

STOCKS		COMMODITIES		ASIAN MARKETS				CURRENCIES			
As on Tuesday								As on Tuesday			
DSEX	CSCX	Gold	Oil	MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI	USD	EUR	GBP	CNY
▲ 0.71%	▲ 0.80%	\$1,902.40 (per ounce)	\$68.45 (per barrel)	▲ 0.75%	▲ 0.31%	▲ 0.72%	▲ 0.34%	BUY TK 83.95	101.60	118.16	12.87
5,884.78	10,286.19			51,017.52	28,642.19	3,146.09	3,593.36	SELL TK 84.95	105.40	121.96	13.53



Star BUSINESS

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MFS interoperability by December

Users can transfer funds to all operators, banks free of cost

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

People will be able to transfer funds from their mobile wallets to other accounts belonging to another carrier and banks by December in a development that would give the mobile financial service (MFS) industry a massive boost.

Bangladesh Bank has already completed the necessary tasks to ensure interoperability of the service, which was rolled out in 2011.

Interoperability refers to the basic ability of different computerised products or systems to readily connect and exchange information with one another, in either implementation or access, without restriction.

The central bank carried out a study between February 1 and February 14 to establish interoperability among MFS providers and banks. Twelve banks, two payment service providers, and one MFS provider took part in the piloting.

"We encountered some problems while conducting the study. We are working to resolve them," said a central banker, who has strong knowledge on the matter.

The upcoming system will allow clients

KEY INDICATORS OF MFS IN MARCH

Comparison: year-on-year

Number of providers:	15	Unchanged
Number of accounts:	10.27cr	▲
Total transactions:	Tk 59,642cr	▲
Average daily transaction:	Tk 1,924cr	▲
Number of agents:	10.69 lakh	▲

SOURCE: BB

to transfer funds from banks to MFS providers and vice versa.

In the last decade, the MFS industry has made significant strides.

The number of registered accounts with MFS providers spurted to 10.27 crore at the end of March this year. Transactions rose 50 per cent year-on-year to Tk 59,642 crore.

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Green power plans go sideways

Bangladesh fails to meet power generation target from renewable sources

PORIMOL PALMA

Bangladesh has failed to achieve its target to raise the share of renewable energy to the total power generation to 10 per cent by 2020 amid constraints of resources, technologies and policies.

Currently, 723.97 megawatts of power are generated from renewable sources, accounting for 3.25 per cent of the total electricity produced.

The Renewable Energy Policy 2008 had set a goal to produce 5 per cent of electricity from renewable sources by 2015 and 10 per cent by 2020.

