



STOCKS		COMMODITIES		ASIAN MARKETS				CURRENCIES			
DSEX	CSCX	 Gold ▲ \$1,728.67 (per ounce)	 Oil ▲ \$63.70 (per barrel)	MUMBAI ▲ 1.38% 48,544.06	TOKYO ▲ 0.72% 29,751.61	SINGAPORE ▲ 0.44% 3,187.90	SHANGHAI ▼ 0.48% 3,396.47	USD 83.95	EUR 98.80	GBP 114.44	CNY 12.58
▲ 1.35% 5,258.50	▲ 1.24% 9,167.52							BUY TK 84.95	102.60	118.24	13.23



# star BUSINESS

DHAKA WEDNESDAY APRIL 14, 2021, BAISHAKH 1, 1428 BS ● starbusiness@thedailystar.net

## Govt decides to keep banks open after mass confusion

*Business hours from 10am to 1pm*

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Khaza Hasan Chisty, a small business owner, yesterday spent more than an hour around noon at the Tejgaon branch of Dutch-Bangla Bank in the capital to withdraw cash so that he does not face any liquidity shortage during the hard lockdown starting from today.

He got a serial number of 40 as there was a massive crowd at the branch after the government ordered banks to close during the lockdown period between midnight of April 14 and the morning of April 21.

Although the clients had put on a face mask to prevent themselves from the coronavirus, it was not enough to maintain the health protocol given the huge crowd, said Chisty.

"I was terrified of the crowd, but there was no scope to avoid visiting the bank as I have to keep adequate cash in my hand during the lockdown period when banks will remain close," he said.

Like Chisty, thousand of others rushed to banks as well, after both the central bank and the government on April 12 ordered banks to keep all branches close from Wednesday, as the country has tightened measures to curb the spread of the virus.

In the afternoon, the government and the central bank backtracked from the stance, saying some branches will remain open during the restriction period.

Albeit a relief, the late decision frustrated Chisty.



*Banks will have to open their main branches at every district town. Upazila-level branches will operate on Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday.*

"The authorities should have taken the decision two or three days ago to dispel confusion among the commoners whether banks would remain open or not."

Crowding in a small space creates risks in many folds to spread the deadly flu, he said.

As per the new decision, clients will be allowed to do banking from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm. Branches will have to be closed by 2.30 pm after completing regular procedures.

Authorised dealer (AD) branches that carry out international transactions, including those for exports and imports, will operate as usual.

If any AD branch is not available in a radius of two kilometres in city corporation areas, a non-AD branch, which is dedicated to operating general banking, will have to be kept open.

Banks will keep their main branch in the district town open as well.

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**If life's uncertainties had a face, this is certainly it. Lost in thought, Nur Mohammad ponders over his fate yesterday. Seven days have gone by waiting at Notun Bazar in the capital from 7:00am till noon. None has sought his manual labour, in offer for merely Tk 300 a day. With a strict lockdown imminent, there is little he can do to make ends meet.**

PHOTO : SK ENAMUL HAQ

## Informal workers slip through the cracks again

MAHMUDUL HASAN

Workers of the urban informal sector, which has been largely ignored despite the devastating pandemic for more than a year, are facing a fresh onslaught of adversities amid a surge in coronavirus infections.

Besides, the announcement of a week-long hard lockdown from today has only exacerbated their hardship following a year of living from hand to mouth.

From CNG-powered auto-rickshaw drivers to small tea stall owners, informal earners have witnessed a drastic fall in income in the past three weeks as the

number of Covid-19 patients and deaths grew at an alarming rate from the second week of March.

"From 8:00 am to 12:00 pm, I earned only Tk 10," Srilal Babu, a cobbler in the capital's Rupnagar area, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Babu was sitting on a small wooden stool on the footpath with his eyes filled with complete hopelessness. His daily income dropped to Tk 150 to Tk 200 in the last few days, from more than Tk 700 before the pandemic.

"Life has become so tough. Over one year, I can't even afford to buy food for my kids," said Babu, who has two children.

He had to shut his business for

a few months last year due to the initial lockdown when he had to take over Tk 80,000 in loans to bear his family expenses.

"I now struggle to pay the instalment of those loans," the 55-year-old said, adding he did not get even one kilogram of rice as a donation during the pandemic, let alone the government stimulus funds.

According to experts, more than five lakh rickshaw-pullers, 25,000 CNG-powered auto-rickshaw drivers, over one lakh ride-hailing motorcycle drivers, and thousands of street vendors, van-pullers, bus drivers, cobblers, restaurant workers, and sweetmeat makers

will suffer from the fresh lockdown measures.

Rubel Miah, a CNG-powered auto-rickshaw driver, said his daily income had halved to Tk 500 since February last year.

"January and February of this year were pretty good as we were able to get frequent trips. Since March, the number of passengers dropped and after paying rent, there is virtually no income."

"And now, for these new restrictions, I don't know how I will pay my house rent this month."

Sugarcane juice seller Md Ashiq said life has become increasingly difficult due to the pandemic.

