

STOCKS		COMMODITIES		ASIAN MARKETS				CURRENCIES			
DSEX	CSCX			MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI	USD	EUR	GBP	CNY
▲ 0.19%	▲ 0.32%	Gold ▲	Oil ▲	▼ 0.72%	▲ 0.59%	▲ 0.21%	▲ 1.15%	BUY TK 84.85	96.33	114.87	13.02
6,995.92	12,317.98	\$1,860.50 (per ounce)	\$82.55 (per barrel)	59,919.69	29,277.86	3,238.07	3,532.79	SELL TK 85.85	100.13	116.67	13.69



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# BUSINESS

DHAKA FRIDAY NOVEMBER 12, 2021, KARTIK 27, 1428 BS ● starbusiness@thedailystar.net

## Forex reserve drops to \$45b

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

The country's foreign exchange reserve has declined to \$45.06 billion, mainly due to high import payments and a downward trend of remittances.

The reserve crossed \$48 billion on August 24, after which it saw a steep decline, putting pressure on the taka over keeping its exchange rate stable against the US dollar, said Bangladesh Bank officials.

Settlement of letters of credit (LCs), generally known as actual import, stood at \$17.04 billion in the first quarter of this fiscal year, up 47.2 per cent year-on-year.

The central bank has injected foreign exchange into the market on a regular basis since July in order to help banks settle their growing import payments.

Some \$1.6 billion has been so far injected this fiscal year in order to tackle the depreciation of the taka against the US dollar.

The central bank had bought a record \$7.93 billion from local banks last fiscal

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# Traders hostage at Teknaf land port

Point fingers at organised syndicate, port operator, transport owners

MOHAMMAD SUMAN, back from Teknaf

Traders who import goods from Myanmar through Teknaf land port have become hostage to an organised syndicate at the trade gateway on the southeastern border of the country.

Port users say they are being forced to pay extra in every stage of the imports, from hiring workers to loading goods from boats to trucks, and during quarantine tests, submission of bill of entry at customs, and transportation.

But it is the retail consumers who bear the additional prices ultimately as costs are passed on.

Teknaf Land Port is operated by United Group, which has been running it since July 2012 on the "build, operation and transfer" arrangement basis.

Thirty-five clearing and forwarding (C&F) agents and 500 traders use the port, and 130 trucks are used to transport the goods.

One of the main items that is brought in from Myanmar is onion. Traders claim they have to spend an additional Tk 26,000 per truck to carry imported goods through the port.

The organised syndicate charges an extra Tk 13,000 per truck for transporting goods, Tk 6,000 as labour cost, and Tk 7,000 for port evening service charges. As a result, they levy an additional cost of more



MOHAMMAD SUMAN

Queues of trucks are seen at Teknaf land port due to the port operator's deliberate delay in unloading goods as it levies additional charges for the service in the evening. The photo was taken last month.

than Tk 2,000 per tonne of the kitchen product, or Tk 2 per kg.

About 25,000 tonnes of onions were imported from Myanmar in October. The price of onion is Tk 26 per kg but it has to be sold at Tk 35-40 because of the additional cost, said Abdullah Al Faruque, an onion trader.

He said that they were not getting any remedy even after raising the issues with the port operator and the authorities.

At least 10 C&F agents and 12 importers echoed these concerns.

Port users say the transportation cost of a 13-tonne truck from Teknaf to Dhaka is Tk 27,000, but traders

have to pay Tk 40,000. A truck is not allowed to enter the port if it is not listed with the Teknaf Landport Truck Owners Association.

The cost of loading goods on a truck is Tk 8,000. The cost is usually Tk 2,000, but labour suppliers charge an additional Tk 6,000.

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## Japan's SoftBank to buy 20pc stake in bKash

AHSAN HABIB

Japanese multinational conglomerate SoftBank Group Corporation is going to buy a 20 per cent stake in bKash, which could give a further push to the fast-expanding mobile financial service industry in Bangladesh.

bKash, the largest MFS operator in Bangladesh, said investment from SoftBank Vision Fund 2 is to promote financial inclusion by building a digital financial ecosystem.

The Fund will make both primary and secondary investments in the operator to buy the shares on a fully diluted basis.

The investment will provide support to bKash's existing platform, increase digital adoption and help users experience the best technology available in the world, said the MFS operator in a statement.

The investment by the renowned foreign firm was viewed positively by analysts and MFS operators as it shows the potential of the MFS industry, which recorded around Tk 2,100 crore transactions daily in July, up 115 per cent three years ago.

Brac Bank, which holds 51 per cent stake in bKash, said its board approved the execution of the share purchase and subscription agreement amongst bKash and its existing shareholders, including Money in Motion LLC, the International Finance Corporation, the Bill & Melinda

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## Help small businesses fight pandemic blues

Experts urge private sector to come up with CSR funds

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Private sector entities should help micro enterprises recover from the Covid-induced economic downturn through their corporate social responsibility (CSR) projects and by mobilising resources to this end, according to experts.

Corporations also have the ability to provide economic rehabilitation. For example, they could help survivors of human trafficking reintegrate into the economy by offering them a place to work or credit to start a business.

