

BANGLADESH UPDATE



1,444
New cases in 24hrs



7,98,830
Total cases



12,583
Deaths



7,38,805
Recoveries



3,554,086
Deaths



170,904,685
Total cases

COVID AID TO INDIA, FINANCIAL HELP TO SL BANGLADESH IS SHOWCASING ITS ECONOMIC RISE

Experts say main reason behind Bangladesh's economic growth is EU, other bodies' trade preferences programmes

NAYANIMA BASU, New Delhi

From providing India with Covid relief materials to extending financial help to Sri Lanka in its hour of crisis, Bangladesh has started to showcase its economic rise and use it to forge deeper ties with neighbours.

Earlier this week, Bangladesh agreed to extend a \$200 million currency swap facility to Sri Lanka. This will help in boosting their economy even as it will enable Colombo to tide over the massive debt crisis it is facing at present, diplomatic sources told ThePrint.

The foreign debt situation of Sri Lanka is at a critical juncture leading to a massive balance of payment issues. Sri Lanka has reportedly \$3.7 billion of foreign debt maturing this year, hence this cooperation from Bangladesh is expected to be a lifeline for their economy.

According to sources, the arrangement was finalised during Sri Lanka Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa's visit to Bangladesh in March this year.

A currency swap is a transaction in which two parties exchange an equivalent amount of money with each other, but in different currencies. It helps in reducing the cost of borrowing in a foreign currency at favourable rates.

Sri Lankan economy has been in deep trouble ever since the 2019 Easter bombings and subsequently the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic that has wreaked havoc for its tourism industry and other sectors.

Bangladesh is also among the 40 countries that have sent Covid relief aid to India twice as the country battles the second wave.

On 18 May, Dhaka handed over 2,672 boxes of various anti-viral drugs and Covid protective gears to India. Prior to that, Dhaka had on 6 May sent 10,000 vials of Remdesivir to India.

Bangladesh, which is expected to register a GDP growth rate of 5.8 per cent this fiscal, has even come under the US' radar due to its strategic location in the Indo-Pacific region.

In April this year, the US Chamber of Commerce launched the US-Bangladesh Business Council looking at the investment potential by American investors there, and also enhance two-way trade.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina-led Bangladesh government has also garnered praise from arch-rival Pakistan for its growing economic prowess.

"Every government in Pakistan, including the current one, has gone around the world with a begging bowl... It was unthinkable, 20 years back, that Bangladesh's GDP per-capita in 2020 would be almost twice that of Pakistan. Bangladesh could be an economic powerhouse in 2030 if it grows at the same rate as in the past. If Pakistan continues its dismal performance, it is in the realm of possibility that we could be seeking aid from Bangladesh in 2030," Abid Hasan, a former adviser to the World Bank for the Pakistan Program, said in an opinion piece in one of Pakistan's leading national dailies.

The new 'Royal Bengal Tiger of Asia'

According to Prabir De, professor at the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), the main reason behind Bangladesh's economic growth is that it continues to reap benefits from the European Union's Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP) programme and other trade preferences.

"It is due to this continuous support through the EU's GSP scheme that Dhaka has been able to earn considerable revenues from strategic exports. Besides, Bangladesh does receive a good amount of remittances as well," De said.

Mizanur Rahman, commissioner, Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission, told ThePrint that Bangladesh' forex reserves have reached \$45 billion in 2021 from around \$9 billion in 2010, while inward remittances have touched \$200 billion.

"Bangladesh believes in behaving responsibly with its neighbours and reaching out to those who need their help. Dhaka is now looking at deeper integration with its neighbours while not undermining others," Rahman said.

De added: "Bangladesh is the new Royal Bengal Tiger of Asia. They speak in one language across all spectrum and have well-structured governance."

He also said Bangladesh is now doing trade with major ASEAN countries while it is also looking at having trade pacts with some of the ASEAN countries and joining connectivity projects.

[The article was originally published in Indian news portal The Print on May 28]

<https://theprint.in/diplomacy/covid-aid-to-india-financial-help-to-sri-lanka-bangladesh-is-showcasing-its-economic-rise/667019/>

Mango gets in the way

FROM PAGE 1
trade involves cores of taka and livelihoods of thousands of people."

He claimed that the coronavirus situation was not yet alarming and said they would prefer lives over livelihoods only when they think the situation is beyond control.

Contacted, Habibur Ahsan Talukder, Rajshahi divisional director of the DGHS, said, "The number of coronavirus patients requiring hospitalisation is still bearable though the number of infections is high."

He said lockdown was the best solution but it would make things tough for most people who need to go out and work to earn a living.

According to health officials in Rajshahi, the infection rate in the region was 43 percent yesterday as the results of 190 out of 435 samples came positive.

