

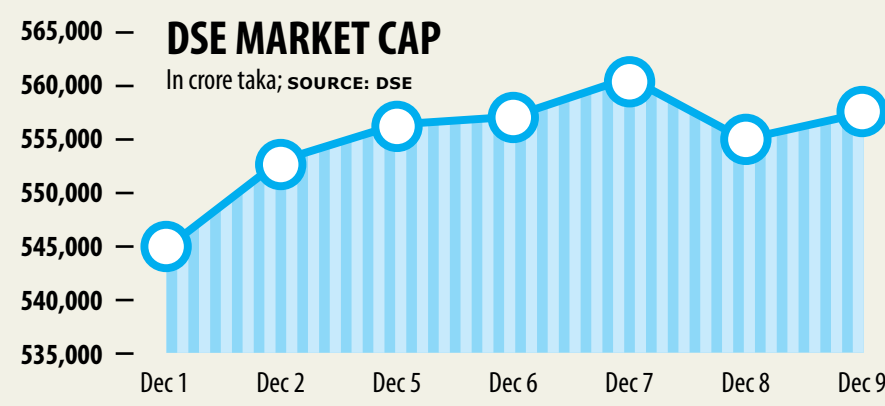
176 businesspeople to get CIP status

STAR BUSINESS REPORT
The government has selected 176 businesspeople to bestow the commercially important person (CIP) title recognising their contributions in merchandise export and vital roles in trade bodies. Of those selected, 138 made their mark in exports while the rest are leaders of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) as per a CIP (export) rules of 2013, according to a December 7 commerce ministry gazette. Some FBCCI directors are nominated directors of prominent chambers, associations and groups. The selection was based on export earnings, employment creation, working conditions, payment to workers and employees, tax payments, innovation in marketing, technology use in product manufacturing and management. The export category CIPs are from sectors dealing in jute, leather and associated goods,

woven and knit garments, specialised and home textile, fabrics, agricultural products, processed and frozen food and pharmaceuticals. Others focus on light engineering goods, handicrafts, ceramic products, plastic goods, computer software and miscellaneous. Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi said the date and venue for presenting the CIP title cards would be fixed very soon. Asked, the minister said exports were rebounding sharply with the recovery of the global supply chain from the severe fallouts of the Covid-19 pandemic. "I am hopeful that the positive trend of export will continue as the demand for locally made apparel items is rising globally," Munshi also said. So far, Omicron, the latest variant of Covid-19, has not proved as dangerous as earlier variants as the reports are saying, he said, adding that therefore it was expected that there would not be any devastating impact on exports from the country in the coming days.

Moreover, the capacity of local exporters has reached such high standards that they are now capable of facing similar disasters as has already been proven in the early days of Covid-19, the minister said. The CIP status will be valid for one year. However, the CIPs can use the cards until the next group is named. On expiry of the validity, those will have to be returned to the commerce ministry, said the gazette. In case of nominated directors of the FBCCI, the CIP cardholders will be able to enjoy the benefits of the status as long as they remain in the trade bodies or until announcement of the next status, whichever is applicable, said the gazette. Every CIP will get to enjoy some government-sponsored benefits such as being able to enter Bangladesh Secretariat using vehicle stickers and get invited to national programmes and receptions accorded to citizens by city corporations and municipalities.

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Stocks bounce back

STAR BUSINESS REPORT
The Bangladesh stock market index returned to the black yesterday after a profit booking session on Wednesday. The DSEX, the benchmark index of Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE), rose 32 points, or 0.48 per cent, to 6,984. On the previous day, it dropped 96 points, or 1.37 per cent, after a five days' continuous rise. Optimistic investors poured money in hopes that the market would go up in the coming days, said a stock broker. The day started with a massive fall but at the end of the day, there was a turnaround. This is mainly due to higher participation of institutional investors, he added.

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Tk 10cr loan for setting up new cinema

STAR BUSINESS REPORT
Bangladesh Bank yesterday said that entrepreneurs would get Tk 10 crore each to set up new cinemas under a refinancing scheme to the tune of Tk 1,000 crore. Meanwhile, existing hall owners will be allowed to get Tk 5 crore each in order to renovate their theatres with the soft loans, according to a central bank notice. It mentioned that the scheme was introduced in order to bring back the glory of Bangladeshi cinema by constructing modern cinemas and renovating the old ones. Earlier in February, the central bank had issued a notice stating that it would provide a maximum of Tk 5 crore to set up new halls or renovating the existing ones. However, it has since raised the ceiling to encourage businesses and entrepreneurs to set up new cinema halls, a Bangladesh Bank official said.



