of approximately Tk 1,200cr
- Around 25,000 employed, mainly on a part-time basis
- About 1.1 lakh deliveries per day

## Excess liquidity falls after 8 months

### AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

Excess liquidity in the banking industry that ballooned because of pandemic-induced lower credit demand and an injection of funds under a massive stimulus package fell in January, the first time in eight months.

The surplus liquidity stood at Tk 204,070 crore as of January in contrast to Tk 204,700

crore a month ago.

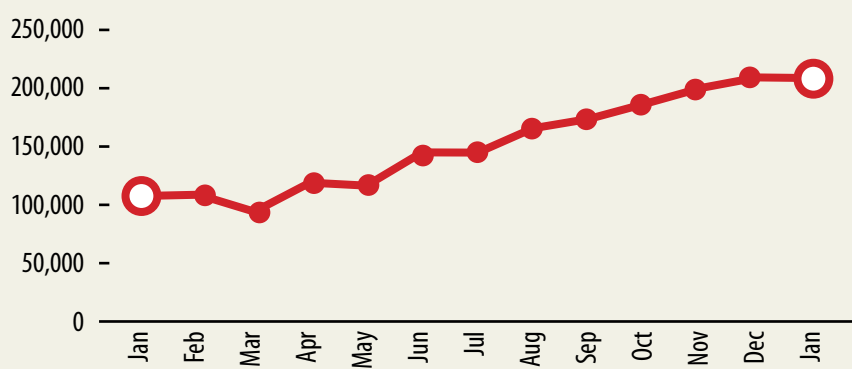
The excess fund, however, surged 97 per cent in January compared to the same month a year ago, when the amount stood at Tk 103,358 crore.

The Daily Star talked to four managing directors of banks and the CEO of a non-banking financial institution to know why the excess liquidity had narrowed.

READ MORE ON B3

### EXCESS LIQUIDITY IN BANKS OVER THE MONTHS

Tk in crore; SOURCE: BB



## Retain undisclosed money investment scope in stock markets

DSE, merchant banks urge NBR

### STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Three associations operating in the financial industry urged the revenue authority to provide tax benefit and policy support in the next fiscal year.

The Bangladesh Association of Banks (BAB), the Bangladesh Insurance Association (BIA), and the Bangladesh Merchant Bankers Association (BMBA) placed the demands at a pre-budget discussion organised by the National Board of Revenue (NBR) at its office.

The BMBA urged the NBR to extend the provision of investing undisclosed income in the stock market for another year.

The Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) also placed its recommendations.

The DSE said the deadline for the investment of undisclosed money in the capital market on payment of 10 per cent tax would expire on June 30.

READ MORE ON B3



## BCI demands 3-year tax holiday for small industries

### STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Bangladesh Chamber of Industries (BCI) yesterday called for tax holiday for the cottage, micro and small industries for three years starting from the next fiscal year to help them grow.

"Later, a tax rate of 10 to 15 per cent could be levied," said BCI President Anwar-Ul Alam Chowdhury during a pre-budget discussion with the National Board of Revenue (NBR).

He placed the budget recommendations on behalf of the chamber at the meeting at the NBR headquarters in the capital. NBR Chairman Abu Hena Md Rahmatul Muneem was present.

Questions should not be asked about the source of funds up to Tk 2 crore to create new entrepreneurs and cottage, small and micro-enterprises, Chowdhury said in a written speech.

All industries should have a tax identification number, and they should be registered with associations, chambers, the SME Foundation or the Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation.

READ MORE ON B3

### BCI calls for

- Withdrawal of tax at source on industrial raw materials imports
- Scrapping of VAT on utilities
- VAT holiday for light engineering manufacturers
- VAT exemption on imports of industrial raw materials
- Reforms on customs and tax structures
- Hiking tax and duty on import of finished products
- Measures to stop under-invoicing, misdeclaration
- Making investment on R&D and skills development tax-free

## IFAD Autos gearing up to enter luxury bus assembly segment

### JAGARAN CHAKMA

IFAD Autos is all set to make a foray into the assembling business as it is now putting together different components to build 160 luxury buses to cater to the domestic market.

"We have been assembling commercial vehicles in our Tk 300 crore plant in Dhamrai since 2017 and we began assembling luxury buses last year," said Taskeen Ahmed, managing director of the company.

Of the 48,126 air-conditioned and non-air-conditioned buses registered with the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority as of February, around 10,000 units were sold by IFAD Autos, occupying 21 per cent of the total market, he said.

Since 1988, IFAD Autos has been distributing commercial vehicles of India's leading automobile manufacturer Ashok Leyland. So far, the company has sold over 60,000 such vehicles.

Ashok Leyland has been providing technical support to the 125-bigha plant of IFAD Autos, which will create a total of 800 jobs, including 500 for mechanical and electrical engineers and technical persons.

"We hope we will be able to meet the



quality standards set by Ashok Leyland," Ahmed said.

Nurul Majid Mahmud Humayun, industries minister, hoped the plant will help in building a bigger market for the local automobile component makers and give a boost to the domestic light engineering sector.

He spoke after opening IFAD's luxury bus assembling unit on the premises of the plant yesterday.

"The demand for luxury buses has been increasing thanks to their growing popularity among the general mass for safe and comfortable travels," Ahmed said.

READ MORE ON B3

## Govt moves to rein in illegal battery recycling

### STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The government has barred the dismantling and burning of batteries for recycling without prior approval from the Department of Environment (DoE).

The restriction comes at a time when battery recycling is running rampant in an unorganised manner.

Industry operators say nearly 80 per cent of batteries are recycled illegally, posing a threat to the environment.

Currently, there are just five firms that are authorised to recycle batteries. But there are more than 1,000 firms engaged in the practice in an unauthorised manner, they said.

Bangladesh's manufacturers require 10,000 tonnes of lead a month to make batteries to meet the burgeoning demand from electric three-wheelers, popularly known as easy bikes. The recycling of locally available



RAJIB RAIHAN

Nearly 80 per cent of the batteries used to power vehicles in the country are recycled in an unorganised and illegal manner. This poses a threat to the environment while the workers, as seen above, are also at risk due to a lack of protective gear.

batteries meets up to 70 per cent of the requirement. The rest is imported.

The notification issued by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change on February 25 said firms engaged in dismantling and burning for recycling batteries must ensure that workers use protective gears to protect their health.

"This was required," said Munawar Misbah Moin, president of the Accumulator Battery Manufacturers and Exporters Association of Bangladesh.

"We are also trying to see how we can play our roles and collect batteries from all over the country to ensure eco-friendly recycling of batteries," he said.

In its notification, the ministry asked firms involved in lead-acid battery manufacturing and recycling for hiring dealers and agents across the country to collect old or damaged batteries to recycle.

