

STOCKS		COMMODITIES		ASIAN MARKETS				CURRENCIES			
As of Wednesday								As of Wednesday			
DSEX	CSCX	Gold	Oil	MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI	USD	EUR	GBP	CNY
▲ 0.44%	▲ 0.47%	\$1,783.40	\$74.80	▲ 0.20%	▲ 2.13%	▲ 0.45%	▲ 0.75%	BUY TK 84.85	94.53	111.84	13.09
6,868.17	12,064.55	(per ounce)	(per barrel)	57,901.14	29,066.32	3,128.80	3,675.02	SELL TK 85.85	98.33	115.64	13.76

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Star BUSINESS

DHAKA FRIDAY DECEMBER 17, 2021, POUISH 2, 1428 BS • starbusiness@thedailystar.net

GARMENT EXPORT (FY21)

\$31.46b

Knitwear \$16.96b

Woven \$14.50b

SUIT EXPORTS: BRIGHTER DAYS AHEAD

- Bangladesh exporting suits for a decade
- Exports nearly \$500m worth of suits a year
- Europe, US, Japan major export destinations
- Fabrics are imported from China and South Korea
- Bangladesh has 13 export oriented suit factories
- Suit exports rebounding from Covid fallout
- Global suit market size more than \$160b

Start giving refunds to e-commerce clients

BB asks payment gateways

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh Bank has asked electronic payment gateways to start paying back money to the customers who did not get delivery of products from the rogue e-commerce platforms despite making advance payments.

The central bank sent letters to six payment gateways -- Nagad, Software Shop, Surjomukhi Ltd, Foster Corporation Ltd, bKash and Southeast Bank -- on Wednesday that suggested them to refund the customers of those digital commerce platforms, against which there are no cases under trial in the court.

Under the circumstances, a good number of customers are likely to have to wait for a longer period of time as there are cases in the courts against officials of certain e-commerce platforms, namely Evaly, Dhamaka shopping, e-orange, Sirajganj shop and Qoom.

As such, the refund of a large chunk of the advance payments of Tk 512 crore stuck at the payment gateways are likely to remain stuck for more days to come.

The Bangladesh Bank move comes several days after the commerce ministry recommended refunding the advance

payments made by customers to the e-commerce firms.

In its directive, the central bank also asked payment gateways to properly examine information of buyers before giving the refunds.

"We have received the letter from the regulator and have started working duly considering customers as the top priority," said Muhammad Zahidul Islam, head of communication at Nagad.

He said Nagad also returned a good amount of customers' money in recent times even before the directive.

He said as there are legal issues related to some e-commerce platforms, Nagad will begin to refund the customers after sorting out the number of eligible customers through proper scrutiny.

Haider Dalim, a spokesperson of bKash, said the mobile financial service provider would take steps to refund the money as per the Bangladesh Bank guideline.

The government formed a 15-member panel in October this year in order to take steps to recover money from the controversial e-commerce companies after complaints flooded in against the online shops for non-delivery of products despite receiving advance payments.



Bangladesh makes a name in suit export

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

A decade ago, the number of export-oriented suit-making factories in Bangladesh was one or two, and China and Vietnam were the main sourcing destinations for brands and retailers globally.

In fact, Bangladesh was lagging in the production of value-added garment items due to the dearth of technologies and skilled workforce.

Today, Bangladesh has emerged as a major supplier for high-value suits for many reputed retailers and brands in Europe and the US, propelled by the investment in the segment and adoption of advanced technologies to grab a pie of the global market valued more than \$160 billion.

The number of export-oriented suit-making factories has gone up to 13, which are fetching nearly \$500 million annually.

Humayun Rashid, chairman of Energypac Fashions Ltd, set up his factory in Gazipur in 2007 with a goal to produce value-added garment attires. Currently, he exports 5.9 million pieces of suits every year, earning

more than \$55 million.

What is more, the entrepreneur is going to expand manufacturing capacity from February as retailers and brands are placing higher orders with the factory.

After the planned expansion, 2,500 additional pieces of suits would be added to the



current daily production capacity of 16,000.

The high-range value-added suit produced at Rashid's factory commands a price of \$300 and above.

The export price of a mid-range suit is between \$150 and \$300, while a low range suit is priced between \$99 and \$150 per piece,

according to Rashid, whose clients include many reputed European and US retailers and brands.

The country manager of a major clothing retailer of the UK says 10 years ago the British brand was desperately looking for suit-making factories in Bangladesh as demand was high.

"Today, Bangladesh has turned into the largest suit sourcing destination for my company," said the executive, giving credits to local manufacturers, who have invested heavily and installed modern technologies.

The UK retailer now purchases nearly \$20 million worth of suits and trousers from Bangladesh every year, out of its total sourcing value of more than \$1.2 billion from the country.

"The suit segment is offering a lot of prospects for future growth," said Shahidullah Azim, acting president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

"We export more than Vietnam does in terms of volume. But the value is lower as we are confined to five basic garment items."

READ MORE ON B3

Rules toughen for new ADP schemes

REJAUJ KARIM BYRON and JAGARAN CHAKMA

The finance ministry has warned relevant government bodies that new projects will not be included in the revised annual development programme (RADP) for the current fiscal year if their details are not sent to the Planning Commission by January 2022.