STAR/FILE

Existing hall owners will get Tk 5 crore each to renovate their theatres. distributed in the first phase while the remaining Tk 500 crore will be disbursed in the second phase. Financing banks will take the fund from the central bank at 1.5 per cent interest and distribute the loans at 5 per cent interest in metropolitan areas and 4.5 per cent interest outside the metropolitan areas.

Cinemas having at least 100 seats will be eligible for funds from the scheme, under which owners will get long-term loans at 5 per cent interest. The repayment period will be eight years, including a one-year grace period, with a quarterly equal instalment payback facility. Of the Tk 1,000 crore, Tk 500 crore will be

EMBEZZLEMENT ALLEGATIONS

DSE halts trade of Tamha Securities

STAR BUSINESS REPORT
Dhaka Stock Exchange yesterday halted trade of stock brokerage firm Tamha Securities on receiving allegations of it embezzling investors' money. "For the sake of general investors, Tamha Securities' trading, business operations and activities as a depository participant has been halted," said the premier bourse in a circular. However, investors are allowed to transfer shares by opening a linked account with any other stock brokerage firm, it said. The DSE also sought observations and allegations against Tamha Securities. This is the fourth such firm facing such allegations. Previously Dawn Securities, Crest Securities and Banco Securities were accused of engaging in the malpractice. "We found a huge number of allegations against the brokerage firm of embezzling investors' funds, so we decided to halt its trading," said a top DSE official, preferring anonymity. The DSE is now working to compile all allegations, he said. "Such embezzlement have an effect on investors' confidence so we are strict on it," he added. Md Harunur Rashid, managing director of Tamha Securities, did not receive The Daily Star's phone calls for comment.

Italy hits Amazon with €1.1b antitrust fine

AFP, Rome
Italian regulators hit Amazon with a 1.1-billion-euro (\$1.3-billion) antitrust fine Thursday for allegedly abusing its dominance in the market, the latest action against US Big Tech in the EU. US technology giants have been in the firing line in the European Union over their business practices. In the latest salvo, Italy's competition watchdog said Amazon abused its dominant position by promoting its own logistics service on its Italian platform to the detriment of third-party sellers who did not use it. "The abusive strategy adopted by Amazon is particularly serious, since it is likely to discourage, if not eliminate competition in the relevant markets," read the 250-page decision. The move comes two weeks after the same authority imposed a 68.7-million-euro fine on Amazon for infringing EU laws through restrictions that penalised sellers of Apple and Beats products. In the same action, Apple was ordered to pay 134.5 million euros. As Europe powers ahead with antitrust litigation, US regulators are closely watching its approach to big tech firms, after Washington pledged to intensify scrutiny of the technology industry.

Amazon did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The Italian watchdog said Thursday that third-party sellers who do not use Amazon's logistics service are excluded from "a set of advantages essential for obtaining visibility and better sales prospects." Those included better access to Amazon's "most loyal and high-end customers" who use Amazon Prime, the e-commerce giant's loyalty program. Moreover, a tough performance measurement system is reserved for sellers who do not use Amazon's logistics system, which can lead, if failed, to suspension of the seller's account. "In doing so, Amazon has harmed competing e-commerce logistics providers by preventing them from presenting themselves to online sellers as service providers of comparable quality to Amazon's logistics," said the watchdog, adding that such conduct had "increased the gap between Amazon's power and that of its competitors." In its decision, the authority said it had imposed measures on Amazon subject to review by a monitor. The company must grant sales privileges and visibility to all third-party sellers who meet fair and non-discriminatory standards for fulfilment, and must decide and publish such standards, it said.

