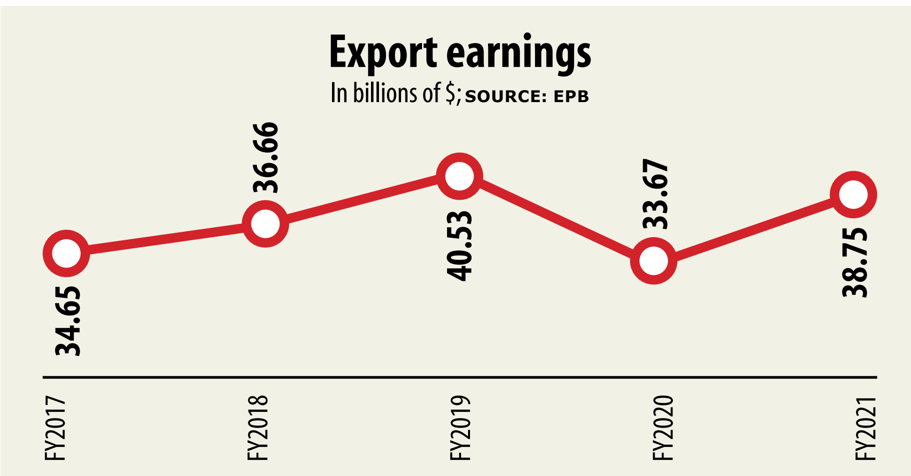
STOCKS		COMMODITIES		ASIAN MARKETS				CURRENCIES (STANDARD CHARTERED BANK)				
DSEX	CSCX	Gold	Oil	MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI		USD	EUR	GBP	CNY
▲ 1.12%	▲ 1.32%	▲ $1,791.25	▲ $76.49	▲ 0.75%	▼ 0.64%	▲ 0.39%	▲ 0.44%	BUY TK	83.95	98.46	115.22	12.75
6,219.94	10,836.43	(per ounce)	(per barrel)	52,880.00	28,598.19	3,141.02	3,534.32	SELL TK	84.95	102.07	118.76	13.40

Star BUSINESS

DHAKA TUESDAY JULY 6, 2021, *ASHAR 22, 1428 BS* starbusiness@thedailystar.net

Exports make strong rebound

Log 15pc growth in FY2021



REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Export earnings rebounded strongly in the just-concluded fiscal year, fetching $38.75 billion, buoyed by a revival in the shipment of garment items, official figures showed yesterday.

The receipts in fiscal 2020-21 are 15 per cent higher compared to a year ago, according to data from the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB).

Month-wise, overseas shipment also recorded significant growth.

In June, the takings from merchandise exports surged 31.7 per cent to $3.57 billion, which was $2.71 billion in the same month a year ago. Despite the turnaround, the overall receipts could not reach the pre-Covid level of $40.5 billion logged in the fiscal year 2018-19, the highest on record.

The shipment also fell 5.47 per cent shy of the $41 billion target set by the government for FY21.

Exporters, however, hope that the uptick in the shipment would likely continue as the demand for the leading export item apparel has risen in the major markets in the west.

READ MORE ON B3

Remittance surges at sharpest pace in three decades

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

Remittance inflow posted 36 per cent growth in the just-concluded fiscal year, the sharpest in 30 years, thanks to the hard-earned money sent by migrant workers amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Bangladeshi diasporas sent home $24.78 billion in 2020-21, the highest on record, in contrast to $18.20 billion a year ago, Bangladesh Bank data showed.

Analysts say that the global hundi cartel, which operates an illegal cross-boundary financial system, has been facing a major disruption since the first quarter of 2020 as the international travelling came to a halt because of the pandemic, fuelling the growth of remittances.

Many nations, including the countries where most expatriate Bangladeshis work, have enforced restrictions on the movement from time to time to contain the spread of the virus.

This has dealt a blow to the hundi system and encouraged the expatriates to send money through the formal channel.

In addition, both the government and local banks have taken some measures, including the introduction of cash incentive, making remitting money through the banking channel attractive.

The growth in the remittance flow in FY21 surpassed the 33 per cent expansion recorded in 2001-02. Migrant workers sent $2.5 billion in the year.

There is, however, no scope to be complacent, said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh.

"Manpower export has dropped sharply in the recent period, and the expatriates are in dire straits due to the ongoing business slowdown."

Around 7-8 lakh Bangladeshis used to go abroad every year searching for jobs before the pandemic. But, only 2.17 lakh people found employment in other countries last year and 1.95 lakh so far this year, data from the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training showed.

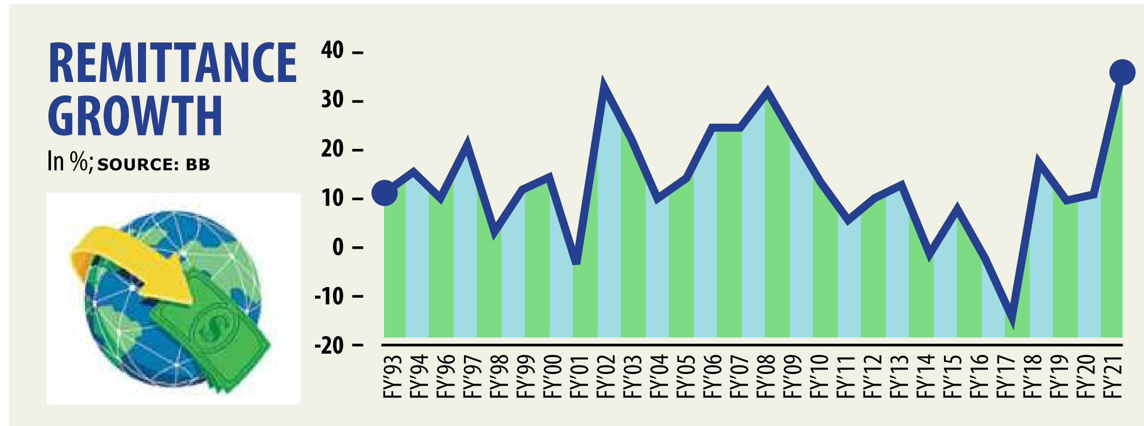
In addition, the migrant workers now face various problems as many employers cut salaries owing to the business slowdown, said Mansur, also a former official of the International Monetary Fund.

