

STOCKS		COMMODITIES		ASIAN MARKETS				CURRENCIES			
DSEX	CSCX	Gold	Oil	MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI	USD	EUR	GBP	CNY
▲ 0.70%	▲ 0.75%	\$1,839.00	\$67.95	▲ 0.60%	▲ 0.55%	▼ 0.56%	▲ 0.27%	BUY TK 83.95	101.06	116.41	12.85
5,645.69	9,848.37	(per ounce)	(per barrel)	49,502.41	29,518.34	3,182.41	3,427.99	SELL TK 84.95	104.86	120.21	13.51



Star BUSINESS

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Sales pick up as Eid nears

But businesses faraway from pre-pandemic level



Shoppers exit Bashundhara City shopping mall in the capital yesterday afternoon.

MAHMUDUL HASAN and SUKANTA HALDER

With Eid less than a week away, smiles have returned to the face of retailers after sales picked up as customers thronged shopping centres, defying the risk of contracting the deadly coronavirus.

Millions of customers are flocking shopping malls, markets and roadside vendors to buy clothes, footwear, electronic items, home appliances, and other fashion items ahead of the festival.

Eid-ul-Fitr, the biggest religious festival in the Muslim-majority Bangladesh, is the peak

shopping season that begins from the first week of the fasting month, accounting for nearly a third of the total annual wholesale and retail trade.

Retailers had bet big on this year's Pahela Baishakh and Eid after watching their businesses evaporate last year when the government imposed lengthy lockdowns to contain the spread of the contagious pathogen.

The infection rate has been climbing up since the middle of March and a seven-day restriction was imposed on April 5 to counter the second wave,

pouring cold water on the optimism of good sales for the retailers.

Since then, the curb has been extended several times, cutting Dhaka from the rest of the country, and even one district from another, although enforcement has been lax.

Their hopes rekindled when the government allowed shopping malls, shops and markets to reopen from April 25 after a 12-day shutdown. Retailers and wholesalers said although sales had rebounded significantly, it still stood below 50 per cent of the pre-pandemic level.

For Aarong, which has 21 outlets, sales reached 65 per cent in comparison to the Eid festival of 2019.

"Sales have been good in the last few days. However, if we are allowed to keep our shops open for extended hours, we would get more customers," said Mohammad Ashraf Alam, chief operating officer of the lifestyle brand.

Many customers venture out for shopping after having Iftar meal, and managing safety protocol would have been easier if there were extended opening hours, he said.

Aarong has taken some cost-cutting measures to cover business losses.

"In other years, we would employ 700-800 additional staff to deal with the rush of the customers. This year, we have recruited only 200 people," Alam added.

FIROZ AHMED

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School banking getting popular

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

School banking is increasingly gaining popularity among students as the total deposits in such accounts reached around Tk 2,000 crore last year, sidestepping the pandemic-induced economic hardship.

As of December last year, students deposited Tk 1,950 crore in the accounts, up 20 per cent from a year ago and 7 per cent three months earlier, according to data from Bangladesh Bank.

The number of accounts under school banking rose 10 per cent to 26.90 lakh

last year.

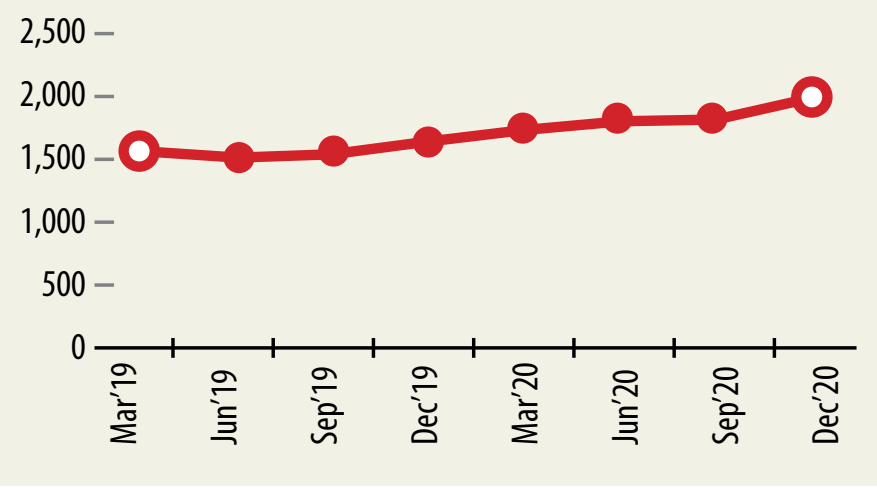
A number of banks earlier took a set of measures to widen the banking operations as per instructions of the central bank, which mainly gave a boost to financial inclusion among students, said a central bank official having substantial knowledge on the matter.