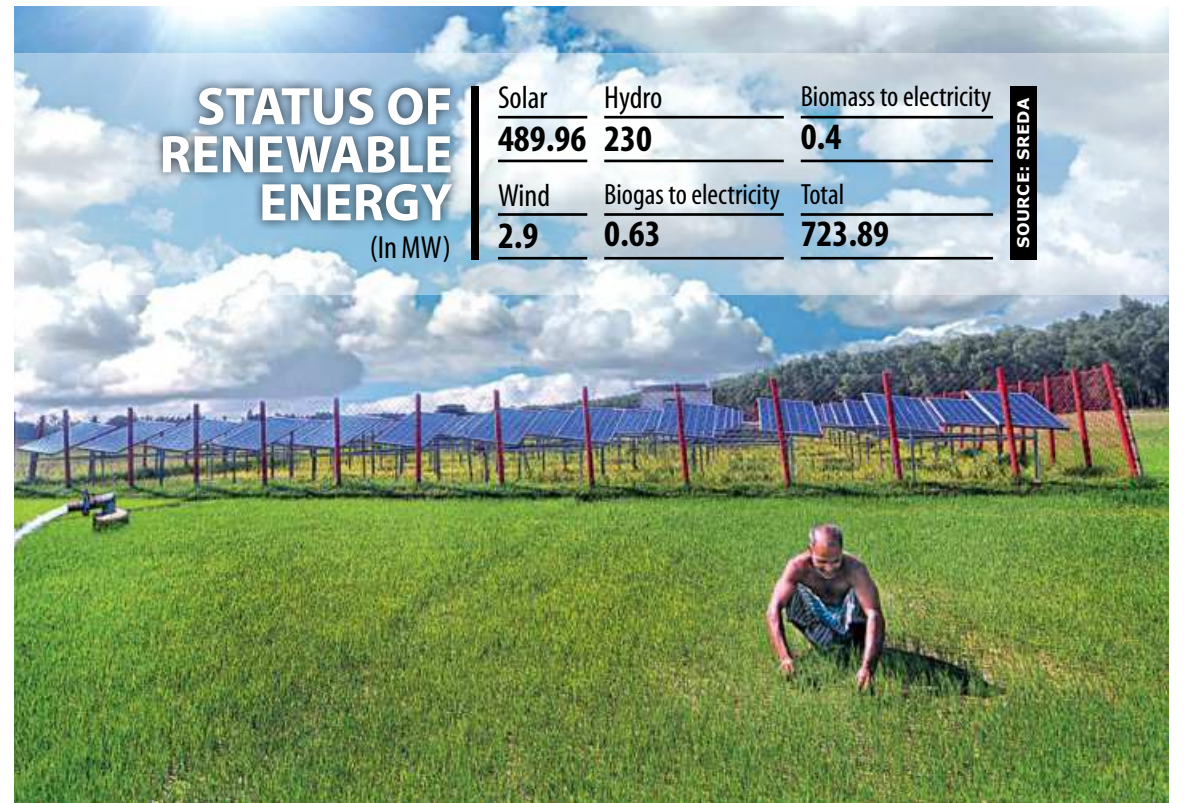
Experts say though Bangladesh's contribution to the global carbon emission is negligible, it cannot stay away from green energy. It will be an important factor in international business since consumers are increasingly getting more conscious about protecting the environment, they say.

Over the years, Bangladesh has formulated policies and taken steps to promote renewable energy. For example, it has installed around 5.8 million solar home systems that benefited 18 million beneficiaries.

Besides, 60.6MW of solar panels were installed on the rooftops of government and private buildings. Nearly 1,969 solar-run irrigation systems have been installed in different parts of the country.

Still, the production of renewable energy has remained insignificant.

According to the Sustainable and



Renewable Energy Development Authority (Sreda), of the 22,289MW of power generation capacity nationally, 47.91 per cent is from gas, 23.37 per cent from heavy fuel oil, 8.05 per cent from high-speed diesel, and 2.35 per cent from coal.

Besides, 9.87 per cent of electricity comes from captive power, which is also generated using fossil fuel, and 5.2 per cent is

imported.

Of the renewable energy, 489.96MW comes from solar home systems and panels, and 230MW from hydropower. A tiny portion comes from wind, biogas, and biomass.

Despite failing to pull off the targets repeatedly, the government has set a new target to generate 1,700MW from utility-scale solar

plants and 250MW from solar home systems by 2030.

Officials and researchers say Bangladesh's main renewable energy comes from solar, but the sticking point here is the lack of land. Besides, the country is fully dependent on other countries for technology, engineers and technicians.

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Betel leaf export to EU resumes after 6 years

Likely to generate \$50m a year

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

After a long six-and-a-half years, betel leaf export to the European Union has resumed following a recent lifting of its ban, with the first consignment of one metric tonne being sent off for the United Kingdom yesterday.

Agriculture Minister Muhammad Abdur Razzaque sent off the consignment through a programme titled "Safe and Quality Betel Leaf Export to Europe" at a Central Packing House of the Department of Agricultural Extension in Shyampur of Dhaka.

In February 2014, the EU imposed a ban on betel leaf exports from Bangladesh till June 30, 2015 due to the presence of harmful Salmonella bacteria in the leaves.

They also set some conditions, including supplying Salmonella free betel leaf and providing associated health certificates



COLLECTED

The ban had caused Bangladesh to lose the opportunity of exporting betel leaf to 29 countries.

and following good agricultural, hygiene and manufacturing practices from production to shipment.

The restriction was gradually

extended to 2020 as Bangladesh could not meet the conditions.

The ban was withdrawn on May 15 based on some conditions after Bangladesh sent documents

verifying meeting the previous conditions.

The new conditions include resumption of the ban if anomalies were discovered, that

In 2014, EU imposed a ban on betel leaf exports from Bangladesh till June 30, 2015 due to the presence of harmful Salmonella bacteria. The ban was later extended to 2020.