"Still, remittance has been on the rise as the expatriates are sending more money using the banking channel due to the collapse of the hundi system."

Remittance transfer may fall sharply once the embargo on movement is withdrawn. "So, the government should take preparation so that manpower export returns to the pre-pandemic level," he said.

Mohammad Shams-Ul Islam, managing director of Agrani Bank, also said the disruption in the hundi system helped accelerate the remittance growth.

READ MORE ON B3



ANNUAL REMITTANCE INFLOW		INFLOW FROM MAJOR COUNTRIES		TOP 3 RECIPIENT BANKS	
FY'21	$24.78b	Saudi Arabia	$4.03b	Islami Bank	$7.46b
FY'20	$18.20b	USA	$2.83b	Agrani	$2.82b
FY'19	$16.42b	UAE	$1.68b	Sonali	$1.53b
		Figures of the first 11 months of FY'21		Figures of July-June of FY'21	

Forex reserve reached **$46.42**b on July 5 this year · Reserve stood at **$36.03**b on June 30 last year — SOURCE: BB

NBFI LOANS
BB relaxes classification rules

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh Bank yesterday relaxed the loan classification policy for borrowers of non-bank financial institutions (NBFIs) given the ongoing business slowdown caused by the recent wave of the coronavirus pandemic.

Borrowers of the NBFIs will not be considered defaulters if they repay 50 per cent of their actual installment of loans which are scheduled to become overdue in June, according to a central bank notice.

Clients will be allowed to repay the 50 per cent of the installments within August.

In April, Bangladesh Bank (BB) said clients would be permitted to pay instalments of the first quarter of this year within June, meaning that they got an additional time of three months to make the payment.

But, the latest spread of the pandemic has dealt a blow to borrowers once again, which is why the BB has relaxed the loan classification policy further.

The BB asked the NBFIs not to impose any penal interest or additional fees, charge and commissions on the clients, who can avail the relaxed facility.

The NBFIs will not be allowed to show their unearned interest as income, said the BB.

The realised interest can only be transferred to their income books. Some 35 NBFIs are operating their business in the country.

Plenty of empty containers, only a few are handy

DWAIPAYAN BARUA, *Ctg*

It may surprise many that a lot of empty containers are lying idle at the private inland container depots (ICDs) in Bangladesh when the ICDs are choked with export cargoes for failing to ship them on time due to an acute shortage of empty boxes.

As of yesterday, 26,336 empty containers were sitting idle at 19 private ICDs. But among them, the number of containers that are specifically required to carry exports is just a few.

Of them, there are 13,647 boxes of 20-foot containers, while the remaining 12,689 are 40-foot containers.

Bangladesh Inland Container Depots Association (BICDA) Secretary Ruhul Amin Sikder said small-sized 20-foot containers are not preferred to carry export cargoes. The bigger 40-foot containers are more suited for the purpose.

Although there are 12,689 40-foot empty containers in the ICDs, most of them cannot be booked for many reasons, he said.

Some of the 40-foot containers have got damaged and are not in a position to load cargoes, he added.

Khairul Alam Sujan, director of the Bangladesh Freight Forwarders Association, said many of the empty containers are idling as their owners -- shipping companies or mainline operators (MLOs) -- do not provide services to the ports in the US and the EU, the two major export destinations for the country's garment sector.

READ MORE ON B3

HC appoints 5 independent directors at Int'l Leasing

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

The High Court has appointed five independent directors to the much-talked about International Leasing and Financial Services for smoothly running operations as it had incurred a loss of around Tk 3,000 crore.

The company bench of Justice Muhammad Khurshid Alam Sarkar made the appointments.

All the members of its present board of directors, except for Chairman Nazrul Islam Khan who was appointed by the bench earlier, are accused in a number of criminal cases and are fugitives in the eye of law.

The HC bench announced the appointments on June 16 on hearing an application filed by the non-bank financial institution for the induction of some independent directors.

That day, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) submitted an affidavit before the HC bench.

It pointed out that a number of criminal cases of cognisable offences are pending against all the present board members, except for Khan, and till date they have remained on the run.

READ MORE ON B3

AMRAN HOSSAIN

Customers nearly overwhelm this branch of a private bank in the capital's Motijheel yesterday as banks opened after remaining closed for four days since Thursday due to a bank holiday, weekends and strict lockdown. In addition, banking activities are currently limited between 10:00am and 1:30pm.

Better infrastructure, policy can create more online jobs: experts

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

An online platform-based economy has huge potential of generating employment in Bangladesh if adequate digital infrastructure is built and proper policy intervention is made, said experts yesterday.

The pandemic has pushed many services onto digital platforms and the associated economy had already been growing for quite some time.

"A big portion of the unemployed can get jobs in the sector if we can create skilled human resources," said Prof Mustafizur Rahman, a distinguished fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD).

"One-third of tertiary education degree holders are unemployed in the country and they have so much opportunity in the digital economy," he said.

He said digital platforms bore enormous opportunities at both local and foreign markets.

The annual export of digital products and services now stands at $1 billion, which can be taken to $5 billion as neighbouring India exported $145 billion-worth digital products, software and services in 2020, he added.

"The digital platform-based economy will make our economy more competitive, increasing productivity and reducing lead time with automation," he added.

READ MORE ON B3

AT A GLANCE

- Bangladesh now the 2nd largest supplier of online labour globally
- It has a 16% share in global online workforce
- Online payments rose to Tk 4,000cr in 2020, up from Tk 1,978cr in 2019
- Exports of IT and software products fetch $1b a year
- There are 2,000 website-based entrepreneurs in the country

Rebound in global gas demand threatens international climate targets

REUTERS, *London*

A rebound in global gas demand to 2024 following a record fall last year is poised to knock the world off track for a climate goal of achieving net zero emissions by 2050, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said on Monday.

More than 190 countries have signed the Paris agreement designed to limit global warming to 1.5 deg C, which will require a huge reduction in the use of fossil fuels such as coal and gas.

"Natural gas demand is set to rebound strongly in 2021 and will keep rising further if governments do not implement strong policies to move the world onto a path towards net-zero emissions by mid-century," the IEA said in its latest gas outlook.

