STOCKS		COMMODITIES		ASIAN MARKETS				CURRENCIES (STANDARD CHARTERED BANK)				
DSEX	CSCX	Gold	Oil	MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI		USD	EUR	GBP	CNY
▼ 0.23%	▼ 0.40%	▲ $1,773.10	▲ $75.65	▼ 0.13%	▼ 0.67%	▼ 0.49%	▲ 0.40%	BUY TK	84.35	97.71	114.10	12.74
7,241.84	12,693.82	(per ounce)	(per barrel)	58,927.33	29,639.40	3,048.05	3,628.49	SELL TK	85.35	101.51	117.90	13.40

Star BUSINESS

DHAKA THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 23, 2021, *ASHWIN 8, 1428 BS* ● starbusiness@thedailystar.net

Foreign funds in stocks drop

DROP IN FOREIGN SHAREHOLDING (In %)

Queen South Textile	81.6	BATBC	20.8
Beximco Ltd	81.1	Beximco Pharma	11.7
ML Dyeing	31	Singer	8
Olympic	28.8	DBH	7
Square Pharmaceuticals	21.6	Brac Bank	7

Ahsan Habib

The stock market regulator's initiatives such as roadshows in various countries to bring in investments appear to have produced no significant positive outcome as foreign investors reduced their stakes in the listed companies to book profits.

Eighteen listed companies had at least 5 per cent foreign investment at the end of their latest financial year on the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE). It dropped for 12 companies, three managed to retain them, and the position of overseas investors increased in three companies.

On average, 19.42 per cent of the stake of 18 companies was at the hand of foreign investors at the end of the last financial year. It went down to 16.39 per cent in August, according to the website of the premier bourse.

The bourse does not publish the monthly data on the foreign portfolio investment like it did in the past. The previous commission ordered it not to share the data, said a senior official of the DSE.

READ MORE ON B3

ADB lowers growth forecast

Star Business Report

The Asian Development Bank has trimmed its economic growth projection for Bangladesh to 6.8 per cent for 2021-22, a reflection of the impacts of the containment measures reinstated at the start of the fiscal year to bring down coronavirus infection rates.

The Manila-based lender revised the growth projection in its latest Asian Development Outlook 2021 Update.

In April, it forecast a 7.2 per cent gross domestic product (GDP) growth. The government has also set a similar target for 2021-22, up from a 5.47 per cent provisional estimate in the last fiscal year.

The World Bank has projected that Bangladesh's GDP growth would be 5.1 per cent in FY22.

The growth projection reflects a strong recovery supported by strengthening manufacturing, continued expansion in the global economy, and effective government recovery policies, said the ADB in the report.

With continued robust growth expected in major country destinations, export earnings should reach pre-pandemic levels, it said.

"The government's policies for saving lives while protecting livelihoods underpinned the recovery process in Bangladesh, making it one of the few countries in the world sustaining commendable economic growth in recent difficult times," said Manmohan Parkash, country director of the ADB, in a press release.

The projected GDP of Bangladesh is the third-highest in South Asia. The Maldives is forecast to attain an economic growth of 15 per cent and India 7.5 per cent.

Nepal may post a GDP growth of 4.1 per cent, Pakistan 4 per cent, and Sri Lanka 3.4 per cent.

In Bangladesh, remittances are expected to remain strong, firming up private consumption. Improving consumer confidence and government stimulus measures will help boost private and public investment.

The main downside risk to the forecast would be sustained escalation of infection rates in major advanced economies, clipping external demand.

"Prudent macroeconomic management and efficient implementation of stimulus measures and social protection programmes have helped. Continued efforts for job creation, quick vaccination, and improving domestic resource mobilisation will further accelerate the recovery process," Parkash said.

He applauded recent initiatives in the areas of financial inclusion and expansion of social protection.

Sustained reforms to increase business competitiveness, foreign investment, diversify exports, develop skills, and adopt technology will stimulate private sector investments and hasten economic recovery, he said.

In FY22, improving consumer confidence and the government's fiscal and monetary stimulus measures are expected to boost private and public investment.

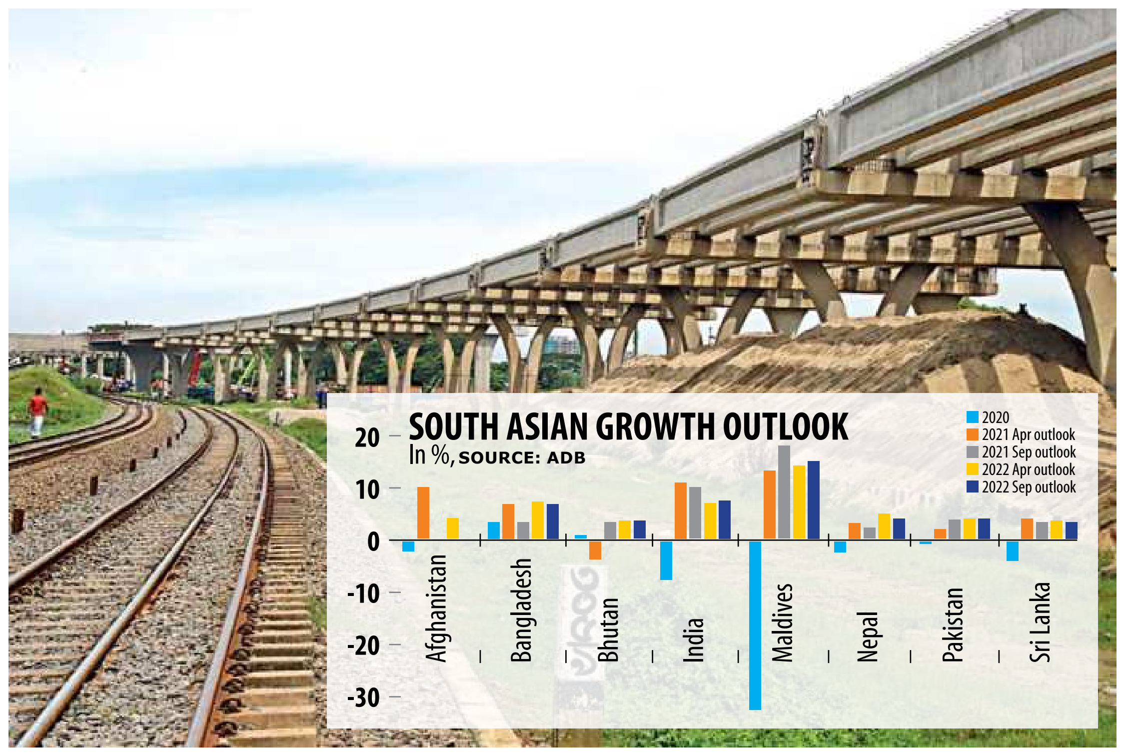
The central bank's expansionary and accommodative monetary policy is expected to support the projected growth while keeping inflation contained.