READ MORE ON B3



# New Biden economic hires point toward infrastructure, manufacturing emphasis

REUTERS, Washington

The White House is adding transportation and manufacturing specialists to its senior ranks as President Joe Biden prepares to lobby for a U.S. infrastructure bill that was a centerpiece of his campaign.

Biden's National Economic Council (NEC) has hired Massachusetts Institute of Technology manufacturing and economic development researcher Elisabeth Reynolds as well as a former top administrator at the transit authority that serves the greater Boston area, Samantha Silverberg, according to a White House official who declined to be named ahead of an official announcement.

They join former top Consumer Financial Protection Bureau

administrator Leandra English, who is now the NEC's chief of staff.

All three women were recently hired by the White House's economic policymaking arm to serve as special assistants to the president in their areas of expertise. Biden vowed to field a historically diverse team and has faced pressure from within his own ranks to live up to that promise in his administration's early days.

The new additions also come as the White House has been laying the groundwork for its second major spending bill, which it plans to unveil if it can shepherd Biden's \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief bill through congress this month. The Senate could vote on the bill as soon as this week.

Meanwhile, on consumer protection issues, Biden has regularly turned to

personnel like English whose views are aligned with Democratic Senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, who has advocated strict enforcement of the financial industry through the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. Republican lawmakers largely regard the agency as too powerful and unaccountable.

As a presidential candidate, Biden pledged to invest \$2 trillion building climate-resilient homes, wiring cities for broadband internet, encouraging the manufacturing of fuel-efficient cars and installing electric vehicle charging stations, among other projects.

He said the spending, paid for with tax increases on the wealthy and corporations, would create millions of jobs for an economy reeling from the novel coronavirus pandemic while also shoring up the country's resilience to climate change.

Reynolds has studied topics including growing the domestic manufacturing base. Silverberg led the development of an \$8 billion transit upgrade program at the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority.

Biden and his transportation secretary, Pete Buttigieg, are expected to meet on Thursday afternoon with a bipartisan group of House of Representatives legislators on infrastructure.

The White House has not specified how closely its legislative proposal will hew to the "Build Back Better" agenda Biden proposed as a candidate. Key decisions about the plan's final cost and contents have not been finalized by his team, according to several people familiar with the plans.



An automobile travels in a carpool lane along the highway system into Los Angeles, California, US.



The Mercantile Bank-Abdul Jalil Education Scholarship-2019 was awarded to 50 children of the law enforcers of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) at a ceremony organised at the DMP Headquarters yesterday. Md Quamrul Islam Chowdhury, managing director and CEO of the bank, handed over the cheques and certificates to Krishna Pada Roy, additional commissioner of the DMP.



Guardian Life, a local insurance company recently launched an innovative term life insurance plan styled, "Guardian Shield", which offers coverage at very nominal prices so that the financial future of a policyholder's family may be protected. The new service was rolled out as a tribute to National Insurance Day.

**EDCL এসেনসিয়াল ড্রাগস কোম্পানী লিমিটেড**  
৩৯৫-৩৯৭, তেজগাঁও শিল্প এলাকা  
ঢাকা- ১২০৮

**নিয়োগ বিজ্ঞপ্তি**

সরকারী মালিকানাধীন ঔষধ প্রস্তুতকারী প্রতিষ্ঠান এসেনসিয়াল ড্রাগস কোম্পানী লিমিটেড, গোপালগঞ্জ প্রকল্পে নিম্নলিখিত পদে জরুরী ভিত্তিতে লোক নিয়োগ করা হবে:

ক্রমিক নং	পদের নাম ও সংখ্যা	শিক্ষাগত যোগ্যতা	অভিজ্ঞতা	সর্বোচ্চ বয়স সীমা
০১।	সিনিয়র টেকনিশিয়ান (ইলেক্ট্রিক্যাল) সংখ্যা-০২	এসএসসি বা সমমান পাশ	১। ফার্মাসিউটিক্যাল প্রাক্টিক্যাল কমপক্ষে ০৮ (আট) বছর ইলেক্ট্রিক্যাল ও মেশিনারিজ রক্ষণাবেক্ষণ কাজের এবং তন্মধ্যে সিনিয়র টেকনিশিয়ান (বা সমমান) হিসাবে কমপক্ষে ০২ (দুই) বছর কাজের বাস্তব অভিজ্ঞতা থাকতে হবে।	১। প্রার্থীর সর্বোচ্চ বয়স ৩২ বছর। (অভিজ্ঞ প্রার্থীদের ক্ষেত্রে বয়সসীমা শিথিল যোগ্য)
০২।	টেকনিশিয়ান (ইলেক্ট্রিক্যাল) সংখ্যা-০২	এসএসসি বা সমমান পাশ	১। ফার্মাসিউটিক্যাল প্রাক্টিক্যাল কমপক্ষে ০৫ (পাঁচ) বছর ইলেক্ট্রিক্যাল ও মেশিনারিজ রক্ষণাবেক্ষণ কাজের এবং তন্মধ্যে টেকনিশিয়ান (বা সমমান) হিসাবে কমপক্ষে ০২ (দুই) বছর কাজের বাস্তব অভিজ্ঞতা থাকতে হবে।	১। প্রার্থীর সর্বোচ্চ বয়স সীমা ৩০ বছর। (অভিজ্ঞ প্রার্থীদের ক্ষেত্রে বয়সসীমা শিথিল যোগ্য)
০৩।	টেকনিশিয়ান (HVAC সিস্টেম) সংখ্যা-০২	এসএসসি বা ভোকেশনাল/সমমান পাশ	১। ফার্মাসিউটিক্যাল প্রাক্টিক্যাল কমপক্ষে ০৫ (পাঁচ) বছর HVAC সিস্টেমের পরিচালনা ও পর্যবেক্ষণের (যেমন: AHU, DX type A/C, Dehumidifier, pump etc.) অভিজ্ঞতা থাকতে হবে। ২। HVAC সিস্টেমের মেরামত, ডাটা রেকর্ড ও রক্ষণাবেক্ষণ কাজের অভিজ্ঞতা থাকতে হবে।	১। প্রার্থীর সর্বোচ্চ বয়স সীমা ৩০ বছর। (অভিজ্ঞ প্রার্থীদের ক্ষেত্রে বয়সসীমা শিথিল যোগ্য)
০৪।	জুনিয়র টেকনিশিয়ান (HVAC সিস্টেম) সংখ্যা-০৪	এসএসসি/ভোকেশনাল	১। ফার্মাসিউটিক্যাল প্রাক্টিক্যাল কমপক্ষে ০৩ (তিন) বছর HVAC সিস্টেমের মেরামত ও রক্ষণাবেক্ষণ এবং ফিল্টার পরিষ্কারের অভিজ্ঞতা থাকতে হবে।	১। প্রার্থীর সর্বোচ্চ বয়স সীমা ৩০ বছর। (অভিজ্ঞ প্রার্থীদের ক্ষেত্রে বয়সসীমা শিথিল যোগ্য)
০৫।	জুনিয়র টেকনিশিয়ান (ইলেক্ট্রিক্যাল) সংখ্যা-০৪	এসএসসি বা সমমান পাশ	১। ফার্মাসিউটিক্যাল প্রাক্টিক্যাল কমপক্ষে ০৩ (তিন) বছর ইলেক্ট্রিক্যাল ও মেশিনারিজ রক্ষণাবেক্ষণ কাজের এবং তন্মধ্যে জুনিয়র টেকনিশিয়ান (বা সমমান) হিসাবে কমপক্ষে ০২ (দুই) বছর কাজের বাস্তব অভিজ্ঞতা থাকতে হবে।	১। প্রার্থীর সর্বোচ্চ বয়স সীমা ৩০ বছর। (অভিজ্ঞ প্রার্থীদের ক্ষেত্রে বয়সসীমা শিথিল যোগ্য)
৬।	অপারেটর (Water Treatment Plant) সংখ্যা-০৩	এসএসসি বা সমমান পাশ	১। ফার্মাসিউটিক্যাল প্রাক্টিক্যাল কমপক্ষে ০৩ (তিন) বছর Water Treatment Plant-এ কাজের বাস্তব অভিজ্ঞতা থাকতে হবে। ০২। Water Treatment Plant এর পরিচালনা, পর্যবেক্ষণ এবং লগ বই এর রেকর্ড রাখা, ইঞ্জিনিয়ারিং ডকুমেন্টেশনের কাজের অভিজ্ঞতা থাকতে হবে।	১। প্রার্থীর সর্বোচ্চ বয়স সীমা ৩০ বছর। (অভিজ্ঞ প্রার্থীদের ক্ষেত্রে বয়সসীমা শিথিল যোগ্য)