Gas demand in 2021 is expected to rise by 3.6 per cent as global economies recover following a record fall in 2020 due to restrictions to limit the spread of the novel coronavirus.

From 2022 to 2024, demand growth is expected to average 1.7 per cent per year, meaning gas demand would be too high to keep to the IEA's road map towards meeting global net zero emissions by 2050.

The IEA in May published a pathway for the energy sector to meet the net zero emissions target and said investors should not fund new oil, gas and coal supply projects.

But new demand could be met by projects already approved or under development before the pandemic, the latest report said.

Global gas prices have soared to multi-year highs over the past month, with high temperatures driving demand for power generation in the northern hemisphere for air conditioning and as some regions such as Asia seek to boost stocks before winter.

The report said Europe's benchmark Dutch gas prices are expected to average US$9.5 per million British Thermal Units (MBtu) in 2021, their highest since 2013, while Asian spot LNG prices are expected to average US$11/MBtu, the highest since 2014.

In Monday's report, the IEA said the gas industry should ramp up efforts to reduce emissions such as addressing methane leaks.

REUTERS/FILE

The sun rises behind a gas-fired power station in Minsk, Belarus on February 5, 2020.

India's Paytm to file draft prospectus next week for $2.3b IPO

REUTERS, *New Delhi*

One97 Communications Ltd, the parent of Indian payments firm Paytm, will file a draft prospectus as early as July 12 for a domestic initial public offering (IPO) that seeks to raise $2.3 billion, two sources close to the matter said on Monday.

The money will be raised via sale of new Paytm stock as well as a secondary offering of shares at an expected valuation of $24 billion to $25 billion with an option to raise the amount at a later stage if required, the sources said, declining to be named as the matter is not public.

Paytm's proposed $2.3 billion IPO will make it India's third-biggest public listing in dollar terms after state-run miner Coal India in 2010 and Reliance Power in 2008.

The prospectus will be filed shortly after Paytm's extraordinary general meeting (EGM) of shareholders in Delhi on July 12, possibly on the same day, the sources added.

Paytm declined to comment.

Paytm, which counts China's Alibaba and Japan's SoftBank as backers, is seeking shareholder approval at the EGM to sell up to 120 billion rupees ($1.61 billion) in new stock and have an option to retain an over-subscription of up to 1 per cent, Reuters reported previously.

There were $3.6 billion worth of IPOs in India in the first half of 2021, up from $1.1 billion at the same time last year, according to Refinitiv.

The level so far this year is the highest since 2008, the data showed. Sona BLW Precision Forgings raised $757.4 million in its June IPO which was the biggest listing in India this year.

Paytm has hired JPMorgan Chase, Morgan Stanley, ICICI Securities, Goldman Sachs, Axis Capital, Citi and HDFC Bank for the IPO, the sources said.

Citi and ICICI Securities declined to comment. Other banks did not respond to requests for comment.

Beijing prices up cost of e-commerce data abuses

REUTERS, *Hong Kong*

Chinese regulators have sent e-commerce companies yet another reminder that they are being closely scrutinised.

The powerful State Administration for Market Regulation on Friday proposed rules to punish illegal pricing, adding a chapter specifically addressing subsidies and the practice of charging different prices based on algorithms that help analyse customers' purchasing behaviours.

The draft rules cast a wider net compared to antitrust guidance finalised in February targeting monopolistic behaviour by internet platforms.

It should herald speedier investigations, while proposing fines equivalent to up to 0.5 per cent of a company's annual sales, and even the confiscation of key operating licences.

Regulatory risks are flying thick and fast at Chinese technology companies spanning e-commerce to fintech to mobility; Beijing is determined to curb monopolistic behaviour and reduce financial risk and, as the slapdown on new US debutante Didi shows, is increasingly fretting about data, both in terms of how it is used and its security. Everyone is on their toes.

REUTERS/FILE

People browse online shops for belts in Beijing, China.

Business is soaring for UK services firms, and so are prices

REUTERS, *London*

The post-lockdown bounce-back for British services firms eased only slightly in June but price pressures jumped by the most on record, adding to signs of a further rise in inflation ahead, a survey showed on Monday.

The IHS Markit/CIPS Purchasing Managers' Index for the sector edged down to 62.4 from 62.9 in May but was slightly higher than a preliminary June reading of 61.7.

Job creation was the fastest for seven years but even so staff shortages contributed to the highest level of backlogs since the survey began in 1996. That in turn helped to push up prices by the most on record for inputs and prices charged.

Britain's economy slumped by nearly 10 per cent last year as the country suffered one of the world's highest Covid-19 death tolls.

But this year it is expected to grow faster than the United States and other advanced economies, helped by its early Covid-19 vaccination rollout and huge monetary and fiscal stimulus.

Despite the growth spurt and inflation running above its 2 per cent target, the Bank of England has signalled it is in no rush to ease off on its support. It is waiting to see if unemployment rises as the government winds down its job subsidies over the next three months.

IHS Markit said there was a small fall in exports due to travel restrictions and uncertainty about quarantine policies. Some firms also said Brexit-related issues had dampened export orders to the European Union.

The composite PMI, including previously released manufacturing data, also eased back, slipping to 62.2 from May's 62.9 which was the highest reading since the series began in January 1998.

REUTERS/FILE

The City of London financial district can be seen as people walk along the south side of the River Thames, amid the coronavirus disease outbreak in London, Britain on March 19.

Daimler, Volvo and Traton plan $600m truck-charging JV

REUTERS, *Frankfurt*

Three major European truck manufacturers - Daimler Trucks, AB Volvo and Traton - said on Monday they plan to form a joint venture (JV) to develop an electric battery-charging network for long-haul trucks and buses.

Charging infrastructure expansion has been a central hurdle to the mass adoption of battery-powered vehicles, with the lack of expansion fuelling so-called range anxiety, the fear of not having enough charging spots to make the trip.

"The key ingredient in the future rolling-out of electric vehicles will be the infrastructure. It will be the big bottleneck," Martin Daum, chief executive of Daimler Trucks, to be spun off from Daimler later this year, told Reuters.

The three companies, which are all building electric trucks and are normally competitors, will jointly invest 500 million euros ($593 million) in the venture that they will own equally and that will start operations in 2022.