Inflation could edge up to 5.8 per cent, and the current account deficit to narrow to 0.6 per cent of GDP in FY22.

Continued implementation of the increased fiscal and monetary stimulus measures could create inflationary pressures, the ADB said.

"A good crop outlook, consumer caution and underutilised production capacity should mitigate any upward pressure on prices. Domestic administered prices for fuel may cushion the impact of increased crude oil prices."

READ MORE ON B3



SK ENAMUL HUQ

The government's policies for saving lives while protecting livelihoods underpinned the recovery process in Bangladesh

Manmohan Parkash
ADB country director

EPB to hold virtual fair to promote exports

Star Business Report

The Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) is going to organise an online fair next month with the aim to promote locally made goods at the international level and subsequently increase Bangladesh's export earnings.

The week-long virtual fair, styled "Sourcing Bangladesh 2021", will be held from October 18 to 24. The EPB aims to attract buyers from Europe, North America, Latin America, the Middle East and Africa.

"Buyers in foreign countries can see our products and understand the quality before sourcing any from here if they want.

READ MORE ON B3

Foreign JV to build 50MW solar power plant

Project cost about Tk 1,328cr

Star Business Report

Two foreign companies yesterday got the government nod to set up a 50-megawatt solar power plant in Khulna's Terokhada upazila.

The cabinet committee on government purchase approved the joint venture, under which Business Research International Corporation Inc (BRIC), a Panamanian registered company, and Singapore-based Hero Future Energies Asia Pte Ltd will establish the solar power project.

The government will buy each kilowatt hour (kWh) of electricity produced at the plant for Tk 8.20 for 20 years. The project is estimated to cost Tk 1,328 crore.

Asked why they chose a company from Panama, a country that has history of allowing creation of shell companies that hide their real owners, to set up a power plant in Bangladesh, Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal said: "No, it's a Singaporean company, no Panamanian company is here."

But when journalists insisted that there is a Panamanian company in the joint venture alongside a Singaporean one, Kamal instantly called Nasrul Hamid, the state minister for power, over the phone.

READ MORE ON B3

Stop soybean meal export

Feed millers urge govt

Star Business Report

Feed millers have called upon the government to stop exports of soybean meal, a major ingredient of poultry, fish, and cattle feed, for the sake of the local livestock industry.

They made this call yesterday at a press conference organised by Feed Industries Association Bangladesh (FIAB) as the government recently decided to export soybean meal, which accounts for 25-35 per cent of animal feed.

The millers said soon after the government decided to export soybean meal, local producers increased their prices by Tk 10-12 to Tk 53-55 per kilogramme.

This put the livestock industry, particularly farmers who have been reeling from the Covid-19 fallout, into a deep crisis, they added.

According to FIAB, the price of soybean meal increased by 41.18 per cent in the past one year.

Similarly, the average price of all other ingredients, including maize and fish meal, increased by 34.22 per cent at the same time.

Feed millers alleged that producers have also created an artificial crisis in the market by reducing the supply of soybean meal, affecting the production of many feed mills.

Besides, the increased costs have led to the closure of many small firms.

At least 50 feed producing mills out of a total of 350 have already been shut, they said, adding that the industry has not faced such a crisis in the last 30 years.

About 20 lakh tonnes of soybean meal is required to produce the roughly 50 lakh tonnes of feed needed in the country each year.

Of this, around 80 per cent of the soybean meal is procured by local companies while the rest is imported.

The feed millers said livestock farmers are deeply concerned about soybean meal exports as they are already facing huge losses amid the increased production cost.

Livestock farmers have to spend 75 per cent of their total production cost to procure feed, according to FIAB.

READ MORE ON B3

Transport strike called off

Ctg port operations resume after 35 hours

Dwaipayan Barua, *Ctg*

Operations at the country's premier Chattogram sea port have resumed after around 35 hours with a countrywide work abstention enforced by a section of logistics service providers being called off yesterday afternoon.

But the strike disrupted the port's recent developments in reducing vessels' waiting periods since August 8 following an acute container congestion in late July.

Bangladesh Covered-Van, Truck, Prime Mover Goods Transportation Owners Association and Bangladesh Truck Drivers Workers Federation jointly enforced the countrywide work abstention.

It aimed to realise a 15-point demand, including cancellation of a decision to hike advance income tax imposed on vehicle owners and addressing complications in issuing driving licences for heavy vehicles.

Leaders of the two platforms declared the withdrawal at 3:00pm after a fruitful meeting with the home minister, where assurances came on meeting their demand.

Eventually some trucks and covered vans started to enter the port.

But leaders of Chattogram Prime Mover Trailer Worker Union vowed to continue the strike, claiming their demands had not been addressed.

So the port's major activities, such as loading and unloading of container vessels, remained suspended.

After another meeting with State Minister for Shipping Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury, the union leaders declared to withdraw the strike at 4:30pm.

Loading and unloading of container vessels at Chittagong container terminal and new mooring container terminal started at 5:00pm after prime mover workers took to work, said Tanveer Hussain, COO of Saif Powertech, operator of the two terminals.