অগ্রহী প্রার্থীদেরকে ০৩ (তিন) কপি সত্যায়িত পাসপোর্ট সাইজের রঙ্গীন ছবি, জাতীয় পরিচয় পত্র, শিক্ষাগত যোগ্যতা ও অভিজ্ঞতার সনদপত্র সমূহের সত্যায়িত কপিসহ আগামী ২০ মার্চ, ২০২১ তারিখের মধ্যে নিম্নস্বাক্ষরকারীর বরাবরে আবেদন করার জন্য বলা হচ্ছে।  
গুডমাত্র শর্ট লিটেড প্রার্থীদেরকে সাক্ষাতকারের জন্য ডাকা হবে।

মহা-ব্যবস্থাপক  
এডমিন এন্ড এইচআরএম  
এসেনসিয়াল ড্রাগস কোম্পানী লিমিটেড  
৩৯৫-৩৯৭, তেজগাঁও শিল্প এলাকা, ঢাকা- ১২০৮।

## UK starts probe on Apple over alleged App Store monopoly

REUTERS

Britain's competition regulator said on Thursday it has opened an investigation into Apple Inc after complaints that the iPhone maker's terms and conditions for app developers are unfair and anti-competitive.

The probe will consider if Apple has a dominant position in the distribution of apps on its devices in the UK, the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) said.

Payment policies related to Apple's App Store have for long drawn complaints from app developers. It charges a commission of up to 30% from developers on the value of transactions or any time a consumer buys their app.

The iPhone maker said it will work with the regulator.

"The App Store has been an engine of success for app developers, in part because of the rigorous standards we have in place applied fairly and equally to all developers to protect customers from malware and to prevent rampant data collection without their consent," Apple said in a statement.

**শেখ হাসিনার উদ্যোগ**  
যত্নে যত্নে বিদ্যুৎ

**DESCO**  
POWER IS YOURS  
ISO 9001:2015 Certified

**Dhaka Electric Supply Company Ltd. (DESCO)**  
House # 22/B, Faruque Sarani, Nikunja # 2, Dhaka-1229, Bangladesh  
Tel. No: +88 02 8900110-11, 8900820-23, Fax No: +88 02 8900100  
E-mail: pit@desco.org.bd, Web: www.desco.org.bd

**Invitation for Tender**

1	Ministry/Division	Power Division, Ministry of Power, Energy & Mineral Resources		
2	Agency	Dhaka Electric Supply Company Limited (DESCO)		
3	Procuring Entity Name	Procurement, Inspection & Testing Division, DESCO		
4	Procuring Entity District	Dhaka		
5	Invitation for	Procurement of Three Phase 315 kVA Distribution Transformer (Core material-CRGO)		
6	Tender No.	47/2020		
7	Invitation Ref No.	27.24.0000.021.07.047.20.298		
8	Date	25/02/2021		

**KEY INFORMATION**

8	Procurement Method	Open Tendering Method (One Stage Two Envelope)		
---	--------------------	--	--	--

**FUNDING INFORMATION**

9	Budget and Source of Funds	DESCO's own fund		
---	----------------------------	------------------	--	--

**PARTICULAR INFORMATION**

10	Tender Name	Procurement of Three Phase 315 kVA Distribution Transformer (Core material - CRGO)		
11	Tender Selling Date, Closing & Opening Date and Time	Last Selling Date April 18, 2021 3.30 PM	Closing Date & Time April 19, 2021 12.00 Noon	Opening Date & Time April 19, 2021 12.30 PM
12	Name & Address of the office for selling Tender Document, receiving & opening tender	Superintending Engineer (Procurement, Inspection & Testing), DESCO, House # 22/B (6 <sup>th</sup> floor), Faruque Sarani, Nikunja#2, Dhaka-1229, Bangladesh.		

**INFORMATION FOR TENDERER**

13	Eligibility of Tenderer	All qualification criteria have been mentioned in Section 2: Tender Data Sheet of the Tender Document.		
14	Description of Goods & related Service	The Purchaser will procure- <b>50 Nos. Three Phase 315 kVA Distribution Transformers (Core material-CRGO)</b> Details are described in Section 6: Schedule of Requirements and Section 7: Technical Specification of the tender document.		
15	Price of Tender Document	BDT 4,000/- (Four Thousand Taka) only payable in the form of Pay Order/Bank draft from any scheduled bank in Bangladesh in favor of 'Dhaka Electric Supply Company Limited'.		
16	Tender Security Amount	The amount of the Tender Security shall be Tk. 5,00,000.00 (five lakh) only for participating in the tender. The Tender Security shall be payable in the form of Bank Guarantee/Bank Draft/ Pay Order in favour of Dhaka Electric Supply Company Limited.		