"And thereafter we are very open in all directions to let other parties partner with us and actually bring equity into the joint venture," Traton CEO Matthias Gruendler said, adding he expected a lot of outside interest once the JV has been set up.

The aim is to install and operate at least 1,700 charging points within five years. The joint company will be based in Amsterdam and will over time seek further partners and public funding.

European car industry association ACEA has called for up to 50,000 high-performance charging points by 2030. Gruendler said that roughly 10 billion euros would be needed to build out Europe's infrastructure to be fully electrified by 2050.

"In order to accelerate further, we need additional partners, additional networks and public funds," AB Volvo CEO Martin Lundstedt said. "We will continue to be very fierce competitors. But we need a new platform to compete upon."

REUTERS/FILE

Daimler AG's FUSO Super Great truck is pictured at the 45th Tokyo Motor Show in Tokyo, Japan.

Britain proposes company listing reforms to catch up with NY

REUTERS, *London*

Britain's financial watchdog proposed on Monday making it easier for tech companies to list in London to strengthen the capital's ability to compete with New York and the European Union following Brexit.

The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) has proposed allowing "dual class share structures" for "innovative, often founder-led companies" listing on the London Stock Exchange's premium segment. Dual class share structures are popular in New York, allowing founders of companies to maintain control at the expense of ordinary shareholders.

They are already available in London on the standard segment, but shareholder rights groups who back "one share, one vote" oppose their introduction on London's premium segment where top companies list.

The FCA also proposed cutting the amount of shares that must be made available to the public or free-float to 10 per cent from 25 per cent.

The minimum market capitalisation, however, for both the premium and standard segments for ordinary commercial companies would be raised to 50 million pounds ($69 million) from 700,000 pounds.

The proposals stem from a government-backed review of listing rules by former European Commissioner Jonathan Hill, who said they would help London catch up with what was already happening in New York and elsewhere.

"These proposals are essential if we intend for the UK to continue to be a modern and dynamic market. Today, we are acting assertively to meet the needs of an evolving marketplace," said Clare Cole, the FCA's director of market oversight. "Our proposals should result in a wider range of listings in the UK, and increased choice for investors while we continue to ensure appropriate levels of investor protection." A public consultation on the proposals will close in September, with final rules due before the end of 2021.

The FCA is also due to announce final rules for easing listings of SPACs or special purpose acquisition companies to catch up with a flurry of listings in New York and Amsterdam.

Indonesia sets coal benchmark price at highest in a decade

REUTERS, *Jakarta*

Indonesia set its coal benchmark price at the highest in more than a decade, an official document published by its energy and minerals ministry showed on Monday, supported by sustained demand from China.

The ministry set the benchmark coal price at $115.35 per tonne in July, higher than the $100.33 per tonne in June and the highest since $117.6 per tonne in May, 2011, Refinitiv data showed.

"China's domestic coal supply capacity continues to run low while power generation activities resume," energy and mineral resources ministry spokesman Agung Pribad said in a statement, adding demand also increased from Japan and South Korea.

"This has an impact on the increase in global coal prices," he said.

DHAKA BANK

Dhaka Bank virtually celebrated its 26th anniversary at its Gulshan head office yesterday. Chairman Abdul Hai Sarker, Founder Mirza Abbas Uddin Ahmed, Founding Vice Chairman ATM Hayatuzzaman Khan and Managing Director and CEO Emranul Huq were also present.

China extends probe into US-listed tech firms after Didi blow

AFP, *Beijing*

Beijing widened a crackdown on its embattled technology sector Monday by announcing probes into two more US-listed Chinese companies, a day after banning ride-hailing giant Didi Chuxing from app stores following its huge New York initial public offering.

The country's major internet firms wield massive influence among its army of consumers, but have in recent months had their wings clipped in a regulatory crackdown that has scuppered listings and hit business as the government seeks to rein in their influence.

The latest targets are newly listed companies Full Truck Alliance -- a merger between truck-hailing platforms Yunmanman and Huochebang -- and Kanzhun, which owns online recruitment platform Boss Zhipin.

"The overarching message here from regulators is, you need to have your house in order domestically before listing abroad," said Kendra Schaefer, head of tech policy research at Beijing-based consultancy Trivium China.

The three platforms have been told to stop new user registrations during the investigation "to prevent security risks to national data, safeguard national security and protect public interest", the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) said.

Hours earlier, the watchdog ordered the removal of Didi from app stores following a similar probe, which it said found the firm's user data collection and use in "serious violation" of regulations.

It also cited national security for the probe, an unusual move against a domestic tech firm. However, there were few details on the probe or Didi's alleged violations.

Didi has pledged to rectify any problems, and said that the takedown "may have an adverse impact on its revenue in China".

The move does not prevent existing users from booking through Didi, but throws a wrench in the company's growth plans after its bumper New York IPO last week raised $4.4 billion, one of the biggest in the US over the past decade.

The investigation was announced just after China wrapped up tightly-choreographed celebrations for the centenary of its ruling Communist Party.

It also comes at a time of heightened tensions between Beijing and Washington with the tech sector a key issue of disagreement.

Dubbed China's Uber, Didi was founded just nine years ago by former Alibaba executive Cheng Wei.

It has gone on to dominate the country's ride-hailing market after winning a costly turf war against the US titan in 2016 and taking over Uber's local unit.

It now claims more than 15 million drivers and nearly 500 million users, with services available in 16 countries, including Russia and Australia.

But its rise also comes amid what Kevin Kwek, senior analyst on Asian financials at Bernstein, called a clear "trend towards tightening on tech".

Chinese tech companies fell in Hong Kong Monday as investors assessed the situation, with e-commerce platform Meituan down 5.6 per cent, Alibaba dropping nearly three percent and Tencent -- which has a stake in Didi -- sliding 3.6 per cent.

Tokyo-listed SoftBank, which has a 21.5 per cent stake in the firm, plunged 5.4 per cent.

Didi, with a near monopoly on ride-hailing, is "the most high profile cyber security case" of its kind, University of Hong Kong law professor Angela Zhang told AFP.

But the action was lauded by state-run Global Times, which said the country must not allow "any internet giant to become a super database of Chinese personal information even more detailed than the state".

A top Didi executive took to social media over the weekend to rebuff rumours the firm had been sharing domestic data with the United States, calling it "absolutely impossible".