READ MORE ON B3

Vehicles transporting goods form a queue to enter the Chattogram sea port after around 35 hours, with a countrywide work abstention enforced by a section of logistics service providers being called off yesterday afternoon. The photo was taken at Dakkhin Halishahar.

RAJIB RAIHAN

HSBC, British Council to provide English, IT lessons to 2,400 girls

STAR BUSINESS DESK

The Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Limited (HSBC) and British Council virtually launched a new programme recently to provide English and IT lessons to 2,400 out-of-school girls in Bangladesh.

Styled "English and Digital for Girls Education" (EDGE), the programme will use face-to-face and remote delivery models, said a press release.

The programme builds on previous EDGE programmes run by British Council since 2012 and includes new components, with senior girls being trained to deliver training to younger counterparts.

"(It will be) helping to give them economic opportunities and strengthen their voices…to make education more equitable and boost girls' life chances," said Robert Chatterton Dickson, British high commissioner to Bangladesh.

The project will reach girls in urban and rural areas, providing useful skills to help them thrive, said Md Mahbub ur Rahman, chief executive officer of HSBC Bangladesh.

The initiative coincides with British Council's 70th anniversary of operations in Bangladesh and Bangladesh's 50th anniversary of independence, said Tom Miscioscia, director (Bangladesh) of British Council.

It will create awareness of social issues among marginalised women and girls, so that they can make more informed and independent life choices to contribute more to the family, economy and society, he said.

US Bank inks $8b deal to buy MUFG's retail banking business

AFP, *New York*

US Bank announced an $8 billion deal on Tuesday to buy the US retail activities of Japan's Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group (MUFG).

The purchase of MUFG Union Bank will allow Minneapolis-based US Bank to strengthen its activities on the US west coast, notably in California, the company said in a statement.

With the deal, US Bank, the country's fifth largest bank in terms of assets, will add more than a million individual accounts and around 190,000 small businesses from MUFG Union Bank's 305 branches, which are mostly in California, Washington and Oregon.

Under the terms of the deal, US Bank will pay $5.5 billion in cash and approximately 44 million shares. The transaction does not include MUFG's US investment banking activities and excludes certain other assets.

UNITED COMMERCIAL BANK LIMITED

Forkan Hossain, general manager of Bangladesh Bank, and Mohammed Shawkat Jamil, managing director of United Commercial Bank Limited, exchanged signed documents of an agreement on an Automated Challan System enabling UCBL's customers to collect payments of various government fees and revenues in real-time and submit to government treasury efficiently. Ahmed Jamal, deputy governor of BB, Nurun Nahar, executive director, and Mohammed Habibur Rahman, deputy managing director of UCBL, were present.

PRIME BANK LIMITED

Kazi Mostafizur Rahman, VAT online project director and commissioner of the National Board of Revenue, formally inaugurated an integrated VAT administration system at Prime Bank Limited for corporate clients. Faisal Rahman, additional managing director of the bank, was present.

China's high-tech push seeks to reassert global factory dominance

REUTERS, *Tianjin*

At a factory in China's north, workers are busy testing an automated vehicle designed to move bulky items around industrial spaces, one of a new generation of robots Beijing wants to shift the country's manufacturing up the value chain.

The robot's Tianjin-based maker has received tax breaks and government-guaranteed loans to build products that modernise China's vast factory sector and advance its technological expertise.

"The government is paying great attention to the manufacturing sector and the real economy - we can feel that," said Ren Zhiyong, general manager of Tianjin Langyu Robot Co, as he gave Reuters a guided tour of his plant.

China is backing R&D efforts by high-tech manufacturers like Langyu, driven by an urgent desire to reduce reliance on imported technology and reinforce its dominance as a global factory power, even as it cracks down on other parts of the economy.

Beijing's pivot puts the focus on advanced manufacturing, rather than the services sector, to steer the world's second-largest economy past the so-called "middle income trap", where countries lose productivity and stagnate in lower-value economic output.

"Pressure is the driving force, and without pressure, it is difficult for companies to develop," said Ren.

He expects revenues to more than double to 100 million yuan ($15.52 million) this year from 2020, on increased demand for high-tech products such as Langyu's automated guided vehicles.

More broadly, the city of Tianjin plans to invest 2 trillion yuan ($311 billion) between 2021 and 2025, with 60 per cent earmarked for strategic emerging industries, Yin Jihui, head of the Tianjin Industry and Information Technology Bureau, told Reuters.

The investment, comprising corporate and government outlays, will help boost manufacturing to 25 per cent of economy in 2025 from 21.8 per cent in 2020, Yin said.

The share of strategic industries in Tianjin's factory output will also rise to 40 per cent, Yin said, from 26.1 per cent last year.

"It will be very difficult and challenging to achieve these goals, (as) we need to ensure stable economic development while making a transition from old to new engines," Yin said.

China's five-year plan in March pledged to keep manufacturing's share of GDP "basically stable", in contrast to the 2016-2020 plan that focused on services to create jobs.

The coronavirus and the Sino-US trade war have reframed the way policymakers see factories: no longer just grimy relics of an old economy but assets of strategic value.

Asian investors soothed by Evergrande bond plan

AFP, *Hong Kong*

Asian investors trod carefully on Wednesday but nerves appeared to be settled by news that troubled Chinese property giant Evergrande had agreed a plan to repay interest on one of its key bonds, for now avoiding a default that many fear could hammer the domestic and global economy.

However, confidence remains at a premium as traders await a crucial meeting of the Federal Reserve, where it could announce a timetable to start tapering its vast monetary easing programme.

That comes against the ever-present backdrop of spiking coronavirus infections and slowing global growth, as well as a brewing battle over the US debt ceiling that, if not resolved, could see a default in the world's top economy, potentially sparking another financial catastrophe.

In Asia, eyes were on mainland Chinese markets as investors returned to work from a four-day weekend to catch up with Monday's rout fanned by feverish talk that one of the country's biggest developers was close to collapse.