50 per cent of the leaves would be checked for Salmonella and that every shipment be provided with health certificates from international-standard testing labs.

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An exceptional move in mutual fund sector

General investors to benefit as Southeast mutual fund is becoming open-ended

AHSAN HABIB

Unit holders of Southeast Bank 1st Mutual Fund have given the go-ahead for VIPB Asset Management Company to convert the closed-end fund into an open-end one.

The development is being viewed by analysts as an exceptional and good move as most closed-end funds have had tenures extended instead of being liquidated, leaving investors unable to realise their gains once maturity is reached.

The VIPB set an example in the mutual fund industry by allowing unit holders to decide the future of the tenure extension of its closed-end mutual fund.

Mutual funds pool together money from many investors and channel it into securities such as stocks, bonds and other assets.

The Southeast fund had a 10-year tenure. It could be extended by another decade as per a Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC) notification.

In 2018, the BSEC allowed the extension of closed-end mutual fund tenures by another 10 years following calls from a few asset management companies.

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Quality testing of imported bitumen made mandatory

JAGARAN CHAKMA

The government has made the quality testing of imported bitumen mandatory to ensure product standards.

The commerce ministry issued a circular on Tuesday to this effect.

The testing has to be carried out at the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution, the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, or Eastern Refinery.

Till date, quality testing was not a prerequisite for bitumen imports before they were unloaded at the Chattogram port.

However, importers do provide test reports from countries the bitumen is imported from.

As per its weather condition, Bangladesh uses bitumen of a "60/70 grade".

AKM Manir Hossain Pathan, additional chief engineer (planning and maintenance) of the Roads and Highways Department (RHD), said the RHD and local government engineering department were the major users of bitumen in building roads and highways.

He said they do test imported bitumen at their own laboratories, the Buet and other related labs before using.

"If the bitumen does not meet specifications, we reject it," he said, adding

The testing has to be carried out at the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution, the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, or Eastern Refinery.

that in most cases, no issues came up in the reports.

He, however, pointed out that the bitumen being adulterated by the users themselves was another issue.

According to Pathan, the bitumen of Eastern Refinery of Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation was a quality product, and there was no doubt about it.

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BANGABANDHU SHILPA NAGAR

Bepza economic zone eyes \$10b investment

JAGARAN CHAKMA

The Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (Bepza) is establishing an economic zone at the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Shilpa Nagar (BSMSN) to diversify exports.

The agency will emphasise the electronic and spare parts manufacturing industries keeping in mind the fourth industrial revolution and job creation.

"The new zone will be different from the existing zones of the Bepza as we will not give priority to the apparel industry," said Md Nazrul Islam, executive chairman of the Bepza.

The planned economic zone will be an EPZ inside the BSMSN in Mirsarai of Chattogram. Investors will have to sell 90 per cent of the products to be manufactured in the international markets, and the rest could be sold in the domestic market following customs and other rules.

Islam said the new zone would attract at least \$10 billion in

- Total industrial plots: 539
- There will be 45 six-storied factory buildings
- Dedicated 10-storied residential facility for investors
- Hotel facility for investors
- Accommodation for foreigners
- Accommodation for women
- Power hub with incinerator, water treatment plant
- Customs bond facility with one stop service

investment and employ five lakh people.

There are eight EPZs under the Bepza across the country.

A total of 476 industrial units have been set up in the EPZs. Of them, 300 units are textile and related accessories factories, 32 footwear plants, 19 electronics and electrical goods factories, 13 plastic goods factories, 13 tent-producing units, and 11 are service-oriented industries.

The factories so far attracted \$8 billion investment and have created around 4.5 lakh jobs. They shipped products worth about \$6.5 billion in the fiscal year 2019-20, down from \$7.2 billion a year ago because of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

The EPZs account for a fifth of the total export receipts for Bangladesh.

The development work of the Bepza economic zone began in 2018. The Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority (Beza) will hand over 1,150 acres of land at the BSMSN to the Bepza on May 30.

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Mohammad Ebadul Karim, managing director of Beacon Pharmaceuticals, handed over pharmaceutical products for Palestinians to the country's ambassador to Bangladesh, Yusef SY Ramadan, at state guesthouse Padma in Dhaka yesterday. Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen and Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen were also present.