**PROCURING ENTITY DETAILS**

17	Name of Official inviting the Tender	Engr. Mohammad Kamruzzaman		
18	Designation of Official inviting the Tender	Superintending Engineer (Procurement, Inspection & Testing)		
19	Contact details of Official inviting the Tender	Interested firms may obtain further information from the office of the under signed during normal office hours (09:00 AM to 05:00 PM). <b>Office of the SE (Procurement, Inspection &amp; Testing), DESCO.</b> Address: 22/B (1 <sup>st</sup> floor), Faruque Sarani, Nikunja # 02, Uttara, Dhaka-1229. E-mail: pit@desco.org.bd		
20	The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject any/all tender(s) without assigning any reason whatsoever.			

N.B. The Tender Document is published on DESCO's website. Copy of tender document purchase receipt is mandatory during Tender submission.

**Engr. Mohammad Kamruzzaman**  
Superintending Engineer (P, I & T), DESCO





**Md Touhidul Alam Khan**  
**Standard Bank**  
**holds customer**  
**service training**

STAR BUSINESS DESK  
Md Touhidul Alam Khan, additional managing director of Standard Bank, inaugurated a two-day workshop on "Excellence in Customer Service", on February 24. The event was organised by the lender's training institute in Dhaka. Mohammad Mohon Miah, coordinator of the IBCP, and Mohammad Amzad Hossain Fakir, faculty of the training institute, were also present.

**Alibaba aims big as it enters local food delivery market**

FROM PAGE B1  
By investing in infrastructure, technology and human resources, Daraz has the ability to take HungryNaki to new heights. Launched in 2013, HungryNaki, serves more than 500,000 customers across Dhaka, Chattogram, Sylhet, Cox's Bazar, and Narayanganj through its network of over 4,000 restaurants. It was a success story till 2018. After that, it came under severe competition when two new players -- Shohoz Food and Pathao Food -- entered the market. The following year, Uber Eats arrived and soon gained popularity with its solid service. However, Uber Eats abruptly left in June last year as the ongoing pandemic made a serious dent in its business. The brutal heat of the pandemic was also felt by HungryNaki. In the early stages of the coronavirus outbreak, the business had declined over 70 per cent due to restaurant closures, said AD Ahmad, CEO and Co-founder of HungryNaki, earlier. In a bid to survive, HungryNaki provided full Qurbani services during the last Eid-ul-Azha. Replying to a question regarding the sale of the platform to Daraz, Ahmad said it was really a moment of joy for a home-grown company to be able to attract a global company as a buyer. Industry insiders were, however, critical, saying

the development set a bad precedent as it shows that local startups can't survive on their own. Some said the move would create uneven competition in the market, where over half a dozen of e-commerce platforms are operating. "It would have been better if Daraz had just bought a stake in HungryNaki instead," said an industry insider, preferring anonymity. Usually, acquisitions like this cost a lot of money, but HungryNaki was sold at a very low price, he said. "This is frustrating as only Alibaba is the winner in this case," he added. Other market players think this move will create uneven competition in the market. "Daraz's recent acquisition provides market validation for the emerging consumer technology sector in Bangladesh," Hussain Elius, co-founder and CEO of Pathao, told The Daily Star yesterday. "However, it also illustrates how the lack of an enabling policy environment cedes the market towards colonisation." "To build a truly digital Bangladesh, we need to allow local champions to emerge, grow, thrive and build the critical digital infrastructure of the country." **DARAZ TO FACE STIFF COMPETITION** Daraz has big dreams for HungryNaki. "We want to be the second leading market player in six months and the leading one within a year,"

said Daraz Managing Director Hoq. But to turn the dream into reality, the e-commerce giant will have to face a gruelling battle with other competitors. "Consumer discount battles will start, leading all players to bleed more than before," said Maliha M Quadir, founder of Shohoz. Daraz is likely to face fierce competition from Foodpanda and Efood. Foodpanda, a subsidiary of Berlin-based Delivery Hero, began its journey in Bangladesh in December 2013 with limited operations in Dhaka. Through its seven-year journey, Foodpanda has expanded its operation to all 64 districts of the country, a first among its peer companies. The local food and grocery delivery market has potential for growth as most of the market is still offline and would greatly benefit from digitalisation, said Ambareen Reza, managing director and co-founder of Foodpanda Bangladesh. The market will also benefit from the high internet penetration and fast smartphone adoption rate in the country. Efood, the food delivery arm of local e-commerce platform Evely, is one of the fastest-growing food delivery platforms in the country. In less than a year since its inception, Efood now makes around 10,000 deliveries per day from 4,700 restaurants to customers in eight cities, including Dhaka, Chattogram, Cox's Bazar and Sylhet. Other potential competitors include Pathao

Food, which has 9,000 registered restaurants and operates in Dhaka, Chattogram and Sylhet, and Shohoz Food, which has 5,000 registered restaurants. **DARAZ'S GROWING DOMINANCE** After Daraz's integration with Alibaba, it mainly brought changes to the technological side. As a part of that vision, in early June, Daraz announced its plans to invest Tk 500 crore by 2021 to set up logistics infrastructure and hubs that would help expand its foothold across the country. A big chunk of that investment has already been utilised for different purposes, including the purchase of over 100 vehicles to help Daraz mail products to all districts. "We are equipped with the logistic infrastructure that Alibaba uses," Hoq told The Daily Star in an interview last year. And now, Daraz has its own logistics facilities all over the country. The e-commerce platform is now building a sorting centre and warehouse with an investment of about Tk 150 crore. It will employ 2,000 people. Daraz currently makes over 65,000 deliveries per day. According to experts, the annual food delivery market stands at Tk 1,200 crore. Some 20,000 people work as freelance delivery persons, and another 5,000 are employed by the platforms. Around 1.1 lakh food deliveries are made each day.