The finance ministry issued a circular in this regard on Wednesday in a bid to ensure optimum use of the country's limited resources through budget allocation for the necessary and priority projects.

Every year, at least 1,400 to 1,500 projects are included in the ADP. Last year though, a whopping 1,886 projects were placed in the development programme even though the original number of projects was around 1,600.

Many of these projects listed with the ADP require just Tk 1 lakh to Tk 2 lakh allocations. However, the implementation of these types of projects is usually held up for years and the project cost increases as a result.

With this backdrop, the finance ministry decided not to include any new projects under the RADP this year without prior scrutiny.

The ministry circular said the list of projects would have to be limited while less important initiatives will be stuck from the RADP.

It went on to say that small-scale projects that have similar objectives would have to be included under an umbrella project.

READ MORE ON B3

Wheat flour prices rising on higher import costs

SOHEL PARVEZ

Flour prices in Bangladesh have continued to rise, driven by increasing prices of wheat in the global market and falling imports, said industry operators yesterday.

Consumers had to pay Tk 34 to buy one kilogramme of flour in November in Dhaka, which was 19 per cent higher from Tk 28.69 a year ago, data from the Food and Agriculture Organisation showed.

Prices of flour have been rising since

READ MORE ON B3

Four fast-track projects on course

Padma bridge expected to open on time

REJAUJ KARIM BYRON and DWAIPIYAN BARUA

With the much-talked about Padma bridge project nearing completion as only 11 per cent of the construction work remains, the authorities concerned hope to complete the project within the deadline by June next year.

The Padma Multipurpose Bridge project achieved 89 per cent physical progress while an estimated 87.67 per cent of the project fund had been spent as of November, according to a report by the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED) on the progress of eight fast-track projects.

Shafiqul Islam, project director for Padma bridge, told The Daily Star that the rest of the physical works include installation of a gas pipe line, electrical works, river training and others.

When asked about the carpeting of the associated approach road, Islam said a little bit of carpeting has been done so far while the rest would be done later.

However, Islam went on to say that there is no possibility to complete the project ahead of the deadline.

Construction of the bridge started in November 2014 to connect the country's south-western region with the capital via road and rail.

Once in service, the 6.15 kilometre-long bridge will connect Dhaka with 21 south-western districts. It is expected to boost the country's gross domestic product by 1.2 per cent.

Counting this project, three other fast-track

projects, such as the Rampal super thermal power project, Payra deep-sea port and the Chattogram-Cox's Bazar rail link are among those making good physical progress ranging from 65 per cent to 73 per cent while the other four have witnessed 50 per cent or below, according to the IMED report.

The Dhaka metro rail project, officially known as Dhaka Mass Rapid Transit Development Project Line 6, has recorded physical progress of 50 per cent having spent 75.63 per cent of its allotted fund, the report said.

The country's first ever metro rail is set to begin commercial operations in the Uttara-Agargaon section on December 16 -- Victory Day -- next year.

The metro rail authorities will start partial operation of the new mode of public transport with 10 sets of trains, an official said.

Formally known as the Mass Rapid Transit Line 6, the elevated rail line is being constructed between Uttara Sector-3 and Motijheel at a cost of around Tk 22,000 crore.

Once completed, it will be able to transport 60,000 people per hour and would reduce travel time from Uttara to Motijheel from about two hours to just 40 minutes.

Around 73.06 per cent of the construction of the Maitree Super Thermal Power Project (2X660 MW) at Rampal has been completed as of November with 71.95 per cent of project fund, estimated at Tk 16,000 crore, having been spent.

READ MORE ON B3

TOP FIVE FAST-TRACK PROJECTS

Total project cost and implementation rate
As of Nov 2021; SOURCE: IMED

Padma bridge Tk 30,193cr Implemented 89%	Padma bridge railway link Tk 39,246cr Implemented 48%
Dhaka metro rail Tk 21,985cr Implemented 50%	Rooppur nuclear power plant Tk 113,093cr Implemented 42%
Matarbari coal-fired power project Tk 35,984cr Implemented 50.7%	

Bank Asia celebrates Bangladesh's golden jubilee

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Bank Asia celebrated the Golden Jubilee of Bangladesh in a lively event yesterday.

The programme started with the hoisting of the national flag accompanied by the national anthem at the bank's corporate office in Karwan Bazar, Dhaka, according to a press release.

Freedom fighters Saad Zaglul Abbas, Md Shohrab and Sheikh Md Abdur Rashid graced the programme as honoured guests.

Rume A Hossain, chairman of the bank's board executive committee, Tania Nusrat Zaman, director, Md Arfan Ali, president and managing director, were present at the programme.

Ashraf Haq Chowdhury, director of the bank, joined the event virtually.

One-minute silence was observed in honour of the martyrs of the Liberation War.

Freedom fighters shared their memories of the war while patriotic songs, recitation of poems and dance were performed by the Bank Asia Cultural Team.

Deputy managing directors, department heads along with other officials were also present.



BANK ASIA

Top officials of Bank Asia Ltd and invited guests cut a cake to celebrate the golden jubilee of Bangladesh at the bank's Karwan Bazar corporate office in Dhaka yesterday.



Shahadat new president of ICAB

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Md Shahadat Hossain