While Tuesday saw a little more stability return to trading floors, there remained a lot of uncertainty and there is a hope that the government will at some point break its silence and give an idea about how it intends to deal with the crisis.

With debts topping $300 billion and no way to make cash, there had been an expectation that it would not be able to meet its interest obligations Thursday on two bonds -- one offshore and one domestic -- which would put it effectively in default.

However, Wednesday got off to a positive start with news it had agreed a plan to repay interest on the local note, providing much-needed relief, though there was no news on the overseas payments.

AFP/FILE

Investors appeared to be soothed for now about news that troubled Evergrande had reached an agreement over repaying interest on its domestic bond.

Coca-Cola Bangladesh gets new MD

Ta Duy Tung

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Coca-Cola Bangladesh Limited has recently announced Ta Duy Tung as its new managing director.

Tung has been with Coca-Cola for 15 years, first joining as regional trade marketing manager for North Vietnam. Before that, Tung was at Procter & Gamble.

Before moving to Dhaka, he was executive director for market operations for Coca-Cola Beverages Vietnam Ltd, the beverage manufacturer said in a statement yesterday.

Tung is a surgeon, earning his first Bachelor of Surgeon degree from Hanoi Medical University, Vietnam.

He later went on to pursue a Bachelor of Business Management from Hanoi Polytechnic University and went to India to attain an MBA degree from Bangalore University.

He is married to a lawyer and has two daughters.

"I'm excited to partner with our bottling partners, International Beverages Private Limited and Abdul Monem Limited," he said.

Coca-Cola has been operating in Bangladesh for over five decades.

MTB, Alliance Sandhani Life Unit Funds declare 14pc, 9.5pc dividends

STAR BUSINESS DESK

MTB Unit Fund declared 14 per cent and Alliance Sandhani Life Unit Fund declared 9.5 per cent cash dividends for the fiscal year 2020-21.

The unit holders, who had the units of these funds till June 30, 2021, will get the declared dividend, a press release said. The decision was taken at a recent meeting of the trustees of the two funds.

Alliance Capital Asset Management Limited is in charge of asset management of these two funds.

Bangladesh General Insurance Company is acting as the trustee and Brac Bank Limited is acting as the custodian.

Chinese toymaker to invest $6.5m for Dhaka EPZ factory

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Chinese toymaker Meigo (Bangladesh) Ltd is going to invest $6.55 million to establish a factory in Dhaka Export Processing Zone. The company will annually produce 9 lakh die-cast, plastic, plush and collectible toys.

This will create employment for 1,616 Bangladeshi nationals, Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (Bepza) said in a press release yesterday.

BEPZA Member for Investment Promotion Ali Reza Mazid and Senior Operation Manager of Meigo (Bangladesh) Chen Shu Qiang inked an agreement in this regard at Bepza headquarters in Dhaka.

Imam Hasan Akan, field corporate affairs manager of Chevron Bangladesh, recently handed over the oxygen concentrators to Ishrat Jahan, deputy commissioner of Habiganj, at the Bibiyana Gas Plant. Mustafizur Rahman, civil surgeon of Habiganj, and Aminul Haque, superintendent of 250-bed District Hospital in Habiganj, were present.

CHEVRON BANGLADESH

Foreign funds in stocks drop

FROM PAGE B1

"Attracting investors and holding roadshows is not the job of the commission. Its job is to regulate the market and ensure fair play," said Faruq Ahmed Siddiqi, a former chairman of the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC).

"The roadshows can be arranged by bourses or other intermediaries," he said.

The commission held its first roadshow in Dubai last February. It organised a roadshow in the US in July and is currently having one in Switzerland. A number of roadshows are scheduled in the coming months.

"Even if the roadshows attract investors, it will not happen immediately. Moreover, they will analyse the potential of our companies before investing," said Siddiqi.

"Bangladesh has a very limited number of good stocks, so the BSEC should work on it. If it can bring any multinational company to the market, it will be a big contribution."

Forty-four companies had less than 5 per cent foreign stake at the end of their financial year. The share held by external investors rose at only four companies at the end of August. It dropped for 37 firms and remained unchanged for three.

"As the market has gained at a handsome rate in the last few months, foreign investors booked profit," said Mohammad Rezaul Karim, a spokesperson of the BSEC.

Sometimes, they rearranged portfolios, which is normal, he said, adding that the regulator was now receiving information from intermediaries that foreign investors were increasing their stake again.

A senior official of a brokerage firm said: "My experience is that they always take profit if the market gains at a higher rate and if they see any policy disruption."

The DSEX, the benchmark index of the DSE, stood at 3,989 points on June 30, the last day of the last financial year. It has surged 72 per cent to 6,869 points as of August 31, DSE data showed.

The closure of the market for around two months and the imposition of floor prices at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic spooked the confidence of the foreign investors. So, they began massive sell-offs.

Trading was closed from March 25 to May 31 last year after the government enforced a countrywide lockdown to tame the virus.

On March 19 of 2020, the regulator imposed the floor price to protect stocks from any free fall, much to the dismay of overseas investors.

"Foreign investors don't like interruptions in the market mechanism," the broker said. In June, the BSEC lifted the floor price for all listed companies.

EPB to hold virtual fair to promote exports

FROM PAGE B1

That is why we are going to organise this fair," said Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi at a press conference at the EPB office.

This is the first time that the EPB will hold a virtual fair amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

The EPB usually takes part in various fairs abroad with exporters to increase and diversify the country's export earnings, which stood at $38.75 billion in fiscal 2020-21.

Bangladesh's export basket is dominated by garments, which account for more than 80 per cent of all outgoing shipments.

The EPB said product exhibitions and international trade fairs of different countries remained closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In such a situation, online fairs are being organised to display Bangladeshi products for foreign buyers.

Bangladeshi exporters will display 10 products, including garments, leather and jute goods, at the fair.