Better infrastructure, policy can create more online jobs: experts

FROM PAGE B1

Rahman said the government should act to protect the rights of workers in the digital platforms as well as consumers' rights.

He was speaking at a virtual event on "Digital Platform Economy in Bangladesh" organised by the CPD and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Bangladesh Office.

The onslaught of the fourth industrial revolution is tremendous and it will change the way of life overwhelmingly, Fahmida Khatun, executive director of the CPD.

"Technologies such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, internet of things are changing the way we live, take services and work," she said.

She said digitalisation had also significantly impacted the labour market, with less tech efficient people losing jobs, and many jobs would turn redundant as technology would enable accomplishing many things in many areas.

"On the other hand, there will be many new areas for jobs and with skilled human resources and regulatory framework, Bangladesh can maximise the benefits from the changing labour market," she added.

"We have to be prepared to take advantage of the benefits of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. We can benefit from this sector by providing incentives and creating policies. Digital platforms are playing an important role in entrepreneurship and consumer growth as well as job creation," she said.

The CPD recently concluded an exploratory study on the online platform-based economy in context of Bangladesh. Syed Yusuf Saadat, senior research associate of the think tank, gave a keynote presentation on the study.

He said Bangladesh now accounts for 16 per cent of the world's online labour market, and was now the world's second largest online labour supplier.

At present, there are 2,000 web-based entrepreneurs in Bangladesh and about 50,000 Facebook-based entrepreneurs.

"Online-based business opportunities through digital platforms have increased, especially in the context of the ongoing pandemic. The digital platform is expected to create around five lakh jobs in the next one year," said Saadat.

According to the study, although a lot of mobile applications are coming into the market due to increasing internet coverage and popularity of smartphones, no proper policy has been formulated on those apps yet.

It said although the concept of the digital platform economy was new in Bangladesh, it was gradually gaining confidence and spreading rapidly among the new generation.

To enhance their credibility and acceptability, many digital platforms need improvements in their strategic approach and customer services.

The study recommends ensuring product quality, timely delivery of services, efficient management of inventory, flexible return policy and overall transparency, all of which would result in greater growth of the digital platform economy in Bangladesh.

According to the study, the ridesharing business in Bangladesh has grown significantly, amassing $260 million in the digital platform economy with 6 million rides availed each month.

A study has estimated that the size of the ridesharing market of Dhaka city would be around Tk 2,200 crore a year.

Citing data of the e-Commerce Association of Bangladesh, it said online payments in Bangladesh have increased from Tk 168 crore in 2016 to Tk 1,978 crore in 2019.

Online payment is projected to reach Tk 4,000 crore due to the surge in online transactions during the Covid-19 pandemic, it added.

Due to its low cost labour, Bangladesh has been deemed as the next big IT outsourcing destination in the world, according to the study.

Felix Kolbitz, resident representative of the FES, said the digital platform-based economy was a promising sector.

He said research and discussions involving stakeholders would help create a favourable environment for the expansion of this new sector.

Farhana A Rahman, senior vice president at the Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services, said adequate policy support was needed to facilitate remittance inflow from this sector, especially in freelancing.

She also emphasised on the need to use domestic platforms to expand the local market.

Hussain M Elius, CEO of Pathao, highlighted a lack of skilled manpower having high quality technical knowledge.

Imul Haque Sajib, co-founder of Sheba.xyz, Fahim Uddin Shuvo, founder & CEO, Garbageman; Fahad Ifaz, co-founder and CEO, iFarmer; and Mohammad Abdul Matin Emon, CEO of Doctorola, also spoke.

Spain maintains tourism target despite British travel restrictions

AFP, *Madrid*

Spain expects to meet its target of welcoming around 45 million foreign tourists this year despite virus travel restrictions faced by Britons, its main market, the government said Monday.

"We can still recover half of our international tourism this year, its a prudent goal," Tourism Minister Maria Reyes Maroto said in an interview published in top-selling daily newspaper El Pais.

"We expect around 17 million international tourists during the summer and many will be British because it is a market that is very faithful to Spain," she added.

The minister announced in mid-May that Spain, the world's second most popular destination after France before the pandemic, expected to draw 45 million foreign visitors this year, more than half the 83.5 million it received in 2019. Between January and May, Spain welcomed 3.2 million foreign visitors, including about 130,000 Britons, according to the latest official figures.

Britain allowed international travel to resume in May after months of banning most trips abroad, but Spain is not included in its so-called "green list" of safe destinations.

That means Britons returning from trips to mainland Spain must self-isolate on arrival for 10 days and take two Covid-19 tests. Only Britons heading to Spain's Balearic archipelago, which includes Ibiza and Mallorca, are exempt due to the lower numbers of Covid-19 infections there.

In 2019, 18 million Britons visited Spain, including 3.7 million who headed to the Balearics.

In May, Spain exempted British tourists from having to present the results of covid tests as it tried to boost tourism, a mainstay of the Spanish economy.

But the following month it reversed the policy and now demands a negative Covid-19 test or proof of vaccination.

Airbus delivered more than 70 jets in June

REUTERS, *Paris*

Europe's Airbus delivered more than 70 airplanes in June to leave first-half deliveries in touching distance of the 300 mark, according to industry sources and tracking data.

Between January and May, Airbus handed over a total of 220 airplanes, up 38 per cent compared with the same period of 2020 which was heavily affected by coronavirus lockdowns from late March.

June's performance puts the first-half total comfortably above 290 and marks one of the strongest monthly totals since the start of the pandemic, behind a peak of 89 in December 2020, the sources said.

Airbus declined to comment ahead of the publication of first-half deliveries on Thursday.

Plenty of empty containers, only a few are handy

FROM PAGE B1

The most required MLOs for transporting goods from Bangladesh are Hapag-Lloyd, Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC), Hyundai Merchant Marine, CMA CGM, and Maersk Line.

"There is an acute shortage of empty containers of these MLOs," Sujan said.

Hapag-Lloyd currently has 390 boxes of 40-foot containers sitting idle, while the company has a weekly demand for over 700 of them, according to the local agent of the German shipping company.

Abul Kalam Azad, general manager of operations at GBX Logistics and the local agent of Hapag-Llyod, said they are bringing 300 TEUs of 40-foot empty containers from transhipment ports, and they would be available after a week.