BEACON PHARMACEUTICALS

Buy now, pay later players tackle credit conundrum in Mideast's Gulf

REUTERS, Dubai

Financial technology start-ups in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates offering online short-term credit say they are enjoying exponential growth as the coronavirus pandemic drives a shift in consumer spending online.

Digital buy now, pay later (BNPL) purchasing is relatively new to the region where consumers have traditionally been sceptical of paying for goods before getting them.

But Saudi Arabian-based Tamara and UAE's Spotii, Tabby and Postpay all say the take-up has far exceeded initial expectations. And investors are paying attention. Tamara last month raised \$110 million in debt and equity, a large amount for an early stage Middle East start-up.

This week, Australia's second biggest BNPL player Zip said it was buying the rest of the shares in Spotii it did not already own for \$16 million. Tabby has raised over \$30 million including funding from Abu Dhabi state fund Mubadala.

"We're constantly having to re-forecast our numbers just because we constantly get surprised by the consumer adoption," Tabby Co-Founder and Chief Executive Hosam Arab told Reuters.

There is no independent data available on the Middle East BNPL market which also includes Shary in Egypt; all of the

companies in the sector are early stage start-ups and many only began operating last year.

In the United States, Australia and Europe, BNPL is marketed as an alternative to credit cards. During the pandemic, with consumers conserving cash and seeking alternative methods of borrowing money, the service exploded in popularity.

In the Gulf, BNPL companies present themselves as an alternative to cash on delivery, the most common payment method for online purchases in many Middle East countries, according to a 2018 report by British security firm G4S.

But Anil Malhotra, chief marketing officer of digital payments business Bango, said a cultural challenge for BNPL in the Gulf was to make sure it "doesn't look or smell like credit." Islamic customs prohibit charging interests on loans, which has deterred some Middle East consumers from using credit cards.

Saudi Arabian independent retailer Crate, which introduced Tamara on its website last August, has found that while those checking out with BNPL had become repeat users, most customers preferred to pay by card or cash on delivery.

Half of all purchases are paid with card, while cash on delivery accounts for 40 per cent of all online transactions with BNPL making up 10 per cent, Chief Executive Ryan Fadul told Reuters.

German business mood bright despite drop in GDP

AFP, Berlin

Germany's economy fell more than previously thought in the first quarter as coronavirus restrictions curbed consumption, but business confidence has since soared on hopes of a quick recovery, data showed Tuesday.

After two quarters of growth, GDP fell by 1.8 per cent between January and March, national statistics office Destatis said in a statement, revising down its initial prediction of a 1.7 per cent drop.

It was well below pre-pandemic levels, with Covid-19 curbs leading to a 5.4 per cent drop in private consumption, according to the data.

"Needless to say, the worst quarterly performance of the German economy since reunification was mainly the result of stricter lockdown measures since mid-December," said ING economist Carsten Brzeski, adding that harsh winter weather and a longer-than-usual Christmas break were also factors.

Yet he also added that "the potential for a surge in the second quarter has increased", as Germany's vaccination campaign speeds up and the economy begins to open up after months of lockdown.

Hopes that Europe's largest economy will soon rebound after a

damaging third wave of the pandemic were reflected in a surge in business confidence in May.

The Ifo institute's monthly barometer based on a survey of 9,000 companies climbed 2.6 points from April to 99.2 points in May, its highest value in two years.

"Companies were more satisfied with their current business situation. They are also more optimistic regarding the coming months. The German economy is picking up speed," Ifo president Clemens Fuest

said in a statement.

Germany's Bundesbank central bank also predicted a second-quarter bounce last week, saying that Europe's largest economy could even surpass pre-pandemic growth levels from the autumn.

The German government's forecasts currently predict 3.5-per cent growth in GDP for 2021.

GDP shrank by five percent in 2020, its worst contraction since the financial crisis of 2009, due to economic fallout from the pandemic.



Hopes that Europe's largest economy will soon rebound after a damaging third wave of the pandemic were reflected in a surge in business confidence in May.