It was informed at the press conference that participating companies will be given a virtual booth, through which they will display 3D images of their products as well as audio-visual content.

In addition, there will be a buyer-seller database on the exhibition website. Everybody will be able to communicate with potential foreign buyers via live chat, audio and video conferencing.

The organisers think that 150-200 organisations from Bangladesh can participate in this fair.

"This fair is going to be organised for the first time in Bangladesh. Well-known exporters in the country will participate in the fair," said AHM Ahsan, vice-chairman and CEO of the EPB.

Tapan Kanti Ghosh, secretary of the commerce ministry, was present at the press conference. Bangladesh's export basket includes: bicycles, ceramics, various food products, garments, leather, ICT products, handicrafts, pottery, and jute.

Foreign JV to build 50MW solar power plant

FROM PAGE B1

After their conversation, Kamal told journalists that Hamid will inform him about the company after knowing about it himself. The Panama Papers leaks had put some well-known political and corporate leaders under the spotlight after their names popped up in connection with offshore entities bearing roots in Bangladesh.

The first leak of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), published in 2013, contained the names of 32 Bangladeshis.

In 2016, the ICIJ named three new companies, 14 new addresses and 24 individuals with links to Bangladesh on its second list of leaks.

Amid the gas crisis, the government approved a proposal to buy another 33.60 lakh Metric Million British thermal units (MMBtus) of liquefied natural gas (LNG) from the spot market to meet the growing demand for the super-chilled fuel.

Vitol Asia Pte of Singapore will supply the fuel with each MMBtu costing $29.89.

The committee also approved a proposal of the Directorate General of Food to purchase 50,000 tonnes of wheat from M/S Agrocorp International Pte Ltd of Singapore for Tk 179.53 core.

The price of per tonne wheat was set at $421.19.

Commerce ministry should support conned customers: Kamal

FROM PAGE B4

How many sides could be controlled? Still, the government must accept the responsibility to this effect."

The finance minister was also asked about the latest cut in the rates of the national savings scheme.

On Tuesday, the government brought down the interest rate on the savings tools for the amount above Tk 15 lakh -- a move that may help it reduce the interest rate burden but hurt the middle-income group dependent on the returns to make a living.

The new rates are applicable for fresh investments.

"It will not affect small savers. It has been done in keeping with the prevailing rates of various deposit products," Kamal said, referring to the savings products of banks.

The government has introduced savings schemes for pensioners and marginal groups. But many well-off people have rushed to these tools as the interest rate is comparatively high.

At present, national savings certificates offer a return of as high as 11 per cent, whereas the weighted average rate on deposits at banks was 4.13 per cent in June.

The minister said the latest changes weren't aimed at discouraging investment.

"At the same time, we don't want anyone to come and invest Tk 1 crore. Our target is to allow people to invest in the range of Tk 10 lakh to Tk 15 lakh."

The rate might be revised upwards in the future as well, Kamal said.

Yesterday, the cabinet committee on economic affairs approved a proposal to purchase more than 11 crore syringes from JMI Syringes & Medical Devices Ltd to administer coronavirus vaccines.

The meeting gave the nod to buy the syringes and an adequate amount of auto-disable needles in the future to inoculate 13.82 crore people, the finance ministry said in a press release.

BOJ to keep stimulus as deflation risks cloud outlook

REUTERS, *Tokyo*

The Bank of Japan was expected to keep monetary policy steady on Wednesday as weak growth and deflation risks remain primary concerns, in contrast to major counterparts eyeing a withdrawal of crisis-mode support for their economies.

The rate review comes ahead of a ruling party leadership race on September 29 that may shift the administration's focus away from the current stance based on former premier Shinzo Abe's "Abenomics" reflationist policies, analysts say.

While the candidates agree on the need to maintain massive monetary support for now, they vary on the preferred long-term policy path, an area Governor Haruhiko Kuroda may be grilled on at his post-meeting briefing.

BITOPI

Md Selim Uddin, chairman of Dhaka Electric Supply Company Limited, and Shadab Sajid, managing director of Oculin Tech BD Limited, shake hand after exchanging signed documents of an agreement for a project titled 'Upgradation of Master Information Center (MIC) of DESCO on Turn Key Basis' recently. Bikash Dewan, managing director of Dhaka Power Distribution Company, Md Kausar Ameer Ali, managing director of DESCO, Mohammad Hasan Imam, executive vice president of Oculin Tech BD, were present.

Transport strike called off

FROM PAGE B1

Two vessels MV AS Sicilia and MV Sahare, which were scheduled to leave the port yesterday morning, have deferred their departure for a lack of transportation.

A total of 929 TEUs (twenty equivalent units) of export-laden containers meant to be loaded onto Colombo-bound MV Sicilia could not be sent from different private inland container depots (ICDs).

Unloading of 1,217 TEUs of import-laden containers from MV Sahare could not be carried out.

Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) Secretary Md Omar Faruk admitted that this was the first time any vessel failed to make their departure from the port on time due to a strike.

Mohammad Zakirul Islam, deputy manager of Karnaphuli Group, the owning firm of MV Sahare, said despite work ongoing over the night, the vessel would not be able to make its departure in the morning today.

The vessel's operator will have to pay around $2000 as berth hire charge to the port authority for the additional two days' stay, he said.

Bangladesh Inland Container Depots Association (BICDA) Secretary Md Ruhul Amin Sikder said immediately after the strike withdrawal, ICDs started loading export-laden containers meant for MV Sicilia onto prime movers.

"Our priority now is to reach all the 929 TEUs export containers to the port during the night so that MV Sicilia can leave the port tomorrow (Thursday) morning," he told The Daily Star yesterday afternoon.

Like Sahare and Sicilia, eight more container vessels have remained idle at the jetties for the last 35 hours, since no loading and unloading could be done.

Meanwhile, two container vessels, HR Rea and MCC Cebu, were waiting at the outer anchorage for a scope to berth yesterday but failed as no ships could depart and the jetties were occupied.