According to officials of several shipping companies, most of them are unwilling to give bookings for their containers due to an acute space shortage in the mother vessels at transhipment ports.

A total of 1,650 boxes of 40-foot empty containers owned by MSC are lying idle at the ICDs, but the company has slowed the booking process due to a space shortage in the mother vessels that sail from Colombo and Singapore transhipment ports.

Hong Kong-based Orient Overseas Container Line (OOCL) currently has 3,000 boxes of 40-foot empty containers in the ICDs. However, it also suspended new bookings for exports to the EU mainly for the same reason.

OOCL Country Head Giasuddin Chowdhury said they were unable to take new bookings since most mother vessels had reduced capacity or were avoiding voyages to various EU ports because of acute vessel congestion at the ports.

Exports make strong rebound

FROM PAGE B1

Garment shipment, which accounts for about 85 per cent of the national export, registered 12.5 per cent year-on-year growth, fetching $31.45 billion in the last fiscal year.

Knitwear emerged as a major driver as earnings rose 22 per cent to nearly $17 billion in FY21.

Woven export, which had been stuck in the negative territory in the last one and a half years, registered 3.24 per cent growth to $14.49 billion.

Home textile posted spectacular growth.

For the first time, the shipment of home textile crossed the $1-billion mark. The export from the segment soared 49 per cent to $1.13 billion in FY21.

Exporters say the demand for both knitwear and home textile items has gone up globally as people are spending more time indoors because of the lingering coronavirus pandemic.

Md Shahidullah Chowdhury, executive director of Noman Group, the biggest home textile producer and exporter in Bangladesh, said the shipment of bed sheets, curtains and towels helped his company boost the export growth by 10 per cent.

Work orders from China shifted to Bangladesh to some extent, he said.

"The export trend looks bright as international retailers and brands are coming back with a handful of work orders for the next season," said Faruque Hassan, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

He said the export earnings should be compared with the pre-crisis period.

In fiscal 2018-19, Bangladesh exported garment items worth $34.13 billion. It dropped to $27.94 billion in the following year as the sales collapsed in the western markets because of the pandemic.

"With the reopening of the clothing stores in Europe and the US, the shipment of garment items is rising," Hassan said.

According to the business leader, the export of knitwear had already returned to the pre-pandemic level, and woven export was rebounding.

The price of garment items made in Bangladesh also increased to a bit as buyers are taking into account the high cost of raw materials like fabrics and yarn. But the cutting and making charges have almost remained unchanged.

Hassan thanked the workers, owners and the government for keeping open the garment factories during the lockdown.

The export of jute and jute goods clocked 31.6 per cent growth to reach $1.16 billion in FY21. Leather and leather goods brought home $942 million, up 18 per cent year-on-year, EPB data showed.

Md Saiful Islam, president of the Leathergoods and Footwear Manufacturers & Exporters Association of Bangladesh, said the increase in the proceeds from leather and leather goods shipment was driven by the sales of previously unsold goods and the reopening of Europe and the US.

"The western customers are going out and spending thanks to the mass vaccination. So, I hope the positive trend in the shipment of leather and leather goods will continue."

Frozen foods, agricultural products, pharmaceuticals, ceramics, footwear, and carpets also fared well.

HC appoints 5 independent directors at Int'l Leasing

FROM PAGE B1

Placing the affidavit, Khurshid Alam Khan, representing the ACC, said unless the board members obtained bail from a court, they could not attend any board meeting.

Md Mahfuzur Rahman Milon, representing the NBFI, told The Daily Star yesterday that the accused were namely M Nurul Alam, Nasim Anwar, Bashudeb Banerjee, Nowsherul Islam, Md Anwarul Kabir, Barrister Nuruzzaman and Muhammad Abul Hasem.

The HC bench recently released the full text of its order observing that because of their fugitive status, the present board members were not competent to attend any board meeting, extraordinary meeting and annual general meeting.

"It means that the company is currently not in a position to call any type of meeting with the required quorum towards smoothly running its business because of not having sufficient members in its board of directors," said Justice Sarkar.

Under the circumstances, the company's prevailing situation falls within the purview of Section 85(3) of the Companies Act as had been in the case of "Tees Mart Inc Vs BIFCL", said the court.

Among the newly inducted directors, Syed Abu Naser Bakhtear is the former managing director and chief executive officer of Agrani Bank, Prime Bank and South East Bank.

The others include Md Shafiqul Islam, a retired senior district and sessions judge and a former ACC director, Brig Gen (retired) Md Meftaul Karim, Barrister Md Ashraf Ali and Enamul Hasan, FCA.

The company has been directed to pay each an honorarium of Tk 25,000 for attending each board meeting.

The HC also ordered Bangladesh Bank to do the needful to let the board of directors form and run the NBFI as per the court's order.

The HC on January 21, 2020 placed a bar on 20 people, including the much-talked about Proshanta Kumar Halder, also known as PK Halder, from leaving the country for allegedly embezzling Tk 3,000 crore from the NBFI.

The HC also directed the central bank and all private banks to freeze the accounts of PK Halder, his five relatives, Bank Asia's former managing director Erfanudidn Ahmed and Halder's cohort Uzzal Kumar Nondi for allegedly misappropriating the funds.

UK new car sales rise in June compared to difficult 2020

REUTERS, *London*

British new car registrations rose by an annual 28 per cent in June compared to the same month last year, when some dealerships were closed for much of the month due to Covid-19 restrictions.

A total of 186,128 new cars were registered, according to the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT), which said the level remained down on the 10-year average for June.

In 2020, dealerships reopened their doors to customers on June 1 in England, June 8 in Northern Ireland, June 22 in Wales and June 29 in Scotland.

Remittance surges at sharpest pace in three decades

FROM PAGE B1

"The government initiative to pay a two per cent incentive on remittance has had a good impact on the inflow as well," he said.

On top of the government incentive, Agrani Bank itself provides an additional one per cent incentive, taking the benefit of using the formal channel to 3 per cent.

Agrani is the second-largest bank in terms of mobilising remittance, bringing home $2.82 billion last fiscal year.

The state-run lender rolled out a mobile application – Agrani Remittance App – for the remitters last year, allowing them to send money from their offices, factories, or residences to Bangladesh.

