

STOCKS		COMMODITIES		ASIAN MARKETS				CURRENCIES			
Week-on-week		As of Friday		Friday Closings				As on Thursday			
DSEX	CSCX	Gold	Oil	MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI	USD	EUR	GBP	CNY
▲ 2.35%	▲ 2.23%	\$1,777.18	\$66.11	▼ 0.42%	▼ 0.57%	▲ 0.2%	▲ 0.26%	BUY TK 83.95	99.96	117.01	12.71
5,435.03	9,485.52	(per ounce)	(per barrel)	47,878.45	29,020.63	3,194.04	3,474.17	SELL TK 84.95	103.76	120.81	13.37

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Branchless banking gaining ground

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

A good number of banks are going towards branchless banking in recent times by way of rolling out different digital products as a part of their efforts to reach out to more people both in rural and urban areas.

This is also helping them decrease the cost of doing business in an efficient manner as the expenditure of digital banking is much less than the manual one, said managing directors of four banks.

People's habit of branch-led banking has also reduced to a great extent as a large number of clients now prefer to settle transactions sitting from their homes by using internet or mobile app-based banking in order to protect themselves from the coronavirus.

Plenty of local banks have already allowed clients to open accounts without visiting branches during the times of the pandemic to expedite branchless banking to push the clients' habit further.

Syed Mahbubur Rahman, managing director of Mutual Trust Bank (MTB), said the lender had opened only one branch in the last two years.

"We do not have any plan to set up excessive branches in the days ahead except in case of an emergency requirement," he said.

The MTB, which has 118 branches across the country, has decided to expand its financial services in the remotest parts of the country riding on the digital means.

The lender will carry out its banking services by collaborating with fintechs, Rahman said.

"We are going to introduce a new method that will allow clients to give instalments of their deposit pension scheme (DPS) through mobile financial services (MFS) providers," he said.

In addition, the bank is trying to roll out lending services for clients from all walks of life through MFS providers, he said.

The central bank should lay emphasis on the matter as well such that branchless banking gains momentum, he said.

THE CHANGING TRENDS



The model of branchless banking also helps reduce the cost of doing business as well, Rahman said.

Banks have to spend around Tk 1 crore to set up a branch in the major cities including appointing at least 10 officials to run operations.

If they want to set up such an outlet in rural areas, they must count between Tk 50 lakh and Tk

60 lakh.

Despite that, banks have been forced to expand their branches over the years as people in the country are largely habituated to do banking by going to outlets.

Some banks, which had earlier focused on branchless banking in providing financial services, have struggled to make the method attractive for commoners.

Then came the first wave of

the coronavirus pandemic in the country in March last year.

People had been barred from going outside of their homes amidst a lockdown that had also compelled banks to close a good number of branches for the time being, leaving clients with no choice but to use technology to conduct transactions.

The pandemic also created obstacles for banks to set up branches last year. In such a situation, both banks and customers learnt more techniques to do more branchless banking than before.

The country now faces a second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has already given another boost to digital banking.

Although the majority of banks had failed to manage their expected profit for expansion of their businesses by opening new branches last year, they have embraced different digital models to make their services available for people.

Banks set up only 107 branches in 2020 instead of an average figure of 300-400 per year, data from the central bank showed.

Md Arfan Ali, managing director of Bank Asia, said his bank had set up only seven branches in the last two years and it does not have any strong plan to open such outlets in the days ahead.

"But we have a roadmap to open a good number of sub-branches in the days ahead to operate our digital banking activities in rural areas," he said.

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Govt to expand safety net

Aims to build resilience to future shocks, finance minister tells WB



AHM Mustafa Kamal

REJAUUL KARIM BYRON and DWAIWAN BARUA

The government has already provided seasonal assistance to about 10 lakh people living below the poverty line and will expand such social protection programmes to curb the adverse effects of any future economic shock, according to Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal.

A ministry official recently informed that Kamal made these comments in a letter to David Malpass, president of the World Bank Group.

In the letter, Kamal said that the government had taken various measures to strengthen job creation, improve job quality, and promote inclusive access to employment under World Bank funding.

The letter was issued about a month before the multilateral lender's board approved a \$250 million credit support for Bangladesh on March 26.

The Third Programmatic Jobs Development Policy - the last in a series of three loans - aims to facilitate better and more inclusive job creation, enable quick recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, and build resilience to future crisis.

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Carew hand sanitisers remain unsold

Officials blame it on lack of marketing

SUKANTA HALDER

Despite last year's flying start with the production of hand sanitisers, state-owned Carew & Co is now struggling to find customers for 60,000 bottles of disinfectant it has in its store.