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার. মেলা প্রশাসকের কার্যালয়, মহম্মদিয়া (হাসিনা সরকার শাখা). তারিখ: ২৪/০৫/২০২১ খ্রি: ২০২০-২১ অর্থ বছরের জন্য মহম্মদিয়া জেলা ইউনিয়ন পরিষদের কর্মকর্তাদের প্রশিক্ষণের (সেফা/সেফাস) পেশার 'খ' তফসিলে বর্ণিত পেশার ও অন্যান্য সরকারি কর্মকর্তাদের জন্য অভিভাবক পেশার সর্বোচ্চ/অধিকারী/অধিকারী/অধিকারী/অধিকারী/অধিকারী নিম্নের নিম্ন শর্ত সাপেক্ষে সীলমোহরিত প্যাকেজ দাখিল করা যাবে।

Goldman Sachs obtains China licence for asset management

AFP, New York

Goldman Sachs said Tuesday it won preliminary approval from Chinese regulators for a wealth management joint venture to serve customers in China.

The venture, owned 51 per cent by Goldman's asset management division and 49 per cent by a subsidiary of the state-owned Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, aims to serve some of the estimated \$70 trillion in investible assets expected at Chinese households by 2030, Goldman said in a news release.

The announcement marks the latest sign of increased openness by Beijing to participation by foreign financial heavyweights. JPMorgan Chase was authorized in December 2019 for a majority holding in a trading joint-venture in China, followed a few months later by similar announcements from Goldman and Morgan Stanley.

Asset management giant BlackRock received approval in early May for a venture with China Construction Bank and Singapore sovereign wealth fund Temasek, The Wall Street Journal reported.

"China's wealth management industry has grown on the back of increased household wealth and continued financial market reform," said Tuan Lam.

Rangamati Government College. Sadar, Rangamati Hill District. www.rangamaticollege.gov.bd. No. RGC/02/2020-2021. Date: 27/05/2021. e-Tender Notice. e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) for the procurement of following package:

Table with 5 columns: Sl. No., Tender ID No., Name of works, Last date and time of tender security submission, Tender closing date & time. Row 1: 1, 581632, Furniture for General Purposes (Library, Meeting Room, Women Corner and Department etc.), 14/06/2021; 2:00pm, 14/06/2021; 3:00pm.

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copy will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP Portal (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) is required. The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered banks' branches up to 13/06/2021 at 4:00pm. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

Principal Rangamati Government College. Phone: 035162215. E-mail: rgcchtd@gmail.com. GD-1075

বঙ্গবন্ধু শেখ মুজিবুর রহমান অ্যাভিয়েশন অ্যান্ড অ্যারোস্পেস বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়. পুরাতন বিমানবন্দর, ঢাকা সেনানিবাস, ঢাকা-১২১৫। INVITATION FOR RE-TENDER. No: BSMRAAU/Registrar/163/2021/Part File-18/OTM-18/18A. Date: 27 May 21. Ministry / Division: Ministry of Education. Procuring entity name: Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Aviation and Aerospace University (BSMRAAU). Procuring Entity District: Dhaka, Bangladesh. Tender Invitation For: Re-Tender: Procurement of Electric Machines and Drives Lab Items for BSMRAAU, Lalmonirhat Campus. Invitation Reference No: BSMRAAU Open Tender No: OTM-18 (Re-Tender)/2020-2021. Date: 27 May 2021. KEY INFORMATION: Procurement Method: Open Tender Method (National). FUNDING INFORMATION: Budget and Source of Funds: Government of Bangladesh. PARTICULAR INFORMATION: Tender Last Selling Date & Time: 03 June 2021; 16:00 PM. Tender Submission Date and Time: 06 June 2021; 02:00 PM (1400 Hrs). Tender Opening Date and Time: 06 June 2021; 02:30 PM (1430 Hrs). Name & address of the office selling, receiving and opening tender document: Registrar office, BSMRAAU, Old Airport Building, Dhaka-1215. INFORMATION FOR TENDERER: Eligibility of Tenderer: 1. The Tenderer must possess a valid trade license, updated VAT and TAX certificate, up-to-date bank solvency and other documents as per tender document. 2. A pre bid meeting for re-tender shall be held on 11:30 AM, 31 May 2021, tenderers are advised to use Covid-19 protective measures. Tendering Type: Item Description: Supply and installation of Electric Machines and Drives Lab Items for BSMRAAU campus, Lalmonirhat. Quantity: As per tender schedule (amended). Location: BSMRAAU campus, Lalmonirhat Airport at Lalmonirhat Sadar, Lalmonirhat-5500 Bangladesh. Tender Security: 2% of the quoted price by the bidder. Completion Time: 18 Days after awarding Purchase Order/signing of Contract. Tender Document Price: Tk 1500.00 (Taka One Thousand and Five hundred Only) in the form of pay order / bank draft (non-refundable) from any scheduled bank of Bangladesh in favour of 'Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Aviation and Aerospace University' (BSMRAAU). PROCURING ENTITY DETAILS: Name Designation of Official Involving: Registrar, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Aviation and Aerospace University. Address Of Official Inviting Tender: Registrar Office, BSMRAAU, Dhaka Campus, Old Airport Building, Tejgaon, Dhaka-1215. Contact Details: Tel No: 55065059, Mobile: 01769995061, Web: www.bsmraau.edu.bd, Email: procurement@bsmraau.edu.bd. The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject any tender without assigning any reason. Procurement Section BSMRAAU. GD-1074

