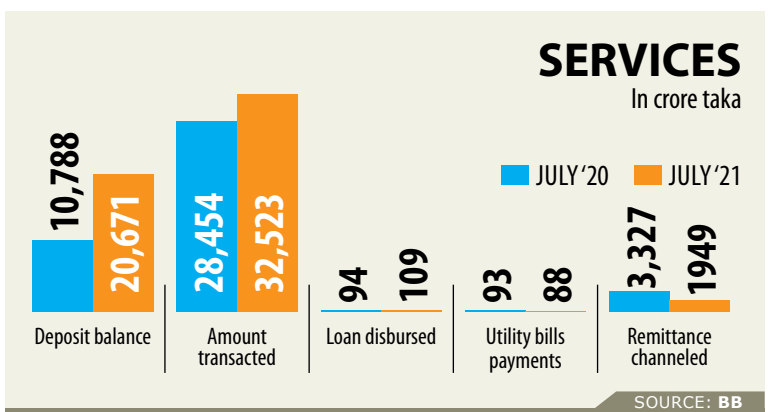
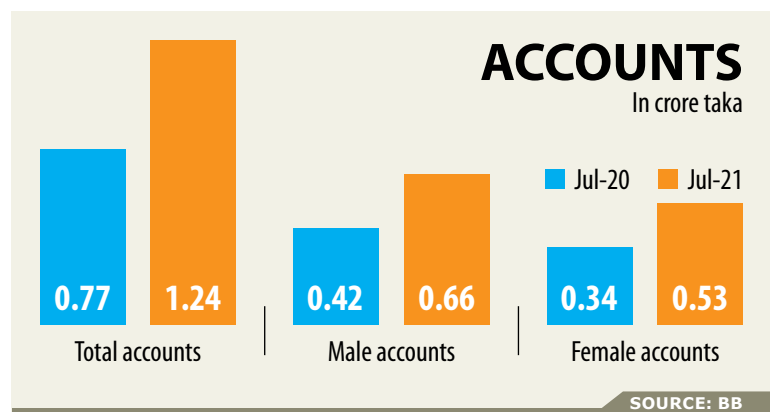


Agent banking transactions see robust growth



STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Funds transacted through agent banking accounts rose 14.3 per cent year-on-year to Tk 32,523 crore in July as more and more people are joining the financial system using the new window, Bangladesh Bank data showed.

This is compared to Tk 28,454 crore in July last year.

Since 2013, the central bank has awarded 28 agent banking licences with the aim to provide a secure alternative delivery channel of banking services to the underprivileged and under-served population who live in remote locations.

Agent banking accounts totaled 1.24 crore at the end of July, up about 62 per cent from 76.86 lakh in the same month a year ago.

The number of agents across the country stood at 13,086 at the end of July, which was 9,180 in the same month last year. Agent banking outlets rose to 17,332 from 12,861 during the period.

In July, 66.42 lakh males had agent banking accounts, up 60 per cent from 41.62 lakh, year-on-year. Female customers owned 52.66 lakh accounts, which was 33.7 lakh in the same month last year, an increase of 56.26 per cent, according data from the central bank.

In Bangladesh, agent banking has emerged as an alternative to the branch-based banking model in the areas where setting up full-fledged offices is not commercially viable because of lower business volume.

Apart from offering basic banking services such as cash deposits, cash withdrawals, and receipt of remittances, banks have started disbursing loans through their agents.

"Agent banking is another factor that is contributing to total deposit growth," said the central bank in a report.

The deposit balance was Tk 20,671 crore as of July, doubling from Tk 10,788 crore in the same month in 2020.

Banks disbursed Tk 109.9 crore in loans through the agent banking system, up from Tk

94.9 crore in the same period last year.

Utility bills amounting to Tk 88.9 crore were paid through agent banking accounts in July. It is, however, down from Tk 93.7 crore in July last year. Remittance to the tune of Tk 1,949 crore was channelled to the beneficiaries, a decrease of 41.42 per cent from Tk 3,327 crore a year ago, central bank data showed.

Twenty-four banks have rolled out the service as of September last year.

Bank Asia, Islami Bank Bangladesh Ltd, Dutch-Bangla Bank Ltd, Brac Bank, City Bank, Mutual Trust Bank, Al-Arafah Islami Bank, Agrani Bank, NRB Commercial Bank, and Modhumoti Bank are among the lenders with a significant presence in the agent banking segment.