The beneficiaries also do not require to visit branches of the bank to collect the money as funds are automatically deposited in their accounts, Islam said.

Annual remittance flow may increase to $30 billion within the next five years if the authorities take appropriate measures, said Shariful Hasan, head of the migration programme of Brac.

The majority of migrant workers are unskilled, and they are facing challenges abroad, he said.

"Their job is vulnerable, and they hardly get any support from Bangladesh's embassies."

The demand for skilled professionals will go up sharply after the pandemic peters out.

"So, the government should take initiatives to provide training to the those who intend to go abroad for jobs," Hasan said.

DSE's prime index crosses 6,200 points

Investors still wary about companies' performances

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The DSEX yesterday rose to its highest point in the last three-and-a-half years thanks to increased investor participation.

The benchmark index of Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) surged by 69 points, or 1.12 per cent, to hit 6,219.94, which is the highest since January 7, 2018, when the index stood at 6,268 points.

"Since trading has continued amid the ongoing strict lockdown, investors no longer fear that the market will be shut," said a stock broker.

When the coronavirus outbreak began in March last year, Bangladesh's stock market was closed down for about two months in the face of a nationwide "general holiday".

If the market remains closed, it disheartens institutional and foreign investors.

So, general investors were similarly tense about whether the market would be shut down again as a part of the ongoing strict lockdown measures.

But the apprehensions have dissipated and people are now investing, he said.

Still, concerns remain about the performance of listed companies.

As consumption decreased amid the current crisis, so too did production.

"This might affect the profitability of certain companies and so, investors are still cautious," added the broker.

Turnover, another important indicator of the market, rose 10 per cent to Tk 1,551 crore yesterday even though the day's trading period was shortened by one-and-a-half hours, till 1:00pm.

At the DSE, 243 stocks advanced, 119 declined and 11 remained unchanged.

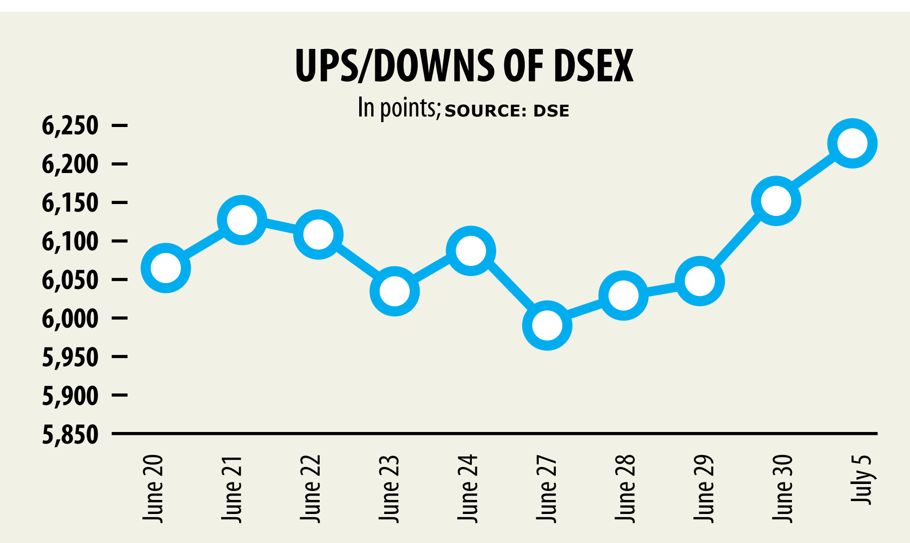
Yeakin Polymer topped the gainers' list, rising 10 per cent, followed by Zaheen Spinning Mills, Khan Brothers PP Woven Bag Industries, Tallu Spinning Mills and Bangladesh Industrial Finance Company.

Stock of Beximco were traded the most, with Tk 73 crore worth of shares changing hands, followed by ML Dyeing, Keya Cosmetics, Sandhani Life Insurance Company, and Maksons Spinning Mills.

Monno Fabrics shed the most, falling 9.80 per cent, followed by Purabi General Insurance Company, Agrani Insurance Company, Bangladesh Monospool Paper Manufacturing Company, and Global Insurance.

Meanwhile, the port city bourse also rose as the CASPI, the general index of the Chittagong Stock Exchange, advanced 240 points, or 1.35 per cent, to 18,035.

Among 304 stocks to witness trade, 215 advanced, 71 dropped and 18 remained unchanged.



Black plum harvests revive Barguna farmer's glories

SOHRAB HOSSAIN

Clusters of black plum are the first to greet the eye at Ahsan Habib's Koraitala village home, just five kilometres away from Barguna district headquarter. He made Tk 15 lakh from sales this season, most of it through Facebook. The photo was taken on Saturday.

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, *Patuakhali*

DISTRICTS IN FOCUS

A former presidential award winner for cultivating watermelon and vegetables is now making a name in Barguna with his black plum trees, that too selling off most of this season's Tk 15 lakh-worth harvests through Facebook.

In 1988, the then agriculture minister had come over to see for himself the produce before the award was presented in 1992, said Ahsan Habib taking pride in his work.

And rightly so. His black plum trees bore no fruit in the first two years on being planted in 2008.

But he doubled down on nurturing them, for which now great clusters of the oblong fruit are the first things to greet the eye at his Koraitala village home, just five kilometres away from the Barguna district headquarter.

The black plum tree is also commonly known as Malabar plum, Java plum, jamun or jambolan. What is less known is its scientific name, Syzygium cumini.

The juicy sweet and mildly sour fruit trees start flowering from March to April and the fruits develop by May or June.

During the harvest season, Habib collects the fruit from his 43 trees almost every day. At the season's start, he was able to get Tk 8,000 per maund (one maund equals around 37 kilogrammes).

As more fruits arrive in markets, prices go down. Most recently, he sold a maund for Tk 2,000. Now that the trees are fully grown, Habib has to bear little expense.

His daughter, Humaira Akter, was the first to make a Facebook post about the season's first arrivals on a group named "Barguna Bee" before word quickly spread.

She said 95 per cent of the sales were made online and they had made deliveries both in Barguna city and around the country, including Barishal, Dhaka and Rajshahi.

Packaging for transportation was an issue as the fruit becomes quite soft when ripe, she said, hoping to adopt better methods in future.

