

Stocks fall for second day Aman cultivation brings cheer to haor farmers

Investors take cautious approach as index reaches record levels

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The country's stock market continued to fall for a second consecutive day yesterday as investors cautiously waited on the sidelines to see what comes next for the record-high market index.

The DSEX, the benchmark index of Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE), fell 11 points, or 0.16 per cent, to 6,760.

The DS-30, the blue chip stock index, dropped 3 points to 2,423 on the day while the Shariah index of the premier bourse, DSES, edged down 4 points to 1,461.

"As the stock market indexes are at their highest level since inception in 2013, people are cautious now," said a stock

broker. Many of them sold their shares as the index is at its highest level. This profit booking tendency is not a bad sign since it ultimately enhances the market's strength, he said.

Among all sectors, general insurance advanced the most, by 2.81 per cent, while banking stocks fell the most, by 1.19 per cent, according to data from UCB Stock Brokerage.

The South Bangla Agriculture & Commerce Bank topped the gainers' list, rising 10 per cent, followed by Purabi General Insurance Company, Karnaphuli Insurance Company, City General Insurance Company and Metro Spinning.

Stocks of Beximco were traded the

MINTU DESHWARA

Haor areas of Sylhet division usually remain inundated for most of the year but there are high grounds where Boro paddy can be grown.

In this year's monsoon, thanks to low rainfall, a lot of areas have been saved from inundation, enabling the cultivation of Aman paddy.

According to the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), a record amount of Aman paddy is being cultivated by haor farmers in Sylhet this season.

During a visit to various areas in the division, this correspondent found that most farmers were busy planting the crop.

Amar Talukder, a meteorological assistant at Sylhet Meteorological Office, said the total recorded rainfall in July was 647.9 millimetres (mm).

However, 968.5 mm of rainfall was recorded in July last year, he added.

The DAE officials said the department set a target to bring about four lakh hectares of land in Sylhet under Aman paddy cultivation this year, of which 52 per cent has already been attained.

Taking advantage of the favourable climate condition, farmers cultivated Aman on 750 hectares of haor land in Kawadighi and Hakaluki haors, said Kazi Lutful Bari, deputy director of the DAE office in Moulvibazar.

Abdul Momin, agriculture officer of Kulara upazila, said Aman paddy was a kind of savings deposit for farmers.

Amidst high temperatures in April, farmers in Sylhet did not opt for cultivating Aus paddy.

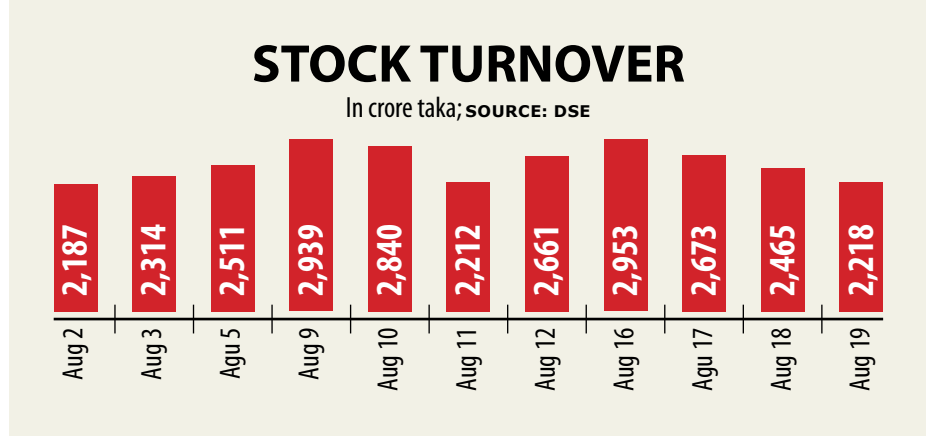
"But due to the currently favourable weather conditions, farmers are now busy planting Aman paddy using traditional methods," Momin said.

Aman paddy has been cultivated on about 500 hectares of land in Moulvibazar sadar upazila,



MINTU DESHWARA

According to the Department of Agricultural Extension, a record amount of Aman paddy is being cultivated by haor farmers in Sylhet this season. The photo was taken recently.



Turnover, another important indicator of the market, fell 10 per cent to Tk 2,218 crore.

"Investors fear that the index may see corrections and so, they are not investing much and are waiting to see the next move," the broker said, adding that many institutional investors were being especially cautious and subsequently sold their shares.