Chapainawabganj, a major mango-producing district in the region, was put under a strict lockdown for a week following a surge in Covid cases. The lockdown ends today.

At least seven cases of the Indian Covid variant have been detected so far in the district. None of the infected people visited India in recent times.

First detected on May 8 in the country, a total of 20 cases of the Indian variant have been found in 10 districts most of which share border with India.

Yesterday, the Covid positivity rate was 34 percent in Chapainawabganj.

"Lockdown means loss for everyone. Nobody wants it. We will sit to discuss the situation tomorrow [today]," said Dr Zahid Nazrul Chowdhury, civil surgeon in the district.

However, Hussain Shafaat, civil surgeon in Satkhira, was in favour of imposing lockdown in the district as the positivity rate was over 22 percent

with Covid claiming at least four lives in the district yesterday.

"As the positivity rate is very high in Satkhira and the hospitals are overburdened, I proposed imposing lockdown here. We will discuss this issue at a meeting of the district's Covid control committee tomorrow [today]," he said.

Officials in Khulna, Jashore and Kushtia said the government should closely observe the Covid situation in the region and wait for a few more days before imposing lockdown.

The Covid positivity rate in the region was around 25 percent yesterday, according to health officials.

Meanwhile, the government decided to extend the ban on travel to India through land ports till June 14 in view of the current Covid situation.

Amid a spike in Covid cases in neighbouring India, Bangladesh has kept its border with India closed since April 26.

However, many people in six districts of Khulna division continue to illegally travel to and from India, raising the risk of transmission of the Indian variant, reports our correspondent from Kushtia.

The six bordering districts are: Satkhira, Jashore, Jhenaidah, Kushtia, Meherpur and Chuadanga.

Contacted, Border Guard Bangladesh Battalion-58 Director Kamrul Hasan admitted that many Bangladeshi nationals have been returning from India, crossing the border illegally.

He also mentioned that a total of 725 Bangladeshis have returned through Darshana border point since May 17. All of them were kept in quarantine.

[Amanur Aman from Kushtia and Dipankar Roy from Khulna contributed to this report]



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina speaking to Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury at the 32nd Parliament Secretariat Commission meeting held at the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday.

PHOTO: PTD

Biman to look into high

FROM PAGE 1

sufferings and financial burden of Saudi-bound migrant workers due to mandatory hotel bookings for quarantine, and post-arrival quarantine and pre-departure quarantine for South Korea bound passengers, added a source.

The respective secretaries of the Prime Ministers' Office, foreign ministry, expatriates' welfare ministry, health ministry, home ministry, civil aviation ministry, the chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh, and Biman Managing Director and CEO Dr Abu Saleh Mostafa Kamal, among others were present at the meeting.

The inter-ministerial meeting was held following the sufferings of Saudi-bound migrant workers following the issuance of a new travel advisory by the Saudi government that said Saudi-bound migrant workers who hadn't yet receive the Covid-19 vaccine would have to stay in seven days'

institutional quarantine at designated hotels in the Gulf country.

The travel advisory came into effect from May 20.

A Saudi-bound worker needs to spend Tk 60,000 to Tk 70,000 to book a hotel room to quarantine in, a large financial burden for them. Failing to book hotel rooms, more than a thousand Saudi-bound migrant workers missed their flights in the past few days, workers alleged.

According to a meeting source, the Biman MD submitted a letter at the meeting mentioning various reasons for increasing airfares on various international routes.

The reasons included Biman's inability to carry passengers at full capacity due to restrictions for maintaining social distancing and the small number of passengers on most Dhaka-bound flights.

Despite these arguments, top officials of the expatriates' ministry

pressured Biman to reduce exorbitant airfares to various Middle Eastern countries. At one stage, the Biman MD said they will look into the matter, a secretary who was present at the meeting told The Daily Star.

Regarding Covid-19 vaccination for outbound migrant workers, Ahmed Munir Saleheen, secretary of the expatriates' welfare ministry, said the inter-ministerial meeting had instructed the health ministry to give vaccines to outbound migrant workers on a priority basis after vaccines become available in the country.

About giving cash assistance of up to Tk 25,000 to each Saudi-bound migrant worker from the Wage Earners' Welfare Fund, Saleheen added they will either provide the money to the respective airlines or to the bank accounts of the workers.

"After finalising the process, a circular in this regard will be issued soon," he also said.

Allocation rising, service

FROM PAGE 1

28,820 crore. In fiscal 2016-17, when the new pay scale was fully implemented, it was Tk 49,043 crore.

With the higher pay, it is natural to expect the quality of service to improve and corruption to moderate, said Ahmed, who has been in civil service for 37 years with spells in the finance ministry, housing and public works ministry, Rural Electrification Board, Prime Minister's Office and Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre.