The lone state distiller started producing hand sanitiser on March 23 last year and made a profit of Tk 1.2 crore in three months to June.

But sales started falling drastically after that thanks to an increased supply of the cleaning agent from private manufacturers and marketers and reduced demand among people, said Abu Saeed, managing director of Carew & Co (Bangladesh).

At the end of June last year, the company had a stock of 100,000 bottles and in the next nine months to March this year it could sell only 40,000 bottles.

"The lack of marketing and a fall in demand are to blame for the decrease in sales," Saeed said.

Carew has the licence to sell spirits,



which is the main ingredient for producing hand sanitisers.

The company produces sanitisers by mixing distilled water, colour and scent with it.

The state company began producing the hand rubs when its demand skyrocketed within a short time after the first coronavirus-infected patient was detected in Bangladesh on March 8 in 2020.

The company started selling the product through three approved outlets and 13 of its depots.

The demand for sanitisers has increased again with the emergence of the second wave of coronavirus in the country amid a rise in Covid infections.

In the last 24 hours alone, 83 people died of Covid-19, according to data of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS). With this, the total number of Covid deaths reached 10,952 and the death rate stands at 1.48 per cent, the DGHS said.

But still Carew is hardly getting any buyers for its products now.

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Stopping barrage of promotional messages just a dial away

BTRC asks operators to ensure the service

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Mobile phone users can stop receiving promotional messages on their handsets by dialling codes, said the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) in a notice yesterday.

The notice comes amid complaints from users of being bombarded with numerous marketing messages regularly. Because of the receipt of so many messages, many important messages sometimes remain unnoticed, they said.

Mobile phone operators and BTRC officials said the scope to prevent the promotional messages from coming in had been in place for several years.

However, subscribers were unaware of the facility. And neither the BTRC nor telecom operators have made users aware of the scope.

Anyone unwilling to receive marketing SMSs can dial shortcuts and activate the Do Not Disturb (DND) option.

To activate the service, Grameenphone users have to dial *121*1101# and Banglalink users *121*8*6#. For Robi and Airtel, it is *7#, said the telecom regulator.

After the BTRC notice, which was issued to



the media for broadcasting, many mobile phone users started dialling the codes to stop the flow of the promotional messages from various products and service sellers.

Yet, many have not been able to activate the DND option, with a return notification saying, "Sorry, your request failed due to technical reason."

Some got notification such as 'connection problem or invalid MMI code'.

Some were initially successful and got a notification that said the request would be

processed within 72 hours or as soon as possible.

Mahbubur Rahman, a government official, said he received 10-12 messages daily.

"It is annoying," he said. "It should be the choice of the customers whether the person wants to receive such messages or not."

Just after the BTRC notice, Rahman followed the instruction and used the code. He got the message, which said the request would be processed within the next 72 hours.

Contacted, BTRC Vice-Chairman Subrata Roy Maitra said most of the mobile phone users were unaware of the DND as the operators did not campaign about the feature among the subscribers.

"We have asked the operators to inform their subscribers and ensure the service. We have also taken steps to raise awareness among the mobile phone users," he said.

On the issue of the problems faced by subscribers to activate the DND service, he said the BTRC would look into the issue.

SM Farhad, secretary of the Association of Mobile Phone Operators of Bangladesh, said the scope to check the flow of promotional messages by dialling code had been in place. However, people were not that much aware.



A shop on Elephant Road being prepared for opening today as the government allowed markets to remain open from 10:00am to 5:00pm every day while restrictions on movement and others were still kept in place until April 28. The decision was taken to enable some sales for clothes traders ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr amidst the economic slump induced by the pandemic.

AMRAN HOSSAIN

Education should be skill-oriented

Speakers say at a webinar

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh's education system should be skill-oriented with an emphasis on technology, innovation, startups and entrepreneurship development, according to speakers at a webinar.

"The country's graduates are struggling to secure jobs as the conventional education system lacks skill-orientation in line with industry demands," said Rizwan Rahman, president of the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce & Industry (DCCI).

"As a result, foreigners dominate the technical and managerial positions in key industries and corporations, leading to a substantial outflow of remittance," he added.

Participants of yesterday's webinar, styled "Industry and Academia Linkage: Role of Academia", agreed that local universities should integrate industry-related content in their undergraduate programmes to prepare students for the job market.

"Industry-academia collaboration in the US, EU and South Korea could provide great examples in this regard," said Prof

"The country's graduates are struggling to secure jobs as the conventional education system lacks skill-orientation in line with industry demands," said Rizwan Rahman, president of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce & Industry

Satya Prasad Majumder, vice chancellor of the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet).

Majumder called upon both public and private sector entities to arrange adequate funding for research and innovation.

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