**Excess liquidity falls after 8 months**

FROM PAGE B1  
Some of them argued that investment was yet to turn around. And depositors had shied away from banks because of a lower interest rate on deposit products. The other MDs thought that credit demand rose a bit, putting a positive impact on the liquidity situation in the banking industry. Between June and December last year, the excess fund increased by Tk 10,000 crore to Tk 12,000 crore per month on average. Despite the fall in January, private sector credit growth went down to 8.32 per cent in the first month of 2021, down from 8.37 per cent a month earlier, said Syed Mahbubur Rahman, managing director of Mutual Trust Bank. "It showed that investment demand from the private sector is still feeble," he said. The majority of lenders now offer 3-4 per cent interest rate on fixed deposit schemes, upsetting depositors. Inflation stood at 5.02 per cent in January, meaning that the real interest rate is in negative. "Such a phenomenon may create an asset bubble in an economy," Rahman said. People now explore alternative ways to invest, such as capital market, land and savings certificates, to get higher returns than depositing money in banks. "This helped lessen the excess liquidity in January," Rahman said. Faruq Mainuddin, an immediate past managing director of Trust Bank, said credit demand showed no signs of improvement. Some banks disbursed funds in January that were sanctioned earlier to keep lower the provision against the disbursed fund, he said. Selim RF Hussain, managing director of Brac Bank, said credit demand from businesses had increased slightly, but the trend was yet to reach a satisfactory level. Many businesses are still adopting a slow-go policy to expand businesses as they think that there will be uncertainties in the days to come, he said. Many garment factories are struggling to survive as the majority of countries in North America, and Europe still face economic hardship. Abul Kashem Md Shirin, managing director of Dutch-Bangla Bank Ltd, said that his bank witnessed an increase in credit demand in January. "But, there is no scope to be complacent as the trend of credit demand is still insufficient given the size of the economy," he said. Arif Khan, managing director of IDLC Finance, termed the decline in excess liquidity a positive indication. He went on to express the hope that the surplus fund would decrease to a large extent within June this year. Both the government and the central bank rolled out a number of stimulus packages as part of their efforts to tackle the economic meltdown deriving from the pandemic. The total amount of financial assistance now stands at Tk 124,053 crore, which is 4.44 per cent of the GDP. This has contributed to the growth of excess liquidity at a time when the credit demand has sharply declined.

**Government launches national app store**

FROM PAGE B1  
operator, will be able to upload their apps to this platform," Palak said. The ICT Division will work to provide income tax exemption for developers and abolish VAT on apps. BD Apps is the largest mobile application platform in Bangladesh. Application developers can market their innovative applications on this platform to local smartphone subscribers. "This partnership aims to boost ICT innovation and develop entrepreneurship," he added. Bikarna Kumar Ghosh, additional secretary of the Ict Division, and Mahtab Uddin Ahmed, managing director and CEO of Robi, signed the agreement at a ceremony at the ICT Division in Dhaka's Agargaon area. The arrangement is set to last for five years with the option of extension. With the world on the brink of the fourth industrial revolution, the job market will soon transform as the need for physical labour will be eliminated, giving rise to the demand for digital

skills. And so, both Robi and the ICT Division are keen to formulate and modify developer-friendly policies to encourage entrepreneurship and digital skillsets among the country's youth. To promote app development, BD Apps is bringing the country's first wizard-based Android app development solution. "We are also delighted to announce that BD Apps is launching a seed funding programme for its developers to facilitate their initial marketing investments," Ghosh said. "We request our government to allow tax waivers for these amateur, young and qualified developers to accelerate these start-ups and create a nationwide wave for an innovation-centric economy," he added. Ahmed Arman Siddiqui, executive vice president of VAS and new business for Robi; Anamika Bhakta, executive vice president or corporate affairs and media communications; and Sharif Shah Jamal Raj, vice president of public affairs, were also present.

**Disney to close 60 North American stores in 2021**

AFP, Los Angeles  
Disney announced Wednesday that it will close at least 60 of its North American stores this year in order to focus on its online sales activities. The closures are only a first step, with the world's number one entertainment company emphasizing in a statement that it intends to "significantly reduce its brick-and-mortar footprint" in order to focus on e-commerce. "While consumer behaviour has shifted toward online shopping, the global pandemic has changed what consumers expect from a retailer," said Stephanie Young, Disney's head of consumer products, games and publishing, in the statement. Disney hopes next year to develop its "shopDisney" sales platform, and expand its integration with mobile apps dedicated to its theme parks and with its social media presence.

**IFAD Autos gearing up to enter luxury bus assembly segment**

FROM PAGE B1  
In the last six years, around 3,000 units of buses have been sold on an average every year, and 600 of them were air-conditioned ones, he said. IFAD Autos believes around 1,000 units of AC buses will be sold a year in the next three years. An increasing number of automobile retailers are now setting up commercial vehicle assembling plants, and some are also getting involved in building of bodies of luxury buses, which will strengthen the local market and reduce their prices. The demand for luxury buses has been annually increasing at around 20 per cent for the last five years, said the managing director of IFAD Autos. The price of locally assembled air-conditioned bus would be Tk 56-80 lakh, while the imported one will cost around Tk 1.3 crore, he said. The price of each of the local non-air-conditioned bus is around Tk 35 lakh, which hovers around Tk 45 lakh for the foreign ones, he said. The customs duty makes the imported ones costly, he said. India's Tata, Eicher, Japan's Hino, Volvo of Sweden and Hyundai of South Korea are the other market players in the local commercial vehicles segment. Iftekhar Ahmed Tipu, chairman of IFAD Autos, was also present.

**Retain undisclosed money investment scope in stock markets**

FROM PAGE B1  
"This special tax treatment facility may be extended up to June 30, 2022," it said, urging the NBR to cut the rate to 5 per cent. On behalf of the BAB, Parvez Tamal, chairman of NRBC Bank, said the rate of corporate tax for banks was very high, although the banking industry played a key role in the economic development of the country. The BMBA demanded a cut in corporate tax for listed companies to 20 per cent from 25 per cent to encourage more firms to go public. The association said the existing gap of 7.5 percentage points in the tax rate between listed and non-listed companies does not provide enough incentive to firms listed with the stock exchanges. Only 325 companies are listed at the stock exchange, although the number of registered

companies is more than 150,000 in Bangladesh, according to the BMBA proposal presented by BMBA President Md Sayedur Rahman. The BMBA also wanted a reduction in the tax rate for merchant banks to 25 per cent from 37.5 per cent. The DSE said companies to be listed on the SME board of exchanges may be offered concessional tax rate for a period of five years from the date of listing. "This type of companies may not be encouraged to be listed due to huge disclosure requirements. Moreover, tax collection from these companies is not significant." "If such companies are given concessional tax rate, they will be encouraged to go public, and in the long run, the tax collection of government will increase."