At the DSE, 156 stocks advanced, 191 declined and 29 remained unchanged.

"The index fell due to the sale of institutional investors, and they were selling well performing stocks so the impact was seen on the index," a merchant banker said.

most, worth Tk 155 crore, followed by LafargeHolcim Bangladesh, LankaBangla Finance, IFIC Bank, and City General Insurance Company.

The National Housing Finance and Investments shed the most, falling 4.87 per cent, followed by First Finance, Zeal Bangla Sugar Mills, Fareast Finance and Investment and Phoenix Finance First Mutual Fund.

The port city bourse also fell yesterday as the CASPI, the general index of Chittagong Stock Exchange, fell 39 points, or 0.19 per cent, to 19,707.

Among 321 stocks to undergo trade, 124 advanced, 171 dropped and 26 remained unchanged.

DISTRICTS IN FOCUS

Rajnagar upazila, and Panchgaon Munshi Bazar Union this season, as per the DAE data.

Besides, about 100 hectares of land in the Hail haor and Barahaor areas of sadar upazila, 100 hectares in Barlekha upazila, and 50 hectares in Juri upazila have come under aman cultivation.

As such, Aman paddy has been planted on a total of 750 hectares of land this season.

Milad Hossain, a farmer from Mirpur area of Moulvibazar sadar upazila, told The Daily Star that

farmers like him were totally dependent on paddy production.

"Therefore, due to low rainfall in July... we have planted four to five varieties of Aman paddy in the Boro cultivation area," he said.

"I have planted Brie paddy 7, 85, 95 and Bina paddy 18.

We are continuing the planting work with local workers in the lockdown," Hossain added.

Samsu Mia, a farmer in Shewajuri area, said times have changed as the region was once inundated with water.

"But since there is less water around Kawadighi this year, I had the courage to start cultivating Aman paddy," he added.

Babar Jaigidar, a farmer in Majlishpur, said the work of planting paddy saplings was going on in time as the weather was favourable and there was timely rainfall. So far, he has planted Aman paddy on 20 bighas of land.

With regard to Boro, bumper yields of the paddy as well as higher prices have led to higher profits.

"So, we have cultivated Aman on 6 more bighas of land in the current season compared to last year," he added. Jaigidar hopes that if the price of Aman paddy, like Boro paddy, was high, he would benefit.

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GLOBAL BUSINESS

Taliban vow to ban heroin, but can they survive without it?

REUTERS

Heroin production has boomed in Afghanistan in recent years, helping fund the Taliban, and experts say they will struggle to wean themselves off the profitable trade despite their promise to do so.

Speaking Tuesday at a first press conference since taking power, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid promised that the new government would not turn the world's leading producer of opium into a fully-fledged narco-state.

"We are assuring our countrymen and women and the international community, we will not have any narcotics produced," Mujahid told reporters in Kabul.

"From now on, nobody's going to get involved (in the heroin trade), nobody can be involved in drug smuggling."

But the anti-heroin rhetoric -- like similar pledges to respect human rights and media freedom -- are seen by analysts as part of efforts by the new Taliban leaders to show a more moderate face in order to secure international backing.

The vast majority of the world's opium and heroin comes from Afghanistan, with production and exports centred in areas controlled by the Taliban, which has taxed the drugs heavily during their 20-year insurgency.

It has become a key resource for the group and they could



The vast majority of the world's opium and heroin comes from Afghanistan, with production and exports centred in areas controlled by the Taliban.

AFP/FILE

struggle to ban it, said Jonathan Goodhand, an expert in the international drugs trade at SOAS University of London.

"Drugs will bring out a set of tensions in the movement," he predicted. On one hand, "they want to create this image of themselves as more moderate and more open to engagement with the West and they realise drugs is one of way of doing this," he said.

But on the other, any repression

would hit farmers in the Taliban political heartlands of Helmand and Kandahar provinces in particular. "It's going to struggle to take a very aggressive approach to drugs," he added. In his premier press conference, Mujahid pleaded for "international assistance" to provide farmers with alternative crops to poppies, the source of sap that is refined into morphine and heroin.

The appeal for international

aid might prompt hollow laughs from people who worked in the coalition of NATO forces, NGOs and UN workers over the last 10 years that tried in vain to break Afghanistan's reliance on poppy farming.