Waiting time of these two vessels may prolong as their new schedule will be decided later, said sources.

Shipping agents feared that an improvement in vessels' waiting time achieved last month may again deteriorate due to the 35-hour stalemate.

However, a few industrial groups like BSRM and Confidence Cement managed to send some of their own trucks to the port during the strike.

Thus unloading of imported raw materials like cement clinkers and scraps and others from the bulk vessel continued on a limited scale, informed CPA Secretary Faruk. But many of these vehicles got stuck inside the port after loading goods due to the strike till 3:00pm.

Mahbubul Alam, president of the Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said it was frustrating for export and import activities to be affected.

The country's industrial sector is now trying hard to get over the huge loss generated for the pandemic in the past one and a half years, he said.

He urged all not to hamper activities of the port in future while observing any agitation programme for the sake of the country's economy.

Stop soybean meal export

FROM PAGE B1

The association also alleged that only three to four soybean oil-producing companies recently started exporting soybean meal, a by-product of soybean oil processing, to India for extra profit.

FIAB leaders said if this export is not stopped, the price of livestock products will go beyond the purchasing capacity of consumers.

The fisheries, agriculture and food ministries had recommended as much to the commerce ministry but were ignored, they added.

However, Biswajit Saha, director for corporate and regulatory affairs at City Group, one of the top soybean meal producers in the country, said soybean meal producers crush about 54 lakh tonnes of the feed ingredient against a local demand of around 21 lakh tonnes per year.

"So if imports are stopped, where will we sell this additional 33 lakh tonnes of soybean meal," he asked.

Saha went on to say that they are now selling soybean meal at about Tk 52 per kilogramme in the country while they are exporting the ingredient at Tk 57 per kilogramme.

FIAB President Ahtesham B Shahjahan, General Secretary Md Ahsanuzzaman, Member Masiur Rahman, and others also spoke at the event.

ADB lowers growth forecast

FROM PAGE B1

On the supply side, agriculture growth is projected to go up to 3.7 per cent in FY2022, driven by the budget priority extended to the sector.

Exports may grow by 8 per cent on continued robust growth projected in major export destinations.

According to the report, growth in remittances is likely to moderate to 7 per cent in FY2022.

"Providing vaccinations for workers is key to job placement in destination countries and maintaining robust remittance growth."

Stocks down after two-day rise

FROM PAGE B4

CAPM IBBL Islamic Mutual Fund topped the gainers' list, rising 9.7 per cent, followed by Active Fine Chemicals Limited, Pacific Denims Limited, Tosrifa Industries Limited and Delta Life Insurance Company Limited.

Desh Garments Limited shed the most, falling 6.30 per cent, followed by Eastern Insurance Company Limited, Monospool Paper Manufacturing Company Limited, The IBN SINA Pharmaceutical Industry Limited and Rupali Insurance Company Limited.

At the DSE, 125 stocks rose, 209 declined and 42 remained unchanged.

Stocks of Orion Pharma Limited were traded the most, worth Tk 133 crore, followed by Beximco Ltd, Maksons Spinning Mills Limited, Beximco Pharmaceuticals Limited and Delta Life Insurance Company Limited.

The prime bourse of the DSE endured a slight setback as it reverted back to a downward direction after two days of upsurge, said International Leasing Securities Limited in its daily market review.

An early hour upsurge in share prices was somewhat slowed down through the mid-session and brought the DSEX to a level 16.73 points lower than that in the last session, it said.

Investors' sell off was observed across the major sectors as a majority of investors exhibited a profit booking attitude, it added.

Chittagong Stock Exchange (CSE) also rose yesterday.

The CASPI, the general index of the port city bourse, edged up 82 points, or 0.39 per cent, to 21,157.

Among 320 stocks to undergo trade, 115 advanced, 171 fell and 34 remained unchanged.

E-COMMERCE SCAM

Commerce ministry should support conned customers: Kamal

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The commerce ministry will have to take the primary responsibility to support the customers who were conned by some rogue e-commerce firms, said Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal yesterday.

He made the comments when asked whether the government would bear the responsibility to return money to the customers who had been deceived by some e-commerce firms in recent times.

Kamal said, "When these types of firms are set up, they obtain the clearance from concerned agencies. In this case, the clearance came from the commerce ministry."

"They [the commerce ministry] have to take the responsibility primarily. At the same time, other agencies involved should take the responsibility collectively," he told reporters after a meeting of the cabinet committee on public purchase.

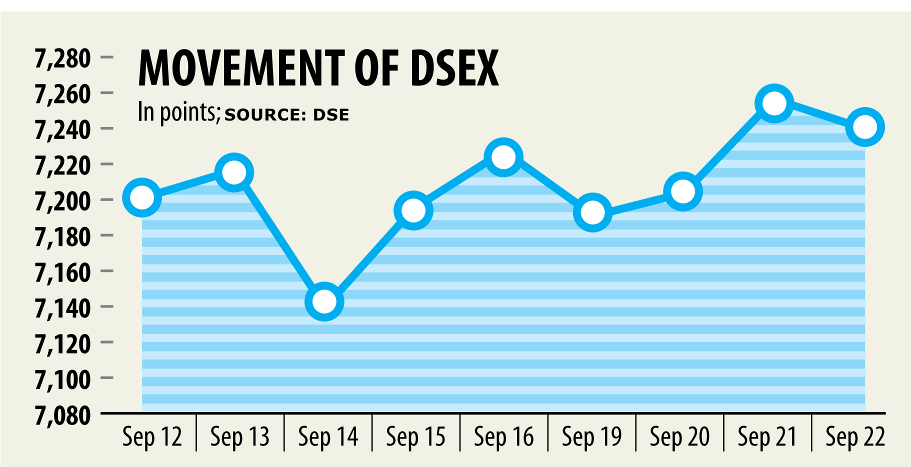
Some e-commerce firms are facing legal actions for their contentious business model as they took payments from customers in advance but delayed the delivery of products for weeks or months on the back of unprecedented discounts.