Transactions through agent banking more than doubled to Tk 393,932 crore in the last fiscal year. Md Arfan Ali, managing director of Bank Asia, which pioneered agent banking in Bangladesh, has high hopes about the new window.

"Agent banking will work as an effective channel to disburse loans in the long run. Now, our employees provide banking services. But in the future, the agents will provide all the services on behalf of banks."

According to the noted banker, agent banking had already expanded the footprint of banks.

"Its growing use will bring down the cost of services. As a result, people will get loans at lower interest rates and other services at lower costs," Ali said.



The central bank has awarded 28 agent banking licences with the aim to provide a secure alternative delivery channel of banking services in remote locations.

COLLECTED

Managing people through change



MAMUN RASHID

The world has changed. Radically new technologies, new forms of working, new customs, new standards, and the gamut of changes spurred on by the "new normal" have drastically changed the modern day workplace.

Successful change management starts with people and without the proper approach, we risk losing both money and talent.

Across 35 years of professional experience, I have adhered to a few principles of management which are more relevant today than ever before:

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

For far too long has the myth been perpetuated that work-life balance is a first-world concept and people in Bangladesh do not place as much value on it. On the contrary, the new generation puts a premium on making this balance work for them and will not choose to work in an organization which does not care about helping them manage it.

However, beyond just retention, fostering better work-life balance is an excellent business decision for organisations as employees who do not take proper breaks are widely known to be less efficient, harder to work with, less likely to be problem solvers and more prone to mental health issues.

Proper breaks, a maximum end-time for office each day, an effort to find solutions in times of conflict between work and family life, and placing a premium on helping employees find humane solutions to their problems are hallmarks of a modern day, people and productivity centric company.

GROOMING TALENT

Employees today look for an organisation which will be able to equip them for a career and not just for a job.

In the banking sector, it has become a common trend to see employees trained in a very narrow function without the ability to solve problems and take decisions.

Managers must make a conscious effort to diversify the range of experiences their employees are exposed to and groom those who perform best into future leadership roles. This is important not just to retain employees but also crucial to ensure that employees are able to create greater value for the organisation.

In banks, where decision making is becoming more important every day, it is an essential skill that managers must both teach and promote.

CREATING OPPORTUNITY AND OWNERSHIP

It is a common misconception that some people take ownership of their work and therefore are innately better employees. This is a costly mistake as a lot of talent is lost out on.

In a work environment where employees can see the bigger picture, are given praise for good work or constructive criticism for failing to meet expectations, and receive better opportunities if they are doing a higher quality of work than their peers, it will be much more likely that they would be motivated to take ownership of their responsibilities.

However, banks often fail to identify and reward those who are the best at their jobs. This means there is no reward for improving the way how our banking sector functions now.

Rewarding employees who improve system processes and make the organisation more efficient must be a cornerstone of



OPINION

banks in Bangladesh.

MEETING THE NEW NORMAL

It would be wrong to think that Covid-19 pandemic is the first time that the normal way of working has been disrupted.

Although the social distancing measures enforced throughout the past year has enhanced the use of video meetings and remote working, change in the way people work in large organisations is a constant process.

Mandatory physical presence at the office, requiring staff to stay back at work and frowning on flexible work arrangements are old world practices exhibited at companies which have not embraced change.

READ MORE ON B2

GLOBAL BUSINESS

Panic buying leaves 90pc fuel pumps dry in major British cities

REUTERS, London

Up to 90 per cent of British fuel stations ran dry across major English cities on Monday after panic buying deepened a supply chain crisis triggered by a shortage of truckers that retailers are warning could batter the world's fifth-largest economy.

A dire post-Brexit shortage of lorry drivers emerging after the Covid-19 pandemic has sown chaos through British supply chains in everything from food to fuel, raising the spectre of disruptions and price rises in the run up to Christmas.

Just days after Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government spent millions of pounds to avert a food shortage due to a spike in prices for natural gas, the biggest cost in fertilizer production, ministers asked people to refrain from panic buying.

But queues of dozens of cars snaked back from petrol stations across the country on Sunday, swallowing up supplies and forcing many gas stations to simply close. Pumps across British cities were either closed or had signs saying fuel was unavailable on Monday, Reuters reporters said.

The Petrol Retailers Association (PRA), which represents independent fuel retailers

which now account for 65 per cent of all UK forecourts, said members had reported that 50 per cent to 90 per cent of pumps were dry in some areas.

