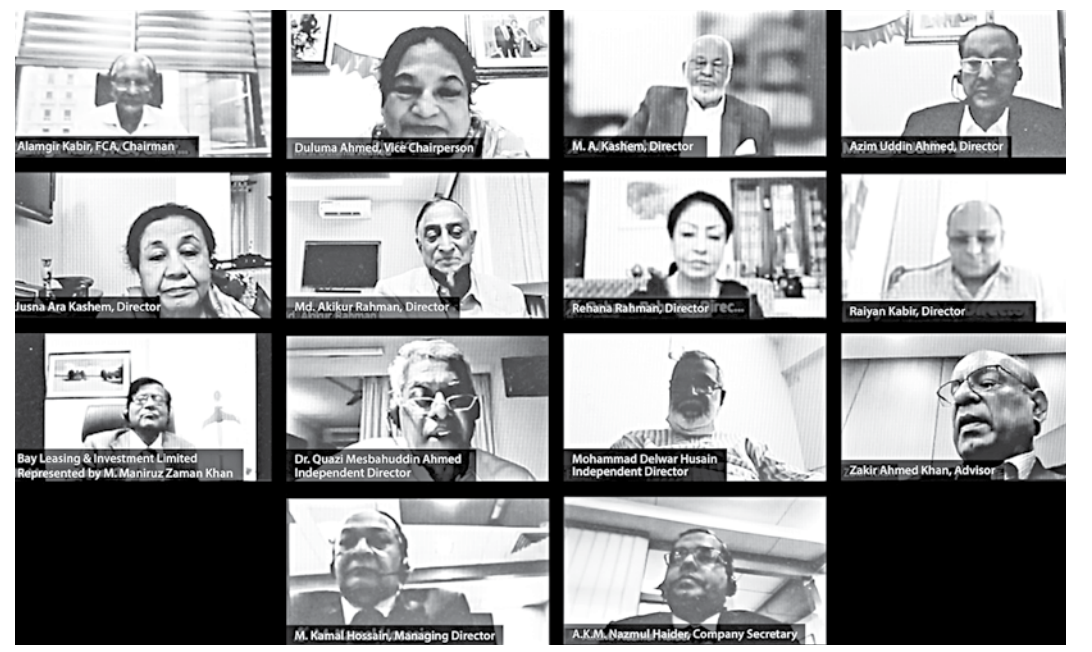




A Rouf Chowdhury, chairman of Bank Asia, virtually chaired a half-yearly Business Meet 2021 yesterday. Mohd Safwan Choudhury, vice chairman, Dilwar H Choudhury, chairman of the board audit committee, Arfan Ali, president and managing director, and Enam Chowdhury, Ashrafur Haq Chowdhury, Md Abul Quasem and Helal Ahmed Chowdhury, directors, also spoke.



Alamgir Kabir, chairman of Southeast Bank, virtually presided over its 632nd board meeting recently. The bank earned an operating profit of Tk 4,662.9 million in the first half of 2021 which was Tk 3,457.9 million in the same period last year. Consolidated earnings per share stood at Tk 2.56 which was Tk 1.59 last year in the same period. Vice-Chairperson Duluma Ahmed, Adviser Zakir Ahmed Khan and Managing Director M Kamal Hossain attended the meeting.

US oil giants to keep a lid on spending even as profits surge

AFP, New York
US oil giants ExxonMobil and Chevron reported strong profits Friday riding a wave of higher prices amid recovering demand, but pledged to keep a lid on spending.
The results marked a 180-degree reversal from this time last year when the companies suffered hefty losses amid heavy pandemic restrictions that cramped economic activity and halted travel.
"Positive momentum continued during the second quarter across all of our businesses as the global economic recovery increased demand for our product," said Exxon Chief Executive Darren Woods.
But neither company indicated plans to pivot away from the focus on spending discipline or open the spigots on more investment in

additional projects, reflecting pressure from investors, including those who oppose more spending on fossil fuels.
ExxonMobil said it would keep its 2021 capital spending budget at the low end of projections, while Chevron highlighted its lower spending in the second quarter.
Chevron also announced plans to resume share repurchases in the third quarter.
ExxonMobil reported profits of \$4.7 billion in the second quarter, compared with a loss of \$1.1 billion in the same three months of last year when pandemic restrictions devastated energy demand.
Revenues more than doubled to \$67.7 billion. ExxonMobil scored higher profits across its exploration and production business, with significantly higher oil prices more than offsetting lower production.