These comments came at a webinar on "Micro Enterprises in the post pandemic economy of Bangladesh: Navigating through the challenges to achieve sustainability", held yesterday. The event was jointly organised by The Daily Star in association with CSR Centre and Ashshash project, an initiative of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation being implemented by Winrock International in Bangladesh.

The four-year Ashshash project which began in 2018 works in partnership with public and private-sector service providers to deliver counseling, legal services and economic empowerment support to men and women who have escaped trafficking.

"We should find the way to bring micro enterprises into true entrepreneurship and equip them to do better in the post-pandemic era," said Ferdaus Ara Begum, chief executive officer of Business Initiative Leading Development (BUILD).

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# HR Lines to buy four new ships from Chinese builder

DWAIPAYAN BARUA, Ctg

Bangladeshi feeder vessel operator HR Lines, a subsidiary of the country's only container vessel owning firm Karnaphuli Group, is now in the final stage of negotiations with a Chinese shipbuilder over building four 3,000 TEU-capacity vessels.

The one year-long negotiation is a part of the HR's steady expansion plan to provide liner shipping services to the country's increasing imports and exports.

With its current fleet of six container vessels, the company is now operating two liner services, one on the Chattogram-Singapore-Port Klang route and another on the Chattogram-Colombo route.

According to The Loadstar, a multimodal news source for the global logistics industry, HR Lines is in advanced negotiations with Fujian Mawei Shipbuilding.

The four vessels will be delivered between late 2023 and mid-2024, reported The Loadstar.

Preferring anonymity, a senior official of Karnaphuli Group informed The Daily Star yesterday that the deal would be signed at the end of this month.

The vessels will be customised to the



Karnaphuli Group country's only container vessel owning firm



Subsidiary HR Lines to buy four 3,000 TEU-capacity ships



Already has six container vessels

### AT A GLANCE





Running on Ctg-Singapore-Port Klang route, Ctg-Colombo route



Chattogram port handled 3,097,236 TEUs of containers in fiscal 2020-21



It was a 3.10 per cent rise from 3,004,142 TEUs in fiscal 2019-20

existing draft attainable

at the Chattogram port so that a maximum quantity of containers can be transported, he said.

As the country's foreign trade is increasing while local businesses are mostly dependent on foreign vessel operators amid spiralling shipping costs, HR Lines is

trying to expand the fleet of Bangladesh flagged vessels, he said.

The Chattogram port handled 30,97,236 TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent unit) of containers, including those containing imports and exports, in the just concluded fiscal 2020-21, up from 30,04,142 TEUs in the previous one, posting a 3.10 per cent growth.

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## Tax booths get lukewarm response

Return submissions still just a handful



PALASH KHAN

Taxpayers submit their income tax returns at booths set up at Tax Zone-4 office of the National Board of Revenue in Bijoy Nagar of the capital recently.

SUKANTA HALDER

Over 10 days past opening, booths receiving tax returns at the National Board of Revenue (NBR) field offices are yet to draw substantial crowds.

Though officials were in attendance, there was no rush of income tax payers. Most booths were empty.

The few taxpayers who did come complained that they were finding it hard to fill up the tax returns as there was no help desk to offer assistance in understanding the forms.

This is the second consecutive time the NBR has decided to open the booths instead of organising its customary annual income tax fair to avoid mass gatherings amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

The booths will stay open for a month until November 30, the deadline for furnishing income tax returns without penalty.

Income tax returns will be received uninterrupted during office hours in 649 circles under 31 tax regions across the country in November. Officials said the number of taxpayers would increase towards the end of the month.

Taxpayers get a scope to register, and re-register if there are mistakes to correct, for a taxpayer identification number (TIN) electronically from the service booths.

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## French agency to give €330m for dev projects

UNB, Paris

A development agency of France will provide €330 million for the implementation of development projects in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh and France have recently signed three agreements in this regard.

Of the €330 million, Agency France Development (AFD), a development bank and cooperation agency, will provide €200 million for budget support due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the rest €130 million for the Dhaka Environmentally Sustainable Water Supply Project, which is already under implementation.

Economic Relations Division (ERD) Secretary Fatima Yasmin said this while briefing the media in Paris on Wednesday.

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## Deal wisely with rising cost of living

MD ABU TALHA SARKER

People in Bangladesh began breathing a sigh of relief in August when coronavirus cases receded as optimism grew that the pandemic level sooner than expected and get their halcyon days back.

But rising inflation, caused by high global commodity prices, supply chain constraints and increasing demand, has emerged as the new challenge.

A pickup in inflation erodes the value of consumer's money, eats up savings, and affects monthly expenses.

The general inflation rose five basis points to 5.59 per cent last month, which was 5.54 per cent in August, according to data from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

The recent hike of diesel and kerosene has handed a further blow as consumer prices would go up. This is already evidenced by the rise in transport fares.

The blow in the form of higher inflation comes when there has been no rise in income, but expenses are rising. So, it has become difficult to strike a balance between income and expenses. As a result, consumers have no choice but to plan their spending smartly.

In a high inflation scenario, one needs to prioritise expenses so that the household budget remains intact.

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