The number of accounts and the outstanding balance under school banking would have increased manifold had not the coronavirus pandemic hit the economy, he said.

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DEPOSITS IN SCHOOL BANKING ACCOUNTS

In crore taka; SOURCE: BB



LDC GRADUATION Committee formed to address challenges

SUKANTA HALDER

The government has formed a 22-member committee to address the challenges that Bangladesh will face as a result of its transition from a least developed country (LDCs) into a developing one.

The committee headed by Ahmad Kaikaus, principal secretary to the prime minister, will carry out preparation, planning, implementation and monitoring to address the possible challenges and create an action plan to overcome those.

It is learnt that the committee will determine the sectors and the level of impact in the post-transition period. Moreover, it will map up the roles of the main responsibilities and associated ministries, divisions, and agencies designated for each sector.

The committee will take initiatives for commercial expansion through bilateral, regional and international agreements. It will provide suggestions on the formulation of tariff policies consistent with free trade agreements.

At the same time, the ministry, divisions or organisation concerned will take a precise and timely action plan and implement it.

It will provide suggestions and regular monitoring on the implementation of action plans adopted by ministries, divisions or organisations.

Bangladesh will lose various international assistance in the period of status transition. Duty-free and quota-free access and easy and low-interest loans from bilateral or multilateral parties will shrink.

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Safety net budget to cross Tk1 lakh crore for first time

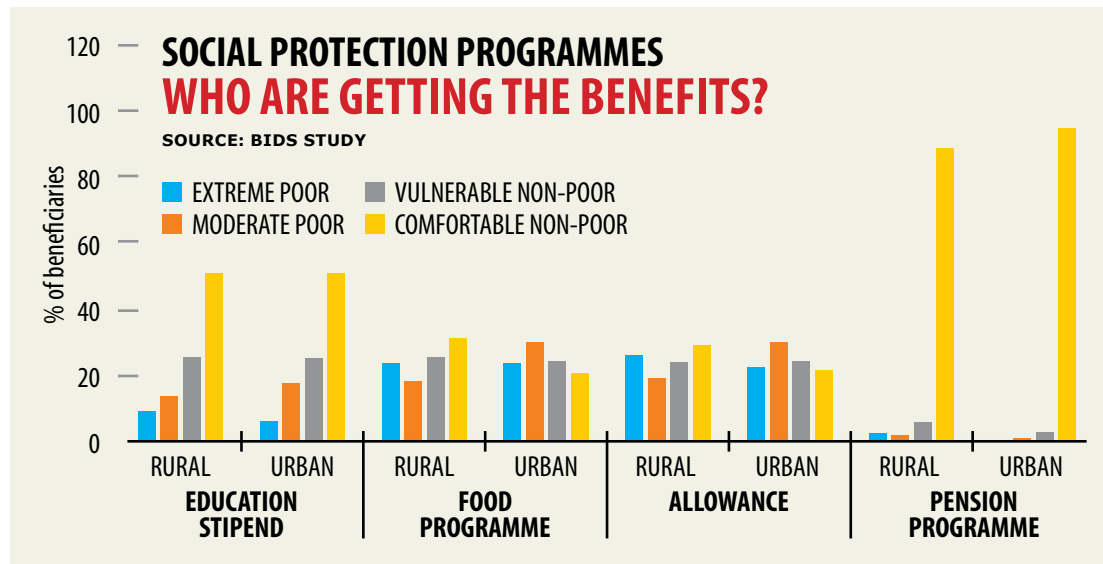
But large portion still goes to non-poor

REJAUUL KARIM BYRON and DWAIPIYAN BARUA

The budgetary allocation meant for the poor and vulnerable is set to go past Tk 1 lakh crore mark for the first time as the government sets aside additional funds to support the needy during the coronavirus-induced income collapse.