Chemical profits also surged during the quarter on strong demand and pricing. But the company pointed to "ongoing impacts from market oversupply" as a drag on its downstream business, which lost money during the quarter.
ExxonMobil said it expects higher planned spending in the second half of the year on key projects, but full-year spending will be on the "lower end" of its projected \$16 billion to \$19 billion for all of 2021.
Chevron, meanwhile, brought in earnings of \$3.1 billion, compared with a loss of \$8.3 billion a year earlier, as revenues more than doubled to \$37.6 billion.
"Second quarter earnings were strong, reflecting improved market conditions, combined with transformation benefits and merger synergies," said Mike Wirth, Chevron's chief executive.
"Our free cash flow was the highest in two years due to solid operational and financial performance and lower capital spending," Wirth added. "We will resume share repurchases in the third quarter at an expected rate of \$2-3 billion per year."
"CFRA Research analyst Stewart Glickman said both oil giants had a "great" quarter, adding that "everything that had been a headwind turned around and became a tailwind."
"Investors do not want the oil giants to boost capital spending, he said.
"The investor base is telling Exxon to keep the cap ex low, improve the capital efficiency," Glickman said.
"The growth mantra (oil and gas production) has totally lost resonance.
"That includes investors focused on environmental, social and governance issues or ESG. "ESG investors are becoming a bigger force," Glickman said.
"They really want to see more focus on renewable energy, not on fossil fuel."
"At quarterly meetings earlier this spring, ExxonMobil and Chevron each suffered defeats in votes on shareholder proposals from investors who favor more focus on the energy transition.

Amazon faces slowing sales growth

REUTERS
Amazon.com Inc needs to spend billions of dollars to expand its warehouse and delivery system, adding pressure to its shares which dropped 7 per cent on Friday after it forecast lower sales growth.
The company is racing to meet demand even though shoppers are venturing more outside the home and it is returning to a pre-lockdown sales trajectory.
Last year, Amazon turned goods away from warehouses for weeks because it lacked the people and space to fulfill them safely. It still is playing catch-up, said Andrea Leigh, vice president at e-commerce optimization firm Ideoclick, who formerly worked at Amazon.
"Amazon is running out of available space," she said. "They're also running out of labor." Even after the company almost doubled its warehouse and transportation network in the prior 18 months, it sees significant investment ahead, not to mention costs from hiring and training staff.
A tight labor market forced Amazon to raise wages early and add signing bonuses to attract full and part-time employees,

who now number 1,335,000.
It also has to get back on track to its goal of one-day Prime deliveries in the United States.
"This is all part of a multi-year investment cycle for us," Chief Financial Officer Brian Olsavsky told analysts Thursday.
For shareholders, Amazon's spending to capture long-term gains at the risk of near-term profit is in a playbook it has deployed over 27 years, sometimes testing the patience of Wall Street.
"Slower growth & increased investments make the shares more challenging," JPMorgan analysts said in a note.
Amazon plans to add 517 facilities to its global distribution infrastructure in the coming years, according to logistics consultancy MWPVL International. That is 176 million square feet on top of the 402 million it already has.
Amazon did not comment on the accuracy of those estimates, but said its infrastructure rollout already is ramping up. Over the past 12 months, capital expenditures and equipment leases jumped 74 per cent to \$54.5 billion, almost double the growth rate a year ago.



AFP/FILE
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REUTERS/FILE
Packages emblazoned with Amazon logos travel along a conveyor belt inside an Amazon fulfillment centre in Robbinsville, New Jersey, US.

Economic recovery boosts France's BNP Paribas

AFP, Paris
French bank BNP Paribas said Friday that the improving economy and cost savings help boost its bottom line in the second quarter.
In the period of April through June the bank generated net profit of 2.9 billion euros (\$3.4 billion), an increase of 27 per cent from the same period last year when much of France's economy was shut under pandemic restrictions.
However, it was also 18 percent higher than the second quarter of 2019.
The bottom line was boosted by exceptional items such as the sale of certain assets, but even excluding these items, net profit was still up 16.5 per cent from the second quarter last year and 4.9 per cent from 2019.
"Business activity moved solidly back on track this quarter, as the public health situation improved, albeit with differentiated momentum from one region, one sector, and one business line to another," the bank said in a statement.
The bank's revenues edged 0.9 per cent higher from the same period last year to 11.8 billion euros. That was up 4.9 per cent from 2019.

Guava farmers grow weary of lockdown

FROM PAGE B4
During the peak harvesting season, at least 10,000 to 15,000 people visit the orchards and markets each day.
As a result, locals can earn money by operating boats, hotels and restaurants.
Among these three districts, the agricultural life of Jhalakathi sadar upazila, Nesharabad of Pirojpur district and Banaripara upazila of Barishal district are centred around guava cultivation.
Hundreds of wholesalers from all over the country used to come to the region every year to buy guavas but now, this once bustling agricultural area has turned into a ghost town.
Zakir Hossain, a wholesaler, said he used to send 300 maunds (one maund equals 37 kgs) of guavas each day to Shyambazar.
However, demand has since dropped to about one-third of its pre-pandemic levels.
Besides, since wholesalers are unable to visit local markets, the price per maund of guava has come down to Tk 200 while it was previously about Tk 500, he added.