GLOBAL BUSINESS

Apple inches closer to \$3t market cap

REUTERS
Apple Inc is within striking distance of a \$3 trillion market capitalization, a milestone that would make it as big as the world's fifth largest economy after Germany, just over a year after breaching the \$2 trillion mark. Shares of Apple were up 1.6 per cent at \$174. They need to trade at \$182.85 to hit the mark and cap a strong rally that has been powered by



Chinese girls walk inside an Apple showroom in Shanghai, where Apple iPhone 8 and 8 Plus sold more than other iPhones.

investors betting on its brand and viewing it as a comparative safe haven. The stock has jumped about 30 per cent this year on top of an 80 per cent surge in 2020. In comparison, the S&P 500 has risen 25 per cent for the period. Its peers in the trillion-dollar club - Microsoft, Amazon, Alphabet and Tesla - have all gained between 10 per cent and 70 per cent. "Apple does seem to be more immune to the ebb and flow of economic forces just because of this really strong brand. It's new product pipeline is pretty strong too," Susannah Streeter, senior investment and markets analyst at Hargreaves Lansdown said. "There is an expectation that Apple is still going to come for you even though there have been some weaknesses in getting hold of the handsets and making sure that they're available for the public." Apple hit the \$1 trillion in market capitalization in 2018 and took two years to double that valuation. The stock has already breached Wall Street's median price target by \$4, with a majority of analysts covering the stock rating it "buy" or higher. Apple briefly lost its title as the most valuable company to Microsoft Corp earlier this year after CEO Tim Cook's comments on supply chain woes and the struggle to procure semiconductors and components to make smartphones and laptops. Microsoft is about \$500 billion short of reaching \$3 trillion in market capitalization.

China's consumer inflation rises in Nov

AFP, Beijing
Consumer inflation in China picked up to its highest level in over a year in November, official data showed Thursday, bolstered by an uptick in pork prices as seasonal demand spiked.

The consumer price index (CPI), a key gauge of retail inflation, came in at 2.3 per cent on-year according to the National Bureau of Statistics - slightly below expectations but still the highest since August 2020. Rising food prices were a key factor, with the cost of pork - a staple meat in the world's second-biggest economy - hit by "growth in seasonal consumption demand and a short-term tight supply of fat pigs," NBS senior statistician Dong Lijuan said. On a monthly basis, pork prices rose 12.2 per cent, Dong added. Disruptions to vegetable harvests due to bad weather added to food inflation, said Capital Economics' senior China economist Julian Evans-Pritchard. In an earlier report, he noted that people appear to have started stocking up on pork for the winter, adding that "there are signs that the pork supply is no longer improving too."

EU wants new trade powers to fight foreign bad actors

AFP, Brussels
The European Commission on Wednesday launched a bid to equip Brussels with new powers to swiftly retaliate against efforts by foreign governments to undermine the European economy and businesses. The EU executive has not been specific about who would be targeted with the new powers to impose regulatory controls on foreign goods and to deny government contracts and research grants to foreign firms. The package is to be known as an "anti-coercion" tool. The plan's main backers pushed for the new weapon in the wake of Donald Trump's presidency, when EU officials felt unfairly targeted by the whims of the US leader, especially on trade. Potential dirty tricks by China and Russia are also thought to be on the minds

of the tool's backers, which was demanded by the European Parliament, where the desire for a vigorous EU foreign policy is strong. It is also ties in with France's ambition for Europe to exercise "strategic autonomy" against the global supremacy of the US and China, which is seen as increasingly destabilising and unpredictable. "With this proposal we are sending a clear message that the EU will stand firm in defending its interests," EU executive vice president Valdis Dombrovskis said. "The main aim of the anti-coercion tool is to act as a deterrent. But we now also have more tools at our disposal when pushed to act," he said. Under current law, decision-making on European foreign policy requires unanimity among the 27 member states, making a robust response during a geo-political crisis very difficult. The new powers could arguably be used in situations similar to when Lithuania complained last week that its exports had been banned by China, because Vilnius allowed a Taiwanese diplomatic representation to be opened on its soil. The EU cautioned however that they would not be available to respond to trade disputes, which can be handled at the World Trade Organization, or in any matters governed by EU trade deals, such as with Britain. As proposed, the EU's executive in Brussels would have a list of options to answer economic intimidation by foreign governments, with member states only given the ability to stop the riposte if a qualified majority of countries decided to do it. These could include freezing access to public contracts, holding up health and safety authorisations on certain products or bans from EU-funded research projects. "The instrument is there to fend off any third country from pressuring the EU or its member states in a way that would seek to interfere in our domestic affairs in violation of customary international law," an EU official said. The commission's plan now goes to parliament and to the EU's member states, where some governments already have big questions about the need for handing such unprecedented powers to Brussels. They argue that anything that goes outside the conflict-resolution practices at the World Trade Organization would be unwise. In a government paper, the Swedish government doubted "the problem is large enough to justify the proposal."