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### Govt mulls using IoT, AI in 100 villages

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The government aims to use modern technology to boost agricultural and aquaculture production in 100 villages across Bangladesh, according to Zunaid Ahmed Palak, the state minister for ICT.

"We will use the Internet of Things (IoT), drones, and artificial intelligence (AI) to this end," Palak said while distributing paddy seeds and fertilisers among marginal farmers at a function in Natore yesterday.

"The use of technology will also reduce the farmers' cost of production and turn these villages into digital villages," he added.

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## Another bitter Baishakh for sweet shops

JAGARAN CHAKMA and MD FAZLUR RAHMAN

Pahela Baishakh, the first day of the Bangla calendar, is the busiest day for sweet makers in Bangladesh as customers throng outlets to buy delicious items.

But the collapse in demand because of the year-long pandemic and new countrywide lockdown has dampened the festive mood.

Over the years, the festival has become the biggest occasion for sweetmeat makers on the back of a rising trend among corporates to send gift hampers, containing sweet items, to their clients and vendors.

Thanks to the corporate purchase, producers would sell as much as 100 tonnes of sweets worth about Tk 3 crore per day between April 9 and 17.

It is a tradition to welcome the Bangla new year, which falls on April 14, with sweets. The sales ahead of Pahela Baishakh and throughout the month are the second biggest spending season after Eid-ul-Fitr.

But shop-owners say the sales volume will not be more than a third of the average time, or Tk 1 crore per day across the country during the period.

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## Strictly follow health safety rules

*Govt, trade bodies ask factory owners*

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

The government, trade bodies and garment union leaders strongly advised factory owners to strictly follow health safety rules in operations of production units so that workers are not infected with Covid-19 during lockdowns.

The labour ministry has already asked the factory owners to follow a staggered schedule for workers so that the spread of the virus can be contained.

Begum Monnujan Sufian, state minister for labour and employment, in a statement Monday also called for ensuring that masks were worn alongside social distancing in the factories.

She said 23 committees formed earlier would monitor factories in different zones to ensure that the health safety guidelines were being followed while the factories were in operation.

Sufian also urged the factory owners to ensure timely payment of salaries and allowances to workers during the upcoming Eid-ul-Fitr.

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## Restaurant workers demand cash support

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Restaurant workers yesterday demanded cash support and food rations from the government in order to survive the week-long "hard lockdown" beginning today.

They made this plea during a rally in front of the National Press Club, organised by the Bangladesh Hotel Restaurant Sweetmeat Workers Federation (BHRSWF).

To tame the recent surge in coronavirus infections across the country, the government has once again imposed strict restrictions on movement for a week-long period, during which all offices, hotels, and restaurants will be shuttered.

These restrictions will force restaurant workers to sit idle at home and suffer from a loss of income, the BHRSWF said.

For example, many restaurant workers became jobless when the government declared a general holiday to curb the spread of Covid-19 during the initial outbreak in March last year.

At the time, numerous workers were sacked without being paid their arrears.

They also did not receive any festival bonus during Eid-ul-Fitr or Eid-ul-Azha.

And now once again, owners have sent their workers on leave in line with the government's directive but without paying the monthly salaries, the federation said.

As a result, hotel and restaurant workers are passing hard times, it added.

Akhtaruzzaman Khan, vice-president of the BHRSWF, said that during Ramadan every year, owners usually send their workers home empty-handed.

"And as the restriction is set to begin, the same thing will occur again," he added.

Considering the situation, the BHRSWF submitted a seven-point demand, including Tk 10,000 monthly cash support and food rations, to the Prime Minister's Office after the rally.

The federation estimates that more than 30 lakh workers are employed by hotels and restaurants across the country.

## March cost more

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Consumers had to shell out more in March to purchase goods and services owing to an increase in food and non-food prices, shows data of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) released yesterday.

The BBS said inflation rose 15 basis points to 5.47 per cent in March from that a month ago, with people in rural area bearing the brunt of higher prices.

"Rising prices of essential has made it difficult for me to bear expenses of my family," said Delwar Hossain, who went back to his Rajshahi home on losing his job at a private company in Dhaka last year following the outbreak of coronavirus.

He now work as an assistant of a carpenter.

This was the third month in a row that Consumer Price Index (CPI), a measure of general increase in prices of a basket of commodities, has been rising. In January, inflation was 5.02 per cent.

The BBS data showed that food inflation edged up 9 basis points to 5.51 per cent in March from that the previous month. The ratio of the spike was higher in case of non-food items.

Non-food cost soared 22 basis points to 5.39 per cent last month from 5.17 per cent in February.

Inflation in rural areas, where low and middle-income people mainly live, went up by 33 basis points to 5.55 per cent, fueled by a price hike of both food and non-food items.

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## Stocks keep gaining

*Investor participation on the rise*

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The stock market continued to rise for the second consecutive day yesterday thanks to the higher participation of investors, who came in large numbers to take benefit of the low and lucrative prices of shares.

The DSEX, the benchmark index of the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE), surged by 70 points, or 1.35 per cent, to 5,258.50.

The positive start of the day gave a boost to the investors' psychology, said Mohammad Nazrul Islam, chief executive officer of MTB Securities.

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