**Cut cost of doing business to compete in post-LDC era**

FROM PAGE B1  
Rahman was presenting a keynote paper at a dialogue on "Moving out from the LDC group: Strategies for graduation with momentum", organised by the CPD. It was attended by a minister, government high-ups, researchers, policy-makers, exporters, and business people. He called for taking measures, including making active pharmaceuticals ingredient (API) parks functional soon so that Bangladesh can keep producing cheap life-saving drugs after graduation. Locals will have to buy insulin at eight times higher prices from the current level after the expiry of the agreement on the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs). Prices of medicines will also go up in the local markets after graduation, he said. Bangladesh took a Tk 100-crore project to develop an API park in 2008. The park is expected to be operational from 2023. "The completion of the API park is very important. Otherwise, the pharmaceuticals industry will be in big trouble along with the local people," Rahman said. Local pharmaceuticals companies need to import \$1 billion worth of raw materials in the absence of an API park. The Tk25,000-crore local pharmaceuticals industry meets more than 95 per cent local demand and exports medicines worth \$130 million annually. The trade expert called for opening a negotiation cell under the commerce ministry to make the country competitive. "Preparations should start now so that after 2026, we don't find one fine morning that nothing has been done to compete after graduation." Some 70 per cent of Bangladesh's global exports are covered by preferential access, one of the highest in the world. So, Bangladesh is going to face the highest rise in tariffs among the 12 graduating LDCs. Rehman Sobhan, chairman of the CPD, said Bangladesh had been celebrating pre-matured

graduation as the final graduation did not take place yet. The United Nations Committee for Development Policy (UN CDP) recommended Bangladesh for graduation as the country has fulfilled all three criteria. "Bangladesh has statistically graduated. But the country needs to be graduated in the real world," said Prof Sobhan. After graduation, Bangladesh is going to compete with Vietnam, China and India. "But, the question remains how much Bangladesh would be able to compete with these countries?" he said. The pharmaceuticals industry will face a big challenge as Bangladesh will lose the TRIPs facility after graduation, Prof Sobhan said. He suggested diversification of the economy and technological upgradation. An extension of the Everything but Arms (EBA) scheme of the EU is required at least for 7-10 years to sustain the desired growth, said Rubana Huq, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA). The EU accounts for 61 per cent of Bangladesh's exports. The country does not have to pay any duty. The impact of Covid-19 and Bangladesh's endeavour towards global peace-keeping and humanitarian response measures like sheltering of Rohingya refugees, women empowerment and combating terrorism should be considered with due importance, Huq said. Bangladesh's economic growth has been suffering a sharp downturn following the outbreak of Covid-19, which has reversed years of economic development and has made Bangladesh's businesses heavily dependent on the EBA to survive, she also said. "The EBA is critical for Bangladesh to promote economic and societal progress, and devote resources to achieve significant policy objectives praised by the EU, including advancing human and labour rights." Terminating the EBA without taking into

account the vulnerabilities of the country and the detrimental effects it will have on the economy and people runs contrary to EU fundamental principles, the BGMEA chief said. Huq said extending Bangladesh's access to the EBA scheme was consistent with the prior practice of both the EU and other major economies, which made sure the countries graduating from the LDC group had adequate time to transition and adjust to the new trade landscape without suffering from any significant export losses. A Matin Chowdhury, a former president of the Bangladesh Textile Mills Association, said Bangladesh faced various challenges earlier. For instance, the textile and garment industry faced the Multi-Fibre Arrangement (MFA) in 2005 when the quota system phased out. After the MFA, Bangladesh started investing in backward linkage industries heavily and had overcome the difficulties, he said. Chowdhury, also the managing director of Malek Spinning Mills Ltd, called for opening up foreign investment in the high-end textile and garment sector for bringing technology knowhow and ensuring greater market access in the post-LDC period. "We also need to improve labour relations," he added. Md Shahriar Alam, state minister for foreign affairs, said some new opportunities such as more foreign loans at affordable rates and more foreign direct investment would come to Bangladesh as graduation would improve the country's image. The government has formed a high-powered team to formulate a strong strategy roadmap for the transition period and to face challenges in the post-LDC period, he said. Tuomo Poutiainen, country director of the International Labour Organisation, Naser Ezaz Bijoy, chief executive officer of Standard Chartered Bangladesh, and Kazi Nabil Ahmed, a member of the parliamentary standing committee on the ministry of foreign affairs, also spoke.

**BCI demands 3-year tax holiday for small industries**

FROM PAGE B1  
The chamber demanded the withdrawal of the tax at source on the import of industrial raw materials and scrapping of value-added tax on all utilities. It called for VAT holiday if light engineering industries manufacture and sell machinery and VAT exemption on the imports of industrial raw materials. Chowdhury said Bangladesh should reform customs and tax structures to put in place an investment- and industrial-friendly permanent tax and customs systems for national interests and for a smooth transition from the category of least-developed countries. It sought to raise advance income tax, supplementary duty and regulatory duty on imported finished products. A 10 per cent regulatory duty should be imposed on the products that are yet to see such fiscal measure, the chamber said in a press release. Data on the prices of goods and products should be collected regularly, and tax should be imposed in line with the rates. Besides, scanners and automatic weighing machines should be installed at all ports to put an end to the import of products through under-invoicing and mis-declaration, the BCI said. In the industrial sector, the upper ceiling for annual taxable turnover should be

raised to Tk 10 crore from Tk 3 crore. The turnover tax should be brought down to 3 per cent from 4 per cent. "The scope to generate more VAT and create jobs is high in the industrial sector. The sector helps the economy earn foreign currencies through exports and save foreign currencies through reducing imports," said Chowdhury. The entrepreneur also called for granting rebates to encourage investment and industrialisation in the northern region and other impoverished parts of the country to ensure regional development and keep the wheel of the economy moving. The BCI demanded an increase in the tax-free income limit to Tk 4 lakh, taking into account inflation and living costs. It called for granting investment and income tax holiday to encourage technical and vocational course. According to the chamber, the private sector accounts for about 64 per cent of health service in Bangladesh. In order to modernise the private health care segment, a separate budget should be unveiled, it said. All investment directed at research and skills development should be tax-free, it said. BCI Vice-president Priti Chakraborty and Director Shahidul Islam Niru were present during the meeting.

**Govt moves to rein in illegal battery recycling**

FROM PAGE B1  
It also directed firms to get no-objection certificates from the DoE to import batteries. The regulatory measures come at a time when the rapid expansion of electric three-wheelers has opened up substantial business opportunities for battery manufacturers and traders in Bangladesh. The annual sale of batteries amounts to about Tk 8,000 crore, and electric three-wheelers account for more than 60 per cent of it, according to industry insiders. They estimate that around 10 lakh electric three-wheelers are currently in

operation, requiring nearly 25 lakh to 30 lakh batteries annually. These vehicles have created jobs for 15 lakh people and carry nearly one crore of people every day, Moyn said earlier. Syed Samiul Haq, managing director of Japan Solartech (Bangladesh), a manufacturer of Japanese brand Yuasa battery, said the government's decision would help protect the environment. The government should strictly monitor whether recyclers follow the rules or not, he said, adding that the initiative of the government would turn effective if a proper implementation can be ensured.



# Digital banking, future of financial services

Bank Asia Managing Director Md Arfan Ali says in an interview

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

Banks will have to embrace digital means extensively compared to what they have adopted so far to digitalise services, or else they will be unable to keep their businesses afloat, said a top banker.

"Considering this, Bank Asia has taken preparations to transform its manual banking services into digital ones," Md Arfan Ali, managing director of the lender, told The Daily Star in an interview recently.