The gap between their assets and liabilities has widened to the point where they might not be able to supply the products to online shoppers. Many e-commerce firms also owe to sellers.

According to Kamal, the ordinary people were deceived by this group of firms in various forms on numerous occasions.

"It had been done manually in the past. Now it is carried out digitally.

READ MORE ON B3



Stocks down after two-day rise

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Dhaka stock index dropped yesterday just after touching its highest-ever levels in the preceding two days.

The DSEX, the benchmark index of Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE), fell 16 points, or 0.23 per cent, to 7,241.

Due to a profit-booking tendency among investors, the index suffered yesterday, said a stock broker.

People were optimistic, so it rose in the first hour of trading. However, some profit-seeking people became active at the end of the day, he said.

As people were ready to buy stocks, the index was saved from falling further, he added.

Turnover, an important indicator of the premier bourse of the country, rose 12 per cent to Tk 2,150 crore, which was Tk 1,910 crore a day earlier.

All the large-cap sectors posted negative performances.

Fuel and power experienced the highest loss of 0.58 per cent followed by telecommunication (0.45 per cent), banking (0.44 per cent) and non-bank financial institutions (0.41 per cent).

READ MORE ON B3

Imitation jewellery makes a comeback in Jhenidah



Imitation or "city gold" jewellery makers in Moheshpur upazila of Khulna's Jhenaidah district are recovering from the pandemic-induced economic downturn as factories have reopened following prolonged closures due to recurring lockdowns.

PHOTO: AZIBOR RAHMAN

AZIBOR RAHMAN, Jhenidah

Around 10,000 families in Moheshpur upazila of Khulna's Jhenaidah district are seeing better days as the local imitation or "city gold" jewellery industry has bounced back from a prolonged period of economic uncertainty due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

The district's first factory making such products, called Milon City Gold, was established in Moheshpur back in 2004 and since then, its owner Rashedunnabi Milon has enjoyed much success.

The renowned factory directly employed about 600 workers between 2005 to 2017 and as these workers gradually gained experience in metalworking, they went on to set up their own factories across the region.

There are now 23 imitation jewellery factories in Moheshpur that produce earrings, necklaces, bangles, rings, bracelets and others.

Aminur Rahman, the owner of Amin City Gold Factory, said Moheshpur town was thriving thanks to the local imitation jewellery industry.

"We were passing happy days but the pandemic brought a swift end to this as production at all the factories nosedived due to the recurring lockdowns and other measures imposed to curb the spread of Covid-19," he added.

However, the industry has since started to recover from the pandemic-induced downturn thanks to the lifting of these restrictions, according to industry insiders.

DISTRICTS IN FOCUS

The pandemic destroyed our plans but now we are progressing again since the lockdowns have ended," said Shahidul Islam, owner of a factory.

Shahidul Islam, the owner of another factory in the upazila, told The Daily Star that he has been working in the industry for 12 years.

"This pandemic destroyed our plans and growth trajectory but now we are progressing again since the lockdowns have ended," he said.

Shima Khatun, a resident of Naudaga village under the municipality, said she worked at Milon City Gold for seven years.

Khatun would make imitation earrings at home and sell them to the factory for about Tk 6,000 per month during the pre-pandemic era but after the coronavirus began its rampage across the country, her income dropped to around Tk 3,500 per month.

Now though, her earnings have bounced back.

Similarly, housewife Rima Khatun of the same village said profits were poor amid the pandemic due to increased raw material costs but since the restrictions have since been called off, her business was recovering.

Shariul Islam, the owner of Etyadi store at Jalilpur bazar which sells raw materials for imitation jewellery, said prices had increased to a great extent due to the lockdown but were now on a downward trend.

Rashedunnabi Milon, also secretary to the local imitation jewellery makers' association, said it was a very profitable business up till the pandemic began in March 2020, when he reduced the number of workers at his factory to 200 due to decreased demand.

Business had fallen by about 70 per cent compared to pre-pandemic levels as raw material prices had soared due to increased importing costs from India and China.

"Now our business is progressing day by day as lockdowns have been called off. At present, the business is operating at 70 per cent of previous levels," Milon added.

GLOBAL BUSINESS

ADB cuts Asia growth forecast on slow vaccine rollout

AFP, Manila

The Asian Development Bank warned of "lasting scars" from the coronavirus pandemic as it cut its 2021 growth forecast for developing Asia on slow vaccination rates, surging infections and crippling lockdowns.

A shortage of doses, which has hampered efforts to inoculate the vast region stretching from the Cook Islands in the Pacific to Kazakhstan in Central Asia, could worsen as evidence of waning vaccine protection increases demand for booster shots, the lender said Wednesday.

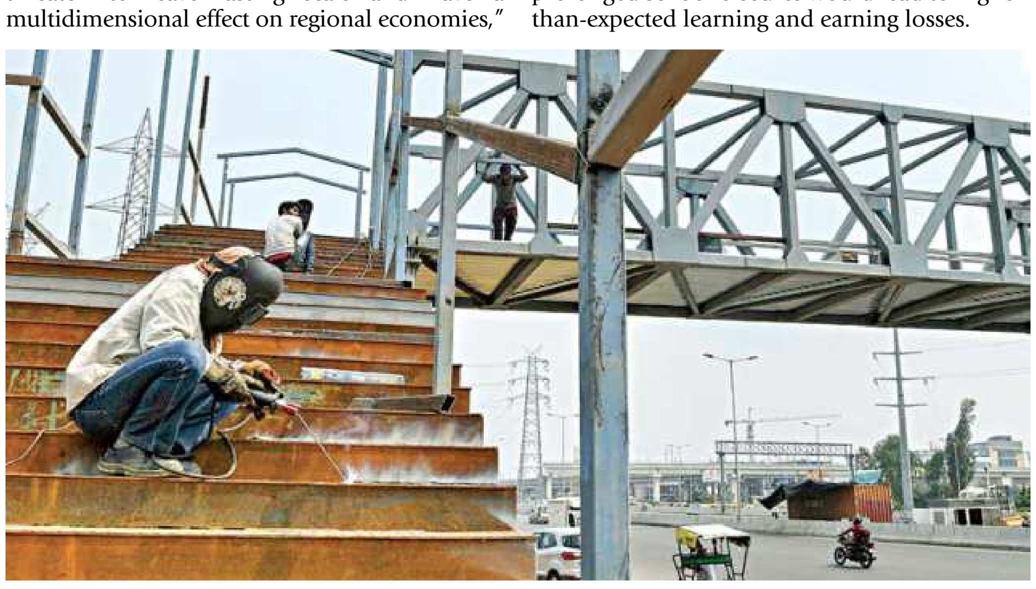
The Philippines-based ADB forecast growth of 7.1 per cent -- compared with its previous prediction in April of 7.3 per cent and a slight contraction in 2020 -- but said the recovery "remains fragile".

