S Korean firm to invest \$4.15m in Mongla EPZ

South Korean company JD Creation Ltd will invest \$4.15 million in Mongla Export Processing Zone to establish an industrial unit to manufacture camping items, garments, tents and garment accessories.

Once complete, the fully foreign-owned company will annually produce 4.85 million pieces of camping equipment, such as sleeping bags, backpacks, and hats alongside woven garment items like shirts, jackets, and about 2 million yards of printing, embroidery, string and elastic bands.

Mohammad Faruque Alam, member for engineering and investment promotion (additional charge) at Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (Bepza), and Seung Chul Kim, managing director of JD Creation, signed an agreement in this regard at a programme at Bepza Complex in Dhaka yesterday.

The project is JD Creation's second venture in the country, where it has operated an electronics and electrical goods production unit called U-jin Led Co (BD) at the Chattogram Export Processing Zone since 1989.

The project will create employment opportunities for around 2,000 people in the country, Bepza said in a

The South Korean company opted for the new venture at Mongla EPZ after being pleased with the services and overall investment climate of Bepza so far, the statement

Major General Md Nazrul Islam, executive chairman of Bepza, was also present at the deal signing ceremony.

Sri Lanka's Capital Alliance enters Bangladesh

in Bangladesh as well," Fernando said.

"Our focus on creating market-leading insights has been our key differentiator in Sri Lanka," said Deshan Pushparajah, managing director of CAL Securities, Bangladesh and managing director for global markets and investment banking at CAL, Sri Lanka.

"We are excited to bring these unique perspectives and approach to research to Bangladesh as well.

Fleeing Afghans sell their wares at Kabul's busy bazaars

Kabul's flea markets are packed with the belongings that desperate Afghans have sold at rock-bottom prices to fund their escape from Taliban rule, or just to pay for

Plates, glasses, and kitchen appliances are piled high on makeshift tables at the outdoor bazaars, alongside 1990s television sets and old Singer sewing machines, while rolled-up carpets are propped up on second-hand sofas and beds.

Since the Taliban stormed to power in mid-August, Afghans say job opportunities have dried up and they are only allowed to withdraw \$200 per week from their bank accounts, meaning cash is in short supply.

"We don't have anything to eat, we are poor and we are forced to sell these things," said Mohammad Ehsan, who lives in one of Kabul's hillside settlements and came to the bazaar lugging two blankets to sell.

Ehsan said he used to work as a labourer, but building projects have been cancelled or put on hold. "Rich people were in Kabul, but now everybody has escaped," he told AFP.

He is one of many Afghans who come to the flea markets to sell what they can spare directly to buyers, carrying their possessions on their backs or rolling them along on rickety street carts.

He has lived through "change after change" in Afghanistan, and says he is wary of the Taliban's claims of peace and prosperity, as basic food prices skyrocket -- like they did when the Taliban were last in power from 1996 to 2001. "You can't believe any of them," Ehsan said.

Impoverished Afghanistan was already facing a drought, food shortages, and enormous pressure on its health service caused by the Covid-19 outbreak before the Taliban took control, sparking western nations to clamp down on aid that props up the Afghan economy.



Buyers browse second-hand household items for sale at a market in the northwest neighbourhood of Khair Khana in Kabul.

BSEC to carry out special audit into Safko Spinning

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission has decided to carry out a special audit into Safko Spinning Mills as some irregularities have been unearthed.

The regulator also appointed four independent directors to solve the problems of the company.

In a letter to the company's managing director on Sunday, the BSEC said it did not provide any dividend for the last two financial years.

On the other hand, it increased its paid-up capital by more than 80 per cent by issuing bonus shares in the stock

The spinner has also shown higher cost of goods than its sales. Apart from these, it has many other irregularities, which ultimately impede the development of the company, according to the commission's letter.

In this regard, the BSEC decided to run the special audit and appoint independent directors.

However, the company's stock price soared to Tk 33 on September 9, which was Tk 9 on April 29. Yesterday, it closed at Tk 28.8.

Businesses will now get six months to bring in imported goods

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

payments made by banks.