The existing payment methods have been going through major transformation across the globe, and the quick response (QR) code will get huge popularity to keep up with the time, sweeping aside the manual payment methods, he said.

The central bank rolled out an interoperable QR code in January as part of its effort to give a boost to cashless transactions.

The uniform digital payment method, namely "Bangla QR" will help clients pay bills while purchasing goods and services by way of using mobile applications of banks, mobile financial service (MFS) providers, and payment service providers (PSP).

A QR code is a type of barcode that can be read quickly by a digital device, and it stores information as a series of pixels in a square-shaped grid.

Clients have to scan the code by using a smartphone to make payments for products purchased from the stall.

A question has surfaced: how rural people will use the QR code?

The central bank has recently decided to allow small businesses to open micro-merchants to resolve the problem.

As per the initiative, the small businesses -- vegetable vendors, owners of small shops or tea stalls -- are now permitted to accept bills from the clients' accounts and credit cards by using merchant accounts.

Bank Asia, which started its business in 1999, has already opened around 14,000 micro-merchant accounts, for which the lender had already begun to



Md Arfan Ali

attach Bangla QR code, Ali said.

"QR code will bring a revolutionary change in the modules of the payment systems. The lender commenced its preparation several years ago as part of its efforts to expand banking services for the rural people," Ali said.

The bank plans to set up financial kiosks in 87,000 villages of the country, and it has already built such outlets in 5,000 villages.

The kiosks help clients make settlement through QR code payment, transfer money from one account to another, and pay utility bills as well as disburse subsidy among the underprivileged.

The use of point of sales (POS) terminals, physical credit card and automated teller machines will reduce significantly in the years ahead when the QR code will get momentum, said Ali, who took over the helm of the bank in 2016.

He started his banking career at Arab Bangladesh Bank in 1991 and joined Bank Asia in 1999.

Although the use of ATM and POS

has been on the rise in Bangladesh, clients of many countries are distancing themselves from the payment module thanks to the expansion of QR code, he said.

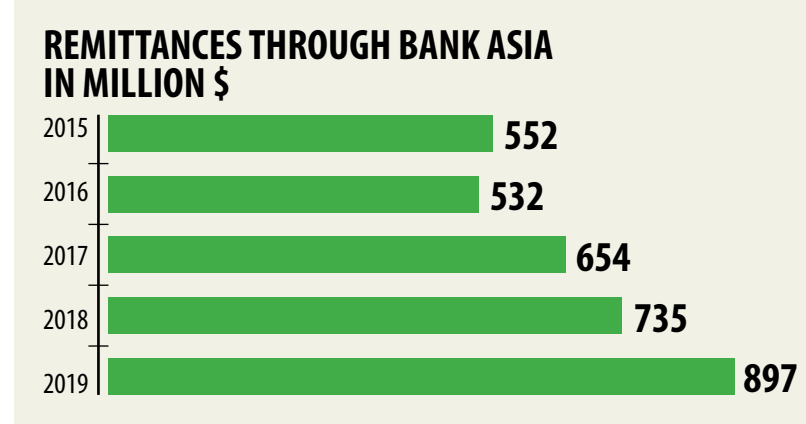
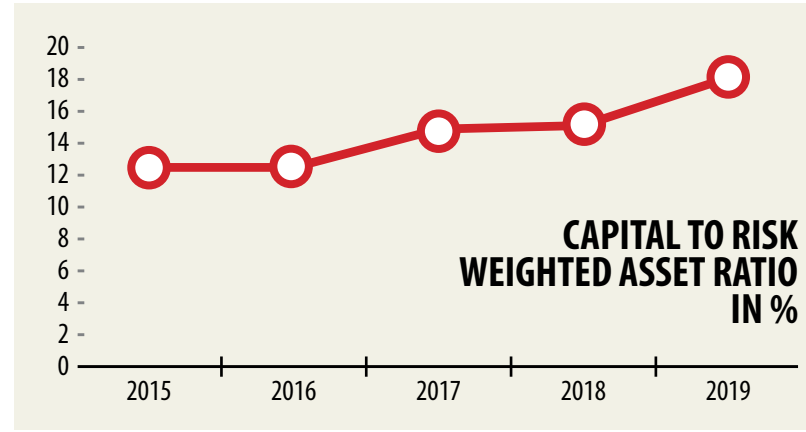
The use of cash will decrease to below 15 per cent than the current level within the next 20 years in the country.

Bangladesh has made impressive strides in digitalising banking services since the mid-90s.

For instance, the MFS industry has gained tremendous popularity in recent years, and Bangladesh has become one of the countries where the digital mode is prevalent in terms of the number of clients and amount of transactions.

Bank Asia rolled out agent banking in 2014 in continuation with the branchless banking, said Ali, who achieved an MBA from the Institute of Business Administration under Dhaka University.

"People now show a huge interest in agent banking as they can take loans and keep deposits with the



platform easily," he said.

Bank Asia, the pioneer in introducing agent banking in the country, has realised that banking services can be expanded to commoners swiftly by using digital financial services (DFS).

The lender lent Tk 5.61 crore to small businesses through one of its agent banking outlets located in Adamdighi under Bogura district.

The outlet was established to extend financial services to small businesses under the Shawl Handloom and Specialised Clothes cluster. Some 119 entrepreneurs have so far taken loans from the outlet with the help of agent banking.

Entrepreneurs in many remote areas

like Adamdighi now enjoy financing from banks, which is changing their businesses as a whole, Ali said.

The examples of both MFS and agent banking proved that there is no scope to escape from DFS as banks will have to completely depend on the IT-based banking services, he said.

"This digitalisation will also strengthen the accountability of businesses as it will help the government mobilise more taxes."

The global economy spends around 0.5 to 1.5 per cent of its gross domestic product on managing physical cash. Digital money will help in decreasing the expenditure needed for cash management.

The requirement of human

resources will not decrease when DFS takes centre stage as they will have to run the machine. But bank officials will have to improve their IT knowledge, according to Ali.

"DFS will help in distributing capital proportionately between rural and urban areas as well."

The banker says as much as 70 per cent of total loans are concentrated in Dhaka and Chattogram, creating an imbalance and depriving other regions of funds.

Banks are in a risky situation due to credit concentration. If the economic activities in the two zones face any debacle, the whole financial sector will face a dire consequence.

"So, we should try to reduce the credit concentration risk soon. Setting up new economic zones will help in reducing the risk," he said.

Less developed areas should get more focus to disburse loans, and the DFS will help do so.

Ali hoped that the ongoing business hardship deriving from the coronavirus pandemic is a temporary phenomenon, and the economy will overcome the situation shortly.

The resilience of the people in Bangladesh is extraordinary, which has helped Bangladesh do better than other nations during the pandemic.