Vaccination rates have been uneven across the region, where less than a third of the population was fully protected against Covid-19 at the end of August, the lender said in an update of its flagship Asian Development Outlook.

That compared with more than 50 per cent coverage in the United States and nearly 60 per cent in the European Union.

The ADB warned that delayed vaccine rollouts and the emergence of new variants were among the biggest risks to the outlook -- and could have long-term damaging consequences. "Income losses caused by the pandemic in particular threaten to leave lasting scars and have a multidimensional effect on regional economies," the ADB said.

Progress on reducing poverty in developing Asia had been set back "at least two years", and prolonged school closures would lead to higher-than-expected learning and earning losses.



Workers build a bridge in Ghaziabad, India. The Asian Development Bank has cut its growth forecast for developing Asia.

AFP/FILE

German auto giants place their bets on hydrogen cars

REUTERS, Munich

Battery power may be the frontrunner to become the car technology of the future, but don't rule out the underdog hydrogen.

That's the view of some major automakers, including BMW and Audi, which are developing hydrogen fuel-cell passenger vehicle prototypes alongside their fleets of battery cars as part of preparations to abandon fossil fuels.

They are hedging their bets, calculating that a change in political winds could shift the balance towards hydrogen in an industry shaped by early-mover Tesla's decision to take the battery-powered road to clean cars.

Global auto hub Germany is in sharp focus. It is already betting billions on hydrogen fuel in sectors like steel and chemicals to meet climate targets, and closely-fought elections this month could see the Greens enter the coalition government and further push the technology.

BMW is hydrogen's biggest proponent among Germany's carmakers, charting a path to a mass-market model around 2030. The company also has one eye on shifting hydrogen policies in Europe and in China, the world's largest car market.

The Munich-based premium player has developed a hydrogen prototype car based on its X5 SUV, in a project already partly funded by the German government.

Jrgen Guldner, the BMW vice president who heads up the hydrogen fuel-cell car programme, told Reuters the carmaker would build a test fleet of close to 100 cars in 2022.

"Whether this (technology) is driven by politics or demand, we will be ready with a product," he said, adding that his team is already working to develop the next generation vehicles.

"We're on the verge of getting there and we're really convinced we'll see a breakthrough in this decade," he said.

VW's premium Audi brand told Reuters it had assembled a team of more than 100 mechanics and engineers who were researching hydrogen fuel cells on behalf of the whole Volkswagen group, and had built a few prototype cars.

Hydrogen is viewed as a sure bet by the world's biggest truckmakers, such as Daimler AG unit Daimler Truck, Volvo Trucks and Hyundai, because batteries are too heavy for long-distance commercial vehicles.

REUTERS

A BMW iX5 Hydrogen is seen during Munich Auto Show in Germany on September 8.

Taliban expand economic team

REUTERS

Afghanistan's Taliban government bolstered its economic team on Tuesday, naming a commerce minister and two deputies as the group tries to revive a financial system in shock from the abrupt end to billions of dollars in foreign aid.

Nooruddin Azizi, a businessman from Panjshir province north of Kabul, was named as acting minister of commerce and industry and would start work immediately, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told a news conference.

Azizi joins the acting finance minister and minister for economic affairs, both of whom were announced previously, in a team facing a daunting task.

Exacerbated by a drought that threatens to leave millions of people hungry, the economic crisis is among the biggest challenges facing the Taliban 20 years after they were driven from power by a US-led campaign in the wake of the September 11 attacks.

"We are working day and night on this and on making sure that the economic issue is resolved as soon as possible," Mujahid told reporters.

He did not give concrete proposals as to how this could be achieved, but did promise that government workers who have been unpaid since at least July would start receiving salaries soon. Underlining the economic pressures building on Afghanistan's new government, prices for staples like flour, fuel and rice have risen and long queues are still forming outside banks as they strictly ration withdrawals.

Some humanitarian aid has started to arrive and limited trade has returned across land borders with Pakistan, but a severe cash shortage is crippling day-to-day economic activity and decades of war have left much infrastructure in tatters.

Foreign aid payments, which accounted for 40 per cent of Afghanistan's gross domestic product, have all but stopped as the West considers how to deal with a group that, until August, led a deadly insurgency against the US-backed government.

IMF execs meet over charges boss changed data to favour China

AFP, Washington

The International Monetary Fund's board of directors met Tuesday over charges that its director, Kristalina Georgieva, pressured staff in 2017 when she was the World Bank CEO to change data in a key ranking report to paint China in a more positive light.

The board did not announce any immediate decision and said it would meet again "soon. "

"The IMF's Executive Board met today for an initial briefing from the Ethics Committee on the matter related to Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva's alleged role in the World Bank's Doing Business 2018 as described in the Investigation's Report," the IMF said in a statement.

It added that the board "emphasized the importance it attached to conducting a thorough, objective, and timely review and agreed to meet again soon for a further discussion.

"The board had already met with Georgieva, who denies the charges, last Thursday and Friday, immediately after the investigation was made public.