Businesses will now get six months time to bring in imported goods after payments are made, up from four

Bangladesh Bank yesterday extended the time following demand from importers, particularly from Bangladesh Reconditioned Vehicles Importers and Dealers Association. The members of the association said they were facing

troubles in releasing imported vehicles from ports. Importers will get the extended time until December 31,

2021, said the banking regulator. Rules say that importers in general have to bring imported products into the country and submit bill of entry as proof of imports within 120 days after import

Until March 31, the central bank granted the additional time for bringing imported goods considering the fallout

No data charge on upay app use by Robi, Airtel customers

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Mobile financial service upay recently signed agreement an with Robi Axiata Limited allowing Robi and Airtel customers to conduct transactions through the upay app without incurring any internet data cost.

Customers of both mobile operators can win up to Tk 450 and 1 GB data registering with upay, says a

This will be useful for users suddenly finding out that they have no data pack or that it has expired, said Sydul H Khandaker, managing director and chief executive officer of upay.

Khandaker and Shihab Ahmad, chief commercial officer of Robi Axiata Limited, signed agreement at The Westin

Banks, non-banks can't comply: BB

The order for other listed companies should also be scrapped for the sake of general shareholders, the central banker said.

The BB urged all the regulators institutions, including the BSEC, to consult with the central bank before taking any step about banks and NBFIs.

Suffering lingers for duped e-commerce customers

my products," said Rabby.

He said he lost his job in the Covid-19 fallouts last year and was now desperately looking for one.

"I placed the order for the motorcycle with money from my mother. I wanted the motorcycle as I thought I will start working in ride sharing. Getting back the hard earned money of my mother, who is in a low-paid job at a private hospital, is now uncertain. I feel helpless," he added.

"I have repeatedly called Evaly for the products. Every time they tell me to wait a little," said Rabby.

dated July and when I went to get the money, it bounced. Then I got a few calls from Evaly asking not to submit the cheque any more. The nature of their request is like coercion," he added

"What should I do now? So I have now come to file a complaint against Evaly at the DNCRP seeking my product or a refund,"

Five victims met Hafizur Rahman, additional secretary to the commerce ministry, at Bangladesh Secretariat on Sunday to share stories of their sufferings caused by Eorange by not delivering products for months.

Among them, Afzal Hossain, a final year student of a university in Dhaka, had plans of purchasing a motorcycle to make a living out of ride sharing. He said he had placed an order for a

motorcycle which had a market price of Tk 2,55,400 but was on offer at a 50 per cent Alongside, he had placed orders for

some other products, borrowing Tk 65,000 from his elder sister, for which Eorange was said to owe him Tk 3,60,000 in total.

The five told The Daily Star that they want to get either products or refunds, and they also demand the government by nearly five lakh customers wooed

intervene so that their hardship ends.

Not only customers, hundreds of merchants have not received payments against products they delivered on behalf of such e-commerce platforms.

Despair looms over thousands of such victims as uncertainties have intensified over whether they would ever get back their money, estimated to be over Tk 1,000 crore in total. Out of over a dozen companies being investigated by the government, three, namely Evaly, Dhamaka and Eorange, account for most of the victims. None from the three could be reached for comment.

Dhamaka's merchants have sought the "They gave me a cheque of City Bank commerce ministry's support in retrieving Tk 200 crore.

In a letter to Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi on August 16, the suppliers said Dhamaka was supposed to pay dues within 10 working days of supplying products to

But 150 working days have already elapsed with 650 merchants still waiting to be paid, they said.

Dhamaka Managing Jashimuddin Chisty, who is now abroad, gave his word on July 13 to pay the dues but no payment has been made, said the letter. The merchants urged for necessary steps on humanitarian grounds, prioritising the fact that they were small and medium

"We have lost everything and we owe banks and our relatives a large amount of money. We have now been turned to street beggars for doing business with Dhamaka,"

How much Dhamaka owed to customers is not clear as it has not yet responded to a commerce ministry notice seeking records of its assets and liabilities, said a ministry

However, Dhamaka received over Tk 803 crore in payments made in advance

by different offers of hefty discounts, buying products from the e-commerce according to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID).

are still working on tracing out other transactions," Md Humayon Kabir, superintendent of police for financial crimes at the CID, told The Daily Star.

Last week, the CID filed a case at Banani Police Station accusing Dhamaka's Chisty and others of laundering Tk 116.06 crore. According to industry insiders, all of the

e-commerce platforms being accused of fraudulence followed the same script. Initially they do deliver products at

hefty discounts against advance payments. they would share the profit from the resale Months later, once a substantial number of the motorcycles. of customers are hooked, they start, what can be apparently termed, ghosting them, making neither deliveries nor refunds.