"We are unfortunately seeing panic buying of fuel in many areas of the country," Gordon Balmer, executive director of the PRA, who worked for BP for 30 years, told Reuters.

"We need some calm," Balmer said. "Please don't panic buy: if people drain the network then it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy."

Britain is considering calling in the army to ensure fuel supplies reach consumers, according to The Times and Financial Times.

Environment Secretary George Eustice said there was no shortage of fuel, urged people to stop panic buying and said there were no plans to get the army to drive trucks, though the Ministry of Defence would help with trucker testing.

Hauliers, gas stations and retailers warned that there were no quick fixes, however, as the shortfall of truck drivers - estimated to be around 100,000 - was so acute, and because transporting fuel demands additional training and licensing.



A BP petrol station that has run out of fuel is seen in London, Britain on September 26.

US plans projects in Latin America countering China's Belt and Road

REUTERS, Washington

US officials are set to tour Latin America this week to scout infrastructure projects as they prepare a counter to Chinese President Xi Jinping's multi-trillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative.

A delegation of diplomatic and development officials led by President Joe Biden's deputy national security adviser Daleep Singh is in Colombia, where they plan to meet President Ivan Duque, before stops later in the week to Ecuador and Panama, US officials said.

The group is tasked with turning Build Back Better World (B3W), the international infrastructure investment initiative announced by the Group of Seven richest democracies in June, into reality. It's the first of several planned "listening tours."

In addition to meeting with Duque, Ecuadorean President Guillermo Lasso, and Panamanian officials, the trip will allow US officials to speak with the private sector, civil society and "traditionally marginalized groups," officials said.

The programme is focused on areas including climate, health, digital technology and gender equality, officials have said.

A formal US B3W launch event is planned for early next year that will include details of some initial projects aimed at narrowing the \$40 trillion needed by developing nations by 2035, according to a senior Biden administration official. It is not yet decided how much capital the program will ultimately allocate.

In just over a month, US officials also plan to huddle with allies at the Group of 20



An aerial view shows the streets of Bogota, Colombia. A delegation of diplomatic and development officials led by President Joe Biden's deputy national security adviser Daleep Singh is in Colombia now to hold talks on infrastructure projects.

REUTERS/FILE

rich countries and COP26 climate change conferences in Europe, which China is also set to attend. Conversations will continue at Biden's planned Summit for Democracy in December.

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which Xi launched in 2013, involves development and investment initiatives stretching worldwide.

More than 100 countries have signed agreements with China to cooperate in BRI projects like railways, ports and highways.

"Very few of the projects make economic sense and they often have very poor labor and environmental standards," the Biden administration official said.

Pelosi says US infrastructure bill will pass

REUTERS, Washington

US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi expressed confidence on Sunday that the \$1 trillion infrastructure bill will pass this week but sounded more doubtful about bringing it to the House floor on Monday as she previously pledged to do.

"You cannot choose the date, you have to go when you have the votes in a reasonable time and we will," she said.

"I'm never bringing a bill to the floor that doesn't have the votes," she told ABC News.

"ThisWeek" anchor George Stephanopoulos, walking back comments from Friday that she would bring it to the floor on Monday.

"Let me just say that we're going to pass the bill this week," said Pelosi, a Democrat.

The measure was passed in the Senate with support from Democrats and Republicans on August 10, and will help fund road, bridge, airport, school and other construction projects.

It is also key to the success of President Joe Biden's economic agenda.

Biden, asked at the White House on Sunday whether Pelosi had the votes she needed, expressed hopefulness. "I'm optimistic about this week. It's going to take the better part of the week, I think," he told reporters.

Pelosi also said that it was "self evident" Biden's larger \$3.5 billion social welfare and climate bill - whose massive cost has divided

the Democratic party - might shrink in size.

Democrats have so far failed to reach consensus on the timing of the bills.

A large group of progressive lawmakers insist that the \$1 trillion infrastructure bill be held back until the bigger bill is ready.

Moderates want the \$1 trillion bill enacted no matter the progress on the larger measure, which includes provisions for expanding healthcare for children and the elderly and for investing in steps to drastically reduce emissions blamed on climate change.

Pelosi did not specifically address how the divisions within the party would be overcome, but said the final figure for the larger package would be lower than \$3.5 trillion.