FTA with Malaysia back on the table

Commerce minister says govt will sign the deal

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh's signing of a free trade agreement (FTA) with Malaysia should not be just for the duty free benefits on export but also for securing massive investments, according to economists.

Bangladesh should also focus on making use of low-cost industrial materials that can be imported from Malaysia aside from collecting revenue from import duties to promote domestic and export markets, said Khondaker Golam Moazzem, research director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD).

Bangladesh Haznah Md Hashim said if signing FTAs were a mistake, the country would not have repeated it and so it has penned 16 since 1993.

The latest agreement was signed amidst the ongoing coronavirus pandemic properly documenting the benefits, she said. In 2020, Malaysia's trade with all its FTA partners stood at 1.185 trillion Malaysian Ringgits, or 66.7 per cent of its total trade, she added.

Of its total trade for the year, Malaysia's exports to its FTA partners was valued at 667.46 billion Malaysian Ringgits, or 68 per cent of the total exports, which mainly consist of electronic components, petroleum and chemical products that account for 53.2 per cent of its exports to FTA markets.

Bangladesh is Malaysia's 30th largest trading partner and second in overall among South Asian nations. Bangladesh is also Malaysia's 20th largest export destination, signifying the country's growing importance as an economy.

In 2019, trade between Malaysia and Bangladesh was recorded at around \$2.6 billion, up from \$2.4 billion the previous year. For the period between January and July 2020, trade has lessened but remains robust despite the ongoing pandemic, Hashim said.

In fiscal 2019-20, Bangladesh's total export to Malaysia was \$236.37 million, according to data from the Export Promotion Bureau.

As for the proposed FTA, it has been on the table for 11 years and therefore, it is about time for Bangladesh to revisit the process given its status as one of the fastest growing economies in the world today.

Besides, its impending graduation from the group of least developed countries also makes it crucial to secure such deals.

"I wish to begin by reiterating that as an open economy, Malaysia is a firm believer of not only free, but also fair trade policies," she added.

Hashim went on to say that since the conclusion of its first FTA with Japan 15 years ago, Malaysia has implemented FTAs with six other nations, namely Pakistan, New Zealand, India, Chile, Australia and Turkey.

The country has also implemented seven regional FTAs since 1993, namely the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA), ASEAN-China, ASEAN-Korea, ASEAN-Japan, ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand, ASEAN-India and ASEAN-Hong Kong.

Ctg trade bodies want more funds for dev projects



About 90 per cent of the country's imported consumer goods arrive on large vessels but they are unable to dock at the existing jetties of Chattogram port due to the absence of adequate draft in the port channel.

PHOTO: STAR/FILE



RUN-UP TO BUDGET FOR FY2021-22

MOHAMMAD SUMAN, Chattogram

Various trade bodies in Chattogram have urged the government to increase its special allocation for the port city's development projects in the national budget for fiscal 2021-22.

Besides, traders of the Khatunganj-Chaktai wholesale market demanded that the 300-year-old marketplace be declared a commercial zone. They also asked the government to consider the pandemic-induced losses and subsequent debt when levying tax on annual turnover.