"Corruption happens because of two reasons: need and greed. Greed can't be solved but need can be -- and that is what the government tried to address with the eighth pay scale."

And yet, corruption stayed as it is, said Ahmed, a former commissioner of the Anti-Corruption Commission.

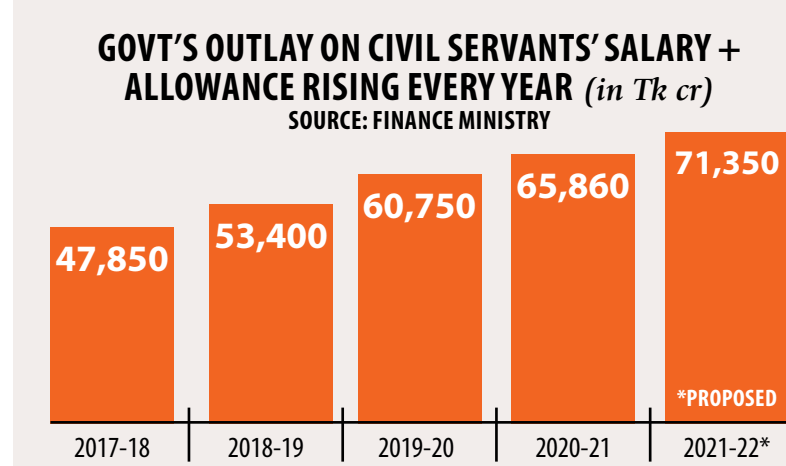
Bangladesh slipped two notches in the Corruption Perceptions Index 2020, the flagship publication of Transparency International, to come ahead of only Afghanistan among the South Asian nations in tackling graft.

The country ranked 146th, which is 12th from the bottom. Bangladesh's score remained for the third time but the others improved theirs to leapfrog the country.

The government is in the civil administration's grip, said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute, a private think-tank.

"They are living like lords on public's money. We are just not getting the service. Please tell me where the service quality has improved and bribing has subsided? So what was the point of the pay rise? There has been no improvement in efficiency or accountability -- it is all whitewash."

What is particularly grating is that for want of civil servants' will among civil servants, the development budget remains largely unused, said Mansur, a former economist of the International



Monetary Fund.

The allocation for the annual development programme is invariably revised down generously towards the end of the fiscal year to show a flattering implementation rate at the end of the year.

In fiscal 2019-20, the implementation of the revised ADP was 80.4 percent, according to data from the Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Division. In fiscal 2015-16, when the new pay scale was implemented, it was 92.7 percent.

Many of the ongoing projects are set to expire next year and yet they are nowhere near completion.

As is often the case, project designs are never right; they need to be modified a few times, leading to delays and cost overruns.

There are also questions about the quality of the work that takes place.

Many of these issues can be improved if the finance ministry takes ownership of the ADP budget and gets backing from the Prime Minister's Office, according to Ahmed, a former

secretary of the Internal Resources Division under the finance ministry.

"The project directors do not own the projects -- they are after fancy cars and foreign tours," he said, while calling for stronger monitoring of the projects.

Service quality, however, improved in areas where there has been automation.

"But during my time at NBR, I have seen resistance to automation."

For instance, the move to automate the value-added tax system began in 2013. That project is supposed to be completed next month, after multiples extensions.

"There is a nexus between tax officials and businessmen that is preventing full automation. And the businessmen are nowadays politicians too. There is a big principal-agent problem," Ahmed added.

In economics, the principal-agent problem is a conflict in priorities between a person or group and the representative authorised to act on their behalf. An agent may act in a way that is contrary to the best interests of the principal.

NID services should be with EC

FROM PAGE 1

The CEC said there was no discussion with the EC earlier over shifting the NID services to the Security Services Division. A few days ago, the EC just received a letter over it. Then it was discussed in the commission's meeting, he said.

He said the director general of NID registration wing was asked to prepare a report in this regard raising the EC's stand and arguments and the report will be given to the cabinet secretary.

Nurul Huda said the shifting issue of NID service is at the very primary stage of discussion. It can't be shifted just by giving a letter. "It is a very tough task," he added.

Mentioning the government's logic behind the move, he said the government's suggestion is that the NID services are not under the Election Commission in other countries.

"It is true that the EC doesn't render the services in other countries. But the situation of Bangladesh should not be

compared with that of other countries in this case. There would be no problem if it remains under the EC. The EC is able to render its services," he said.

In other countries, the NID services are under either the home ministry, local government ministry, law ministry or a separate body, said the CEC.

But there is also no voter registration campaign in many countries as well. Since the countries have proper birth registration programmes, the people become voters automatically just after they cross 18, he said.