The pandemic proved a boon for e-commerce and on the flip side, such controversial business models.

It all started out with Evaly, which, much like the pied piper of Hamelin, drew in droves of customers with astounding cash backs and hefty discounts since its inception near the end of 2018.

A Bangladesh Bank report indicates that Evaly might not be able to pay up for liabilities accrued with customers and

Different government agencies have launched investigations against e-commerce companies over allegations of embezzlement, breach of competition rules and money laundering.

Last month, in a reply to a commerce ministry show-cause notice, Evaly said its liabilities with customers and merchants stood at Tk 543 crore as of mid-July, which is 35 per cent higher than the amount found by an initial probe of the central

Encouraged by the discount offers, many customers had turned into investors,

platforms and then reselling it at profits. But not all were able to make it. Adit

The amount is possibly more...we Hossain, a final year private university student, placed an order for seven motorcycles and some gift vouchers at Eorange making an advance payment of Tk 13.98 lakh in May.

"They promised to deliver the products within 45 days. Over three months have passed but I did not get my products," he said. He had gathered the money selling off his own motorcycle, taking a loan of Tk 3 lakh from his father and convincing his cousin to provide the rest on condition

"Now they are not receiving phone calls. don't know what's in my fortune." said Hossain.

A customer filed a case with Gulshan Police Station on August 16 accusing Eorange of embezzling nearly Tk 1,100 crore by not delivering any product since April 28 despite advance payments being

In the case statement, complainant Md Taherul Islam said the products were supposed to be delivered within an agreed period but that did not happen. The next day, two former owners of the

e-commerce platform surrendered before a Dhaka court which sent them to jail rejecting bail pleas. According to Aminul Islam, officer-incharge (investigation), the investigation

was still underway and they were trying to secure evidence. According to an official of e-commerce platform Aladinerprodip, it has so far provided refunds against 17,000 orders

and still had over 8,000 to go. Sirajganj Shop has so far provided refunds against over 95,000 orders and had over 7,000 more to go, said an official of the e-commerce platform.

Dollar drifts higher as US inflation data looms

REUTERS, Singapore

The dollar began a busy data week on a firm footing, with immediate focus turning to US inflation figures but investors are also wary of the Federal Reserve priming to exit from its super-supportive policy stance even as Covid-19 cases surge.

The greenback inched higher in Asia after logging its best week in three on Friday, benefiting both from safety flows and the policy outlook lifting US Treasury yields.

Moves were modest but the euro fell back under \$1.18 to \$1.1792. The dollar also made small gains on the Australian and New Zealand dollars and marginal rises against the yen and sterling -- last buying 109.96 yen.

"A couple of dynamics favour the dollar," said Rodrigo Catril, senior currency strategist at National Australia Bank in Sydney, noting growing risk aversion as even nighty vaccinated countries such as Singapore and Britain log surges in Covid-19 cases.

Re-opening still faces challenges from the consumer, who is cautious and from bottlenecks which restrict ability for the economy to rebound with some gusto," he said.

"At the same time rising infections suggest we may still need to reintroduce restrictions of some sort. The other thing is that the Fed continues to signal that tapering is

By 0520 GMT the Australian dollar was 0.2 per cent weaker at \$0.7337 -- and it has struggled to hold over \$0.74 -- while the kiwi was down 0.4 per cent at \$0.71 as a lockdown of Auckland was extended until midnight on September 21. The dollar index rose 0.1 per cent to 92.739.

US consumer price data on Tuesday is the next major focus for FX traders, along with US retail sales and production figures later in the week as they frame the economy's progress in the lead-up to the Federal Reserve's September. 21-22 meeting. Core consumer price inflation is expected to slow a tad

However, with Philadelphia Fed President Patrick Harker, in a Nikkei interview on Monday, joining a chorus of policymakers keen to begin scaling back asset purchases, bond traders seem to think a slowdown won't be enough to delay tapering much.

Jatri raises \$1.2m to expand operations

transport sector

"We are now in Dhaka, Chattogram and Sylhet. With the latest funding, we want to expand our footprint to every district in the country," Aziz Arman, co-founder and CEO of Jatri, told The Daily Star.