In addition, remittance has given a huge breathing space to the government in managing macroeconomic stability.

"The robust foreign reserves will insulate us from unexpected external shocks," Ali said.

The global commodity market now faces a trend of price escalation. As a result, the economy may need more US dollar to settle import bills in the coming days.

The reserves, which recently crossed \$44 billion, will give an extra advantage to tackle the situation beyond a doubt.

"The excess liquidity that has ballooned on the back of the robust reserves will reduce once the economy starts firing on all cylinders," Ali said.

## GLOBAL BUSINESS

### #MeWho? Global firms lag on sex harassment, women-friendly policy

REUTERS, London

Most big firms are failing to ban sex harassment at work or enact policies that let mothers work flexibly, a global workplace equality index found on Thursday, highlighting the obstacles women face at work.

Fewer than half of firms' policies directly address sex harassment, despite years of #MeToo campaigns that show the extent of abuse at work, said the report by women's workplace equality organisation Equileap.

The finding suggests legislation to force action is a "necessary evil", said its chief executive Diana van Maasdiijk.

The index data was drawn from 3,702 firms in 23 countries, including the United States, Canada, Japan, France, Germany, Britain and Australia.

"It's only when companies are forced to do something that it's going to happen," said van Maasdiijk, citing progress in Spain after a law compelled firms to publish plans that addressed sexual harassment.

"Some studies have shown one in three women will experience



The #MeToo movement began in 2017 in the United States after accusations of sexual assault and harassment in Hollywood.

sexual harassment in their lifetime, so it's really important that this is addressed and it is called exactly what it is." The #MeToo movement began in 2017 in the United States after accusations of sexual assault and harassment in Hollywood, and quickly spread to a worldwide campaign that sparked wider debate around harassment, pay and representation.

Women went online to call

out their male bosses - from tech to academia - and share stories of unwanted sexual approaches, harassment, coercion, discrimination in the office or poor pay.

But three years on and 51% of companies assessed for the index did not publish an anti-sexual harassment policy last year, said Equileap, albeit an improvement on the 58% in 2019.

The report also highlighted the problems mothers routinely face

juggling paid work and a rota of home duties, a struggle exacerbated by the pandemic.

Setting aside temporary policies enacted for the crisis, it found a lack of permanent, flexible working policies at many firms, with less than four in 10 publishing a policy on flexible hours and just 24% offering one on location.

Women made "modest" progress on cracking glass ceilings in the latest annual report, it said, with women making up 25% of company boards, 17% of executives, 24% of senior management, and 37% of the overall workforce last year.

The pandemic may bring some wins for women at work: more firms are likely to make flexible working permanent and ethical investors increasingly focus on gender, said van Maasdiijk.

But there is a risk that COVID-19's outsized impact on women's jobs may slow or push back progress, she said.

"We will have to see if we will have the same number of women in the workforce after the pandemic," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in a video call.

"I'm hoping that we will, but I'm a little worried."

### Hong Kong removed from economic freedom ranking it once dominated

AFP, Hong Kong

Hong Kong has been removed from an annual index of the world's freest economies because the think-tank that compiles the league table said the city was now directly controlled by Beijing.

The announcement is a reputational blow for Hong Kong and comes as Beijing ramps up its bid to quash dissent after huge and sometimes violent pro-democracy demonstrations in 2019.

The Heritage Foundation, a conservative US think-tank, publishes an annual Index of Economic Freedom ranking countries and territories for how business-friendly their regulations and laws are.

Over the last 26 years, Hong Kong topped the table for all but one year -- a source of pride to the city's government which often used the accolade in its official press releases and investment brochures.

But when the 2021 ranking is released later on Thursday, Hong Kong will not appear because the report's authors believe the city is no longer independent enough of Beijing to justify separate inclusion.

"The loss of political freedom and autonomy suffered by Hong Kong over the past two years has made that city almost indistinguishable in many respects from other major Chinese commercial centres like Shanghai and Beijing," Edwin J. Feulner, the founder of the Heritage Foundation, wrote in the Wall Street Journal on Wednesday.

"[Hong Kong's] ties to Beijing are

increasingly forged in steel," Feulner added, while its pre-handover "traditions of English common law, freedom of speech, and democracy have weakened significantly".

Hong Kong's financial secretary Paul Chan criticised the decision on Thursday. "When they arrived at that decision, they must have been clouded by their ideological inclination and political bias," Chan said during an online conference, according to Radio Television Hong Kong.

The Heritage Foundation is one of the major policy think-tanks that influences fiscal conservatives in the United States. Feulner is also a vocal critic of Beijing and chairman of the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation.

Hong Kong's pro-Beijing government embraced the think-tank's league table each year it came out.

Back in 2019 -- when Hong Kong topped the table for the 25th consecutive year -- finance chief Chan said it showed the city's "economic resilience, high-quality legal framework, low tolerance for corruption, high degree of government transparency, efficient regulatory framework and openness to global commerce".

Last year the city fell from the top spot for the first time, replaced by rival Singapore, after Beijing imposed a sweeping national security law on Hong Kong.

The city's commerce chief at the time brushed off concern and predicted Hong Kong would soon return to the top of the table.



Hong Kong has been removed from an index of the world's freest economies because it is now directly controlled by Beijing, says the think-tank that compiles the table.

### EU sets itself jobs, training and equality targets for 2030

REUTERS, Brussels

The European Commission on Thursday announced goals for the 27-nation bloc to reduce poverty, inequality and boost training and jobs by 2030 as part of a post-pandemic economic overhaul financed by jointly borrowed funds.

The EU executive arm said the European Union should boost employment to 78 per cent in 2030 from 73 per cent in 2019, halve the gap between the number of employed women and men and

cut the number of young people neither working nor studying to 9 per cent from 12.6 per cent "With unemployment and inequalities expected to increase as a fallout of the pandemic, focusing our policy efforts on quality job creation, up-and reskilling and reducing poverty and exclusion is therefore essential to channel our resources where they are most needed," the commission said.

The goals, which will have to be endorsed by EU leaders, also include an increase in the number of adults getting training every

year to adapt to the EU's transition to a greener and more digitalised economy to 60 per cent from 40 per cent now.

Finally, over the next 10 years, the EU should reduce the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion by 15 million from 91 million in 2019.

"These three 2030 headline targets are deemed ambitious and realistic at the same time," the commission said.

The goals are part of the EU's set of 20 social rights, agreed on in 2017,

to make the EU more appealing to voters and counter eurosceptic sentiment across the bloc.

They say everybody has the right to quality education throughout their lives and that men and women must have equal opportunities in all areas and be paid the same for work of equal value.

The unemployed have the right to "personalised, continuous and consistent support", while workers have the right "to fair wages that provide for a decent standard of living".