The government may earmark Tk 103,600 crore in the next fiscal year to meet its growing expenditure for social protection and safety net programmes, which is up 8.4 per cent from the revised allocation of Tk 95,574 crore in the current fiscal year, according to an official of the finance ministry.

The higher allocation came despite concerns raised by experts and a government-sponsored study that the real poor and vulnerable usually do not benefit from a large portion of social protection allocation.



The budget for food assistance programmes such as vulnerable group development (VGD), the vulnerable group feeding (VGF), and test relief (TR) could go up to Tk 19,000 crore in FY22 from Tk

17,981 crore in FY21, an increase of 5.66 per cent.

The next fiscal's allocation for stipend may stand at Tk 5,000 crore, up by Tk 10 crore up from FY21.

The fund for the allowance programmes for the elderly and widows would see the highest hike by 42.97 per cent to Tk 14,600 crore against the current fiscal's allocation of Tk 10,212 crore.

The allowance programmes covered 112 upazilas in FY21, and it would be expanded to 150 upazilas in FY22 to add 11 lakh new beneficiaries. For this, the government will have to bear an additional expense of around Tk 1,000 crore.

The allotment for other social protection programmes may go up to Tk 65,000 crore, up 41.47 per cent year-on-year.

The allocations will be finalised in a meeting between the finance ministry and other ministries after Eid as the latter demanded additional funds to feed the poor throughout the pandemic.

The economic shock induced by the pandemic has pushed 2.45 crore people, 14.75 per cent of the country's population, into poverty in one year, according to a new survey of the Power and Participation Research Centre and the Brac Institute of Governance and Development.

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Small farmers produce the bulk of foods

AKANDA MUHAMMAD JAHD

The small, marginal and landless farmers together account for around 70 to 80 per cent of the country's food production, said agricultural analysts.

Of them, small farmers who own between 1 to 2.5 acres of land operate around 40 per cent of the total farmland and contribute 50 per cent to the food production, said Prof Abdul Bayes, former director of the Research and Evaluation Division of Brac.

And marginal farmers who own on an average of 50 decimals of land operate nearly 7 per cent of land.

Meanwhile, a section of marginal farmers also grow food by leasing land. So, together with marginal farmers, both landless and marginal farmers operate around 20 per cent of the total cultivable land through leases, according to Bayes.

Bayes, who co-authored the book 'Rural Transformation: Insights from Bangladesh' with Mahabub Hossain, said small, marginal and functionally landless farmers operate over 60 per cent of the total cultivated land and contribute to around 80 per cent of the total food output.

The rest 20 per cent output comes from medium and large farms. The medium farmers, who own between more than 2.5 to 4 acres of land, operate 20 per cent of land and the large farmers, who possess more than 4 acres of land, operate around 14 per cent of the land, he said.

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STAR/FILE

Small, marginal and functionally landless farmers operate over 60 per cent of the total cultivated land.

10pc RMG factories yet to pay salary, bonus

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Not all garment factories have been able to pay workers' salaries and festival allowances within the government-set deadline ending yesterday.

As of yesterday, 92 per cent garment factories paid the festival allowances while some 90 per cent salaries of April, said Faruque Hassan, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

The rest will complete making all payments within the next two days, he said.

"Still we have confusion over whether 10 to 12 factories would be able to pay the workers as their financial strength was not that strong. Most of these are small units," Hassan told The Daily Star over the phone.

"We are working with these factories so that they can pay the workers before Eid-ul-Fitr," he said.

Some 40 factories were in a very vulnerable situation over making the payments but the tally declined significantly after the BGMEA worked with them and held consultations with banks concerned, Hassan also said.

He said many factories, particularly the small ones, have been facing troubles in making payment as either their work orders had been cancelled or they were facing delays in payments from international retailers and brands.

Moreover, banks are not interested in providing loans to these small units which have been running under a financial crunch, he said.

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