The United States spent around \$8.6 billion (7.4 billion euros) from 2002 to 2017 in its doomed effort to combat the drugs trade, according to a 2018 report from the US Special Inspector General

for Afghanistan (SIGAR).

Those efforts included paying farmers to grow wheat or saffron, investing in transport links, as well as spraying defoliants on crops and bombing refining facilities.

At each step, they found themselves thwarted by Taliban fighters who controlled the main poppy-growing regions and derived hundreds of millions of dollars from the industry, according to US and Afghan government estimates.

Farmers in Taliban-controlled areas would often come under pressure to plant poppies from local warlords and fighters, investigations have found.

As a result, the country has a near-monopoly on opium and heroin, accounting for 80 to 90 percent of global output, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

The amount of land planted with poppies hit a record high in 2017 and has averaged around 250,000 hectares in the last four years, roughly four times the level of the mid-1990s, UN figures show.

The narcotics policy of the new government will affect global heroin prices, with repercussions for Western countries and their addicts, as well as Russia, Iran, Pakistan and China -- all major smuggling routes but also huge markets for Afghan drugs.

Toyota to slash production for chip shortage

REUTERS

Toyota Motor Corp will reduce global production for September by 40 per cent from its previous plan due to the worldwide shortage of semiconductors, the Nikkei business daily reported on Thursday.

The automaker had been aiming to make a little under 900,000 cars, but has reduced that to about 500,000, according to the report.

Toyota had no immediate response to a request for comment. A resurgence in Covid-19 cases has disrupted parts supplies and production at car companies, compounding a months-long pandemic-fuelled chip crunch.

Toyota, the world's largest automaker by sales volumes, said this month it was facing an unpredictable business environment due to fresh Covid-19 cases in emerging countries, semiconductor shortage, and soaring material prices.

Oil drops below \$66, lowest since May

REUTERS, London

Oil dropped to below \$66 a barrel on Thursday, its lowest since May, pressured by concerns about weaker demand as Covid-19 cases rise, a stronger US dollar and a surprise increase in US gasoline inventories.

Circulation of the Delta variant in areas of low vaccination is driving transmission of Covid-19, the World Health Organization said. Coronavirus-related deaths have spiked in the United States over the past month.

"The longer-than-anticipated battle against the invisible enemy has made investors cautious and pragmatic, leading to gradually softer prices," said Tamas Varga of oil broker PVM. "The potential withdrawal of monetary support, the chaotic Taliban takeover of Afghanistan that threatens with another migrant crisis and worries about the continuous spread of the virus keep the dollar in demand, which, in turn, acts as a hit on any attempted oil-price rally."

The dollar hit a nine-month high, weighing on dollar-priced commodities.



REUTERS/FILE

The chimneys of the Total Grandpuits oil refinery are seen just after sunset, southeast of Paris, France on March 1.

White-collar staff calling shots as job markets recover

REUTERS

Having hunkered down at home and clung on to his job through the 2020 lockdowns, Dutch IT worker Benito Castillion is now on the hunt for a career-enhancing move - and it's a shift of perspective he shares with millions of white-collar staff worldwide.

Based in Prague, the 46-year-old had updated his LinkedIn profile and started attending virtual job fairs. "If the pay is right and there is a good opportunity to

switch jobs I'd be willing to take the risk," he told Reuters. "Now I see companies are willing to pay a bit more. That is important now."

That mindset is driving what one US management professor has dubbed the "Great Resignation" and a US recruiter the biggest movement of human capital for decades, as skilled workers start to re-evaluate careers and life choices.

Having spent more than a year living with the stresses of the coronavirus pandemic, many now find themselves able

to call the shots on pay and conditions as companies compete for staff amid labour shortages created by fast vaccine-led recoveries in rich-world economies.

In Europe's largest, Germany, more than a third of companies complained of staff shortages last month, the highest rate for three years, an Ifo institute survey showed.

Lockdowns have meanwhile shone a harsh light on employers who failed to support and motivate staff working remotely for the first time in their careers,

often under difficult conditions.

The Microsoft 2021 Work Trend Index showed 41 per cent of the global workforce are considering resigning this year - a near doubling of job-switching intent on the two years before the pandemic.

"I've spoken with around 20-30 companies who all say the attrition of candidates leaving is skyrocketing," said Blake Wittman, European Business Director of recruiter GoodCall, which lists L'Oreal and Nestle as clients.