Several development projects, including the construction of a Patenga terminal and bay terminal at Chattogram port, are underway, according to Mahbul Alam, president of the Chattogram Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI).

However, these projects are yet to benefit import-export activities due to the slow implementation process.

"So, the special allocation for these projects needs to increase so that emphasis can be given for speedy completion," Alam told The Daily Star.

After the Bay terminal is completely constructed, the mega-expansion project could nearly double the port's operational capacity.

As a result, the cost of imports and exports will fall significantly since large ships will be able to dock at the terminal jetty.

About 90 per cent of the country's imported consumer goods arrive on large vessels but since they are unable to dock at the existing jetty due to the absence of adequate draft in the port channel, smaller ships have to sail out to the outer anchorage to unload them.

"This is both time consuming and an added expense," said the CCCI president.

The government has initiated a number of mega projects in the greater Chattogram area, including Matarbari, Cox's Bazar, Anwara, Banskhalai and Mirsharai.

Many domestic and foreign investors are eagerly awaiting the completion of these projects, which will bring a huge change to the overall economy.

"This makes it necessary to increase the allocation in the upcoming budget in order to quickly finish these projects," he added.

Alam believes that the local businesspeople could play a leading role in implementing the government's Vision-2041.

He also emphasised on the need to focus on poverty alleviation, generating employment, enhancing investment and increasing revenue collection while formulating the upcoming budget.

Meanwhile, traders of the Khatunganj-Chaktai market in Chattogram want the commodity hub to be declared as a commercial zone in order to address a number of longstanding issues.

The 300-year-old market is slowly losing its lustre due to narrow roads, waterlogging and a gas crisis.

Sagir Ahmed, general secretary of Khatunganj Traders Association, told The Daily Star that the market used to account for 50 per cent of the country's consumer goods demand just two decades ago but at present, it is just 30 per cent.

"If the market is declared a commercial zone and the facilities are increased, small-scale industries of essential items will also be set up in the area," he said.

As a part of their demand, the traders also asked for the establishment of a truck terminal, widening of the roads, dredging of the Karnaphuli river, and expansion of the Chaktai canal.



KEY POINTS

Bangladesh is Malaysia's 30th largest trading partner

In 2019, bilateral trade was about \$2.6b

Bangladesh's total export to Malaysia was \$236.37m in FY2020

About 11 years ago Malaysia called upon Bangladesh to sign FTA

Malaysia's first FTA was with Japan in 2006

Malaysia now has FTAs with Pakistan, New Zealand, India, Chile, Australia and Turkey

Besides, the FTA's signing should aim to develop into a comprehensive economic partnership agreement (Cepa), he said.

Moazzem was addressing a webinar on "Bangladesh-Malaysia FTA: Challenges & Opportunities for Business Community" organised by the Bangladesh-Malaysia Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BMCCI).

Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi, diplomats, exporters and importers from both countries attended the event.

Malaysian High Commissioner to

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GLOBAL BUSINESS

US consumer confidence holds steady

Soaring prices slowing housing momentum

REUTERS, Washington

US consumer confidence hovered at a 14-month high in May as optimism over jobs tempered concerns about rising inflation and diminishing government financial support.

Though the survey from the Conference Board on Tuesday suggested the pace of economic growth remained robust in the second quarter, the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic recession, which started in February 2020, is bumpy.

The housing market, one of the star performers, is showing signs of fatigue, with new single-family homes sales dropping in April amid a dearth of properties, which is boosting prices at the fastest pace in more than 15 years.

"Economic activity is getting back to where it was before the pandemic hit," said Joel Naroff, chief economist at Naroff Economics in Holland, Pennsylvania.

"So why aren't people more exuberant? We might want to start blaming inflation."



Shoppers visit Macy's flagship store in New York City, New York, US on May 20.

PHOTO: STAR/FILE

The Conference Board said its consumer confidence index slipped to a reading of 117.2 this month from 117.5 in April, the highest level since February 2020. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast the index at 119.2.

Effective May, the Conference Board switched to an online from

a mail survey.

Data from January through April was revised to reflect the results of the online survey. The dip mirrored other sentiment surveys, which were pulled down by worries that rising inflation would erode consumers' purchasing power.