But the situation in the South Asian countries is different as there is no proper infrastructure to determine the age of people. "So, if the NID services remain under the EC, there is no problem. It is our logic," he added.

Nurul Huda said the EC secretary will try to convince (the government) in the cabinet or other forums through discussions about the government's thoughts.

106,000 Pfizer jobs to arrive today

FROM PAGE 1

centres in the capital. Bangladesh is expected to receive 68 million doses of Covid vaccines from COVAX.

The Directorate General of Drug Administration (DGDA) on May 27 approved the emergency use of the Pfizer vaccine in the country.

Seeking anonymity, a health official told this newspaper that these vaccine doses will be administered mainly in

the capital as most areas outside the city don't have the cold chain system needed to transport and store the vaccine.

"The Pfizer vaccine must be stored in minus 60-80 degrees Celsius," the official pointed out.

The vaccine produced by Pfizer Manufacturing Belgium NV is the fourth Covid-19 vaccine approved so far by the DGDA for emergency use in Bangladesh.

The other three are: Covishield

produced by Serum Institute of India; Sputnik V manufactured by Generium Joint Stock Company of Russia; and Sinopharm produced by Beijing Institute of Biological Products Co Ltd of China.

The Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), the Vaccine Alliance (GAVI), and the World Health Organization are co-leads of the COVAX initiative for equitable global access to Covid-19 vaccines.

GREEN GROWTH

Campaign on action-oriented approach

PM tells P4G summit

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday put forward three suggestions before the Partnering for Green Growth and the Global Goals 2030 (P4G), including strengthening campaign about its action-oriented approach by engaging more financiers, innovators, policymakers and creative entrepreneurs in its focus areas.

"P4G needs to campaign more about its action-oriented approach, engaging more financiers, innovators, policymakers and creative entrepreneurs in the five P4G focus areas [food, water, energy, cities and circular economy], and share best practices," she said in her recorded statement played in the 2021 P4G Seoul Summit.

The two-day summit is being held on the theme of "Inclusive Green Recovery towards Carbon Neutrality" in Seoul, the capital city of South Korea, aiming to position P4G as a delivery mechanism to build back better and greener in this decade of action.

The second suggestion Sheikh Hasina placed is the need for a whole-of-world attitude in addition to a whole-of-society approach for achieving green growth and global goals 2030.

Placing the third suggestion, she said, "We, the participating leaders in the P4G Summit, need to work more closely towards a greener future for our next generation."

In the statement, the prime minister said Bangladesh's key focus is to promote locally-led adaptation solutions to address the adverse impact of climate change.

"As the chair of the Climate Vulnerable Forum-CVF and the host to the South Asian office of Global Centre on Adaptation, Bangladesh's key focus is to uphold the interests of the climate vulnerable countries and promote locally-led adaptation solutions," she said.

The prime minister said water, an area of work for P4G, is one of the most valuable assets of Bangladesh. "So, we've adopted a 100-year sustainable development plan styled as Delta Plan 2100 that focuses on efficient use and preservation of water."

She said Bangladesh is the first LDC to establish a "Climate Change Trust Fund" from its own resources. "Every year we spend about 5 billion US dollars on climate adaptation and mitigation measures."

Bangladesh, a member of the P4G, pursues a low carbon development path. "Our National Solar Energy Action Plan 2021-2041 predicts generation of up to 40 Giga Watt of renewable energy by 2041," she added.

Illegal border crossings going on in 6 districts

AMANUR AMAN, Kushtia

Amid the closure of Indo-Bangla land borders, Bangladeshis nationals are trespassing using several illegal points in six districts of the south.

The districts are Satkhira, Jashore, Jhenidah, Kushtia, Meherpur, and Chuadanga.

Multiple trafficking rackets are assisting people to travel between Bangladesh and India through these points, eventually increasing health risks in the areas, said sources.

Contacted, Lt Col Kamrul Hasan, director of 58th battalion of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), said some people crossed the border from India amid the closure as they had no other way to return.

"Since they have gone to India illegally, they have returned illegally," he said.

According to the BGB official, all these trespassers are general people and used to travel to the neighbouring country for visiting their relatives.

Some of them also used to work there as labourers, he added.

Lt Col Khalekuzzaman, director of 6th BGB battalion in Chuadanga, said their troops regularly patrol the borders to prevent trespassing form India. However, since the borders are fenceless, some people take opportunity to enter the country.

A total of 725 Bangladeshi citizens returned through Darshana frontier from May 17, he said, adding that the returnees were sent on quarantine and isolation.

Like them many others have returned without any test for coronavirus, he added.

According to sources, maximum trespassing take place through Benipur and Dhopakali villages in Chuadanga's Jibannagar upazila; and Matila, Laraighat, Samanta and Khoshalpur villages in Jhenidah Maheshpur.