Seeing the success, many of the area's farmers now seek Habib's expertise in the cultivation.

The fruits available in the market are all of native tree varieties as there is no cultivation of improved or hybrid ones, said AKM Mostafa Zaman, a professor of the Department of Agronomy at the Patuakhali Science and Technology University.

GLOBAL BUSINESS

Euro zone business activity soared in June as lockdowns lifted

REUTERS, *London*

Euro zone businesses expanded activity at the fastest rate in 15 years in June as the easing of more coronavirus restrictions brought life back to the bloc's dominant service industry, a survey showed on Monday.

But that surge in growth has come at a cost as inflationary pressures mounted due to labour shortages and disruptions to supply chains caused by the pandemic.

IHS Markit's final composite Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), seen as a good gauge of economic health, jumped to 59.5 last month from May's 57.1, its highest level since June 2006.

That was ahead of the 59.2 "flash" estimate and well above the 50 mark separating growth from contraction.

"Europe's economic recovery stepped up a gear in June, but inflationary pressures have also ratcheted higher," said Chris Williamson, chief business economist at IHS Markit. "Business is booming in the euro zone's service sector. Added to the impressive growth seen in the manufacturing sector, the PMI surveys suggest the region's economy is firing on all cylinders as it heads into the summer."

An acceleration in vaccination programmes on the continent has meant governments have allowed more of the services industry to re-open and its PMI soared to 58.3 from 55.2, ahead of the flash 58.0 estimate and its highest reading since July 2007.

A PMI covering manufacturers, released last week, showed factory activity expanded at its fastest pace on record in June but that they faced the steepest rise in raw materials costs in well over two decades.

Those inflationary pressures were also felt by the services industry and the composite input prices index bounced to 69.8 from 66.8, the highest in nearly 21 years. Although inflation risks are skewed to the upside the European Central Bank was expected to maintain its loose monetary policy and look through higher inflation expectations for a while before it acts, a Reuters poll found last month.

REUTERS/FILE

People enjoy an evening drink at Place de la Contrescarpe in Paris as cafes, bars and restaurants reopen after closing down for months amid the coronavirus disease outbreak in France on May 19.

Oil edges up as Opec+ seeks to break impasse over supply

REUTERS, *Tokyo*

Oil prices were slightly up on Monday with investors and traders awaiting crucial talks by OPEC+ following disagreement over output within the group that could lead to major producers pumping up volumes to grab market share.

Brent crude was up 15 cents, or 0.2 per cent, at $76.32 a barrel by 0558 GMT, after slipping 1 cent last week, the first weekly decline in six. US oil gained 12 cents, or 0.5 per cent, to $75.28 a barrel, having risen 1.5 per cent last week, the sixth consecutive week of gains for the contract.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its allies, known as OPEC+, voted on Friday to increase production by about 2 million barrels a day from August to December 2021 and to extend the remaining output cuts to the end of 2022, but objections from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) prevented an agreement.

It was a rare public disagreement between members of the group, with national interests increasingly diverging, which is impacting OPEC+ policy as oil users want more crude as their economies recover from the Covid-19 pandemic. "Failing to come to a deal may provide some brief upside to the market," ING Economics said in a note.

"However, realistically it could also signal the beginning of the end for the broader deal, and so the risk that members start to increase output," ING said.

Saudi Arabia's energy minister sought on Sunday to push back against UAE's opposition to a proposed deal, calling for "compromise and rationality" to get unanimity when the group meets again on Monday.

"You have to balance addressing the current market situation with maintaining the ability to react to future developments ... if everyone wants to raise production then there has to be an extension," Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman told Saudi-owned Al Arabiya television channel.

He also highlighted uncertainty over the course of the pandemic and production from Iran and Venezuela.

In the United States, energy companies increased oil and natural gas rigs for a third week out of the last four.

A petrol station attendant prepares to refuel a car in Rome, Italy.

REUTERS/FILE

German car production forecast slashed

REUTERS, *Berlin*

Germany's car industry on Monday slashed its forecast for production growth this year, indicating that the recovery from the coronavirus pandemic will be bumpy as manufacturers battle supply-chain disruptions.

The Association of German Automobile Manufacturers (VDA) cut its forecast for production growth to 3 per cent from 13 per cent previously, saying that production in recent months had been "significantly below expectations".

It now expects 3.6 million cars to be made in Germany this year, down by 400,000 units from its last forecast, the VDA said in its mid-year market update.

The German car industry - featuring powerful brands like Volkswagen, Daimler and BMW - accounts for an estimated 5 per cent of the economic output and more than 800,000 jobs, making it a bellwether for Europe's largest economy. Manufacturers idled production early in the pandemic in anticipation of a go-slow by car buyers, and have been caught short by a snapback in demand as economies have reopened this year.

Growth in China's services sector falls to 14-month low

REUTERS, *Beijing*

Growth in China's service sector slowed sharply in June to a 14-month low, weighed down by a resurgence of Covid-19 cases in southern China, a private investigation revealed on Monday, adding to concerns the second largest in the world the economy may start to run out of steam.

The Caixin / Markit Services Purchasing Managers Index (PMI) fell to 50.3 in June, the lowest since April 2020 and down significantly from 55.1 in May. It held up just above the 50 mark, which separates growth from contraction on a monthly basis.

China's official services gauge also showed a marked slowdown in June, although it remained well in expansion territory. The private survey is supposed to focus more on small businesses.

Coupled with a slowdown in the manufacturing sector, analysts say PMI survey results suggest pent-up demand for Covid may have peaked and that China's strong economic rebound from the crisis is starting to moderate. Although slower to recover from the pandemic than industry, a gradual improvement in consumption in recent months has boosted China's service sector.

However, a Covid-19 outbreak of the most infectious Delta strain in the Guangdong export and manufacturing hub since late May and the subsequent imposition of anti-virus measures have weighed on consumer and business activity.

As the government reacted swiftly to contain the new wave of cases and economic disruption eases, the private investigation showed service providers' business prospects for the coming year to be at their lowest in nine months.

A new business sub-index stood at 50.5, also the lowest since April 2020, when the service industry was still mired in Covid paralysis. Businesses also downsized in June for the first time in four months, amid slowing demand.