Jatri is rapidly expanding its operations

throughout Bangladesh with doubledigit month-to-month growth through strategic government and private-sector partnerships. Jatri was founded by Arman, Khandokar Taswar Zahin and Zia Uddin in early 2019

with the vision to provide comfortable

public transportation in one of the most densely populated countries in the world. In its early days, Jatri started to automate traditional ticketing, which was almost ubiquitous in the Bangladeshi public

While Bangladesh is rapidly evolving in terms of technology, technology has so far been underutilised in public transport ticketing. The platform said this current pre-series

A-round will fuel Jatri to rapidly expand its nationwide coverage and services that go beyond ticketing and rentals. Jatri has already partnered with the

Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation to

offer a wide selection of routes which may result in a mass adoption of its services within the nation. Earlier this year, Jatri also attained the

ride-sharing licence from Bangladesh Road Transport Authority

"The progress of Jatri is a testament to the dire need for digital reforms in the Bangladeshi transportation sector. We are determined to ride that momentum with this fresh round of funding along with our diverse set of industry specialists and investors with connections to continue to expand our services." Arman added.

Last year, the public transportation tracking and ticketing startup raised an undisclosed amount of seed funding from Dubai-based Falcon Network, Tahseen Consulting, and leading transport apps like

Bolt Uber, Bird, Angkas, and Buseet. Sonia Bashir Kabir, managing director of SBK Tech Ventures, said: "While technology has touched every aspect of our lives, solving intricate and complicated problems, many of us have forgotten to solve problems that are right in front of us."

"I congratulate the founders of Jatri for embracing problems of the masses and impacting public transport in Bangladesh in a transformative manner," he added.

Jute prices fall by Tk 500 a maund within a week FROM PAGE B4

"The price of jute thread at the international level has decreased as well and so, millers and exporters have less demand. For this reason the price of raw jute has come down," said Gomal Sarwar, chief inspector of the Department of Jute in Faridpur.

If the price of thread increases, the jute price will

automatically rise, he added. Jahangir Hossain Mia, chairman of Karim Group, said, it is true that they do not buy as much jute as they had in previous years as they do not need to supply the thread

"Besides, export costs have sharply increased and so has the price of thread, leading to decreased supply," Mia

Bangladesh among top five resilient economies: Kamal

"These statistics indicate that the existing trade-related policies and strategies of the Commonwealth are not conducive for the member countries," Kamal said.

"I firmly believe that through concerted efforts, we can find out the ways to speed up the economic recovery of the affected countries by raising inter-Commonwealth trade and investment and bring back the glorious past of the Commonwealth."

Aluminium breaks \$3,000 on supply concerns

Aluminium broke \$3,000 a tonne for the first time in 13 years Monday on supply concerns while equity markets were mixed as record high US inflation ramped up concerns the Federal Reserve will have to tighten monetary policy sooner than

Reports that President Joe Biden was considering a fresh trade probe into China added to the downbeat mood and nullified the optimism sparked by news that he had held talks on Friday with Xi Jinping in a bid to smooth relations between the superpowers.

After driving a healthy run-up in Asia so far this month, investor sentiment was once again roiled by data on Friday showing US factory gate inflation had soared in August to an all-time high of 8.3 percent owing to a jump in demand as well as supply and labour shortages.

The reading was fuelled partly by a sharp rise in commodity prices, a concern highlighted by news that aluminium had rocketed past \$3,000 a tonne for the first time in 13 years, owing to concerns about supplies in light of a coup in major bauxite producer Guinea as well as low Chinese

The data ramped up speculation about the Fed's plans for monetary policy. Its boss Jerome Powell has already indicated that the central bank will likely start tapering its vast bond-buying programme -- which has been a key driver of the economic and equity markets recovery -- by the end of the

But the latest figures could cause officials to bring forward their timeline. The release Tuesday of consumer inflation has now taken on more significance.

"With the US Federal Reserve due to meet next week, and the narrative clearly moving towards a tapering of asset purchases sooner rather than later, there appears to be a build up in anxiety that the continued rise in inflationary pressure may well be much more persistent than central bankers would have us believe," said CMC Markets analyst

Michael Hewson. All three US indexes ended in the red on Friday, with reports of Biden's probe adding to the selling pressure.

The president was said to be looking at Beijing's subsidies and their effect on the US economy, the reports said, with discussions also being held on last year's trade deal agreed by Donald Trump.