Echoing him, Narayan Halder, a teacher at Bhimruli school, said the area once thrived on tourism and guava sales.
But both businesses have been hit by Covid-19, leaving local farmers in a dire situation.
Halder suggested that if an agro-product factory that makes jams or jellies out of guava could be set up in the region, then the industry could be saved. During a visit to the area, it was found that at least 10 to 15 wholesale buying and selling centers were set up at guava farms across the three districts.
Although there were once thousands of buyers and sellers at these wholesale centres, this scenario has changed in the last two years.
In the past, boats nearly overflowing with green guavas used to fill the canal that runs through Bhimruli village.
Pushpa Halder had aimed to sell guavas at the floating market but the lockdown has since taken away all hopes. At the local level, the price of guava has gone down to Tk 7 or Tk 8 per kg, but in the city, guavas have been seen

selling at Tk 40 to Tk 50 per kg.
According to the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), guava cultivation is widespread in Barishal, Jhalakathi and Pirojpur districts. Guava cultivation is spread across 3,345 hectares of land throughout the region, having an annual production of 31,747 tonnes.
At the national level, production has declined at an average of about 10,000 tonnes each year since fiscal 2017-18, when 241,504 tonnes of guava were harvested from 11,365 acres of land. In 2019-20, 226,028 tonnes of guava were produced on 67,344 acres of land.
About Tk 25 crore to Tk 30 crore worth of guavas were bought and sold each year in Barishal prior to the pandemic.
The industry, including tourism, is valued at around Tk 100 crore. Taufiqul Alam, additional director of the DAE office in Barishal, said it was true that farmers were not getting fair prices for their produce.
"Work is underway to compile a list of such affected farmers which will be sent to the higher authorities," he added.

Services buoy US consumer spending

REUTERS, Washington
US consumer spending surged in June as vaccinations against Covid-19 boosted demand for travel-related services, but part of the increase reflected higher prices, with annual inflation accelerating further above the Federal Reserve's 2 per cent target.
Though personal income barely rose last month, other data on Friday showed wage growth in the second quarter was the fastest in 13 years on an annual basis.
That, together with rising household wealth and ample savings should keep consumer spending strong, though rising Covid-19 infections pose a risk.
"The overall trend of healthy-to-strong growth will continue into next year," said Scott Hoyt, a senior economist at Moody's Analytics in West Chester, Pennsylvania.
"Downside risks remain large. The return of shutdowns from increased infections is unlikely, but cannot be ruled out. There are also upside risks, especially given all the extra saving since the spring of 2020."
Consumer spending, which accounts for more than two-thirds of US economic activity, rebounded 1.0 per cent last month after dipping 0.1 per cent in May, the Commerce Department said. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast consumer spending rising 0.7 per cent.

Caterpillar sees profits jump

AFP, New York
Caterpillar reported a jump in second-quarter profits Friday driven by higher sales across its divisions, but said customers in major industries were still avoiding new investments.
The company's results showed the benefits of the recovery in the global economy from the depths of the Covid-19 pandemic, led by construction profits, which nearly doubled in the quarter.
"We're encouraged by higher sales and revenues across all regions and in our three primary segments, which reflect continued improvement in our end markets," said Chief Executive Jim Umpleby.
But Umpleby did not provide profit-per-share forecasts, citing the "highly fluid environment" in a conference call with analysts. Umpleby said that key clients were holding back on big capital spending initiatives that drive demand for Caterpillar's industrial machines.
While there has been a "steady improvement in mining," companies overall "continue to display capital discipline," Umpleby said.

In search of the next billion dollar destination

FROM PAGE B4
As an example, we can consider the substantial migrant population who have settled in the United Kingdom since the 1950s. The Bangladeshi community there currently has three representatives in the British parliament, and have representations in all sectors of the job market. This in turn has helped strengthen ties and increase trade between both countries while is also ensuring a stable influx of foreign remittance.
There is a huge service market for labour intensive, and care-based work in Canada like nursing, elderly care, retail work and construction projects.
Considering the socio-economic aspects of Canada, the migration requirement has a relatively higher skill cap compared to the Middle East, and the Bangladeshi government may consider launching specific campaigns to train workers to develop soft skills suited for the Canadian workspace.

Such demand wise capacity building can greatly benefit both countries. The Bangladeshi government can also offer special language courses for low-wage workers to learn English and French to properly integrate themselves into the workforce of Canada.
The migration opportunities provided by Canada are vast with around 85 active programmes. Programmes coming with express entry visas include a Federal Skilled Worker Program, provincial nomination programmes, startup visa for innovative enterprises, intra company transfer for existing businesses in Bangladesh, a Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot and Atlantic Immigration Pilot Program for skilled Bangladeshi graduates who would like to work and live in participating communities.
The only challenge when it comes to utilising these opportunities is a lack of awareness and proper guidance. We need to focus on raising awareness and at the same time invite reputed

regulated Canadian immigration consultants and international recruiters to operate and offer solutions specifically for the Bangladeshi market.
Bangladesh and Canada are currently negotiating an investment protection agreement which would help bring more direct investments. The two countries have also inked an air services agreement to pave the way for more bilateral trade as well as enhance people-to-people contact.
To ensure optimum utilisation of these bilateral initiatives, Bangladesh has to act actively to promote, create opportunity and supply skilled/ high skilled migrant workers from Bangladesh to Canada and thus open yet another source for billion dollars in foreign remittance.
The writer is the director of Go BD Go Ltd, operating in tourism, immigration and IT-enabled services in Bangladesh and Canada.