Inflation is bubbling as the

economy's reopening after coronavirus-related restrictions and massive fiscal stimulus unleash pent-up demand, which is pushing against supply constraints, leading to price hikes for most goods.

The survey's present situation measure, based on consumers' assessment of current business and labor market conditions, increased to a 14-month high of 144.3 from 131.9 last month.

But the expectations index, based on consumers' short-term outlook for income, business and labor market conditions, fell to 99.1 from 107.9 in April.

Consumers' inflation expectations over the next 12 months jumped to 6.5 per cent from 6.2 per cent last month.

Stocks on Wall Street were mixed. The dollar was steady versus a basket of currencies. US Treasury prices rose.

The Conference Board survey's so-called labor market differential, derived from data on respondents' views on whether jobs are plentiful or hard to get, raced to a reading of 34.6 in May from 21.6 in April.

EU wants more from Big Tech against disinformation



European Commissioner for Values and Transparency Vera Jourova addresses a joint online press conference with European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell following a weekly College of Commissioners meeting at EU headquarters in Brussels.

AP/FILE

AFP, Brussels

The EU on Wednesday tasked tech giants such as Facebook, YouTube and TikTok to do more against disinformation and provide much better access to their algorithms as well as beef up fact-checking.

The proposal is the EU's effort to strengthen its existing code of conduct against disinformation, which was launched in 2018 after revelations that platforms had facilitated and amplified false information in the ramp up to the Brexit vote and elections in the US in 2016.

It was signed by Google, Facebook, Twitter, Microsoft and in June 2020 by TikTok, as well as players in the advertising sector. In the wake of the Covid pandemic, the EU executive is now asking the signatories to go even further in their commitments, which are non-binding and voluntary, at least for now.

The pressure on the companies to deliver is great, given that the EU is also hammering out its Digital Services Act (DSA) that will give Europe power to slap penalties on Facebook and others when they fail to demonstrate strong action against disinformation.

European Commission Vice President Vera Jourova said the stricter and more detailed code of conduct was necessary to better root out "systemic risks" on

platforms. Jourova said that it was time for big tech companies "to stop policing themselves alone and stop allowing to make money on disinformation."

"After the DSA will come into force, this code of practice will become semi-obligatory," she warned.

Among the many proposals, the EU is calling for messaging platforms such as Facebook's WhatsApp to also be included, given the vast disinformation campaigns seen in India and elsewhere.

The Commission is also asking platforms for regular reports with clear benchmarks to assess the measures put in place.

In addition, the EU executive is seeking to create a designated task force composed of the code's signatories, representatives of the EU diplomatic service and media regulators from the member states.

The proposals will be discussed with the signatories, who will have to submit a first version of the revised code late this year so that it can be operational by the beginning of 2022.

Marisa Jimenez Martin, Facebook's director of EU Affairs, said that "the reality is that we think the code works".

"It just needs to be now strengthened and we will work with the other stakeholders to make that happen in the next months," she told reporters.

The code is one of the many EU workstreams to limit the reach of Big Tech.

Germany opens Google antitrust probe

AFP, Berlin

Germany's antitrust regulator said Tuesday it has opened an investigation into Google over anti-competitive practices, wielding a new law that has already been used to scrutinise other US tech giants.

The Federal Cartel Office will investigate European units of Google in Germany and Ireland, as well as its parent company, Alphabet, in California, it said in a statement.

The investigation will probe whether Google is considered to be "of paramount significance for competition across markets" due to the breadth of its digital products, Cartel office head Andreas Mundt said.

"Google's business model relies



Germany's antitrust investigation into Google follows the application of a new law giving the authorities more power to rein in big tech companies.

to a very large extent on processing data relating to its users," Mundt said. "Due to its established access to data relevant for competition, Google enjoys a strategic advantage."

"A key question in the probe was whether consumers wishing to use Google's services have sufficient choice as to how Google will use their data", he said.

Google spokesman Ralf Bremer said the tech giant would cooperate fully with the investigation.

"People choose Google because it's helpful, not because they're forced to, or because they can't find alternatives," he said, adding that German consumers are offered "simple controls to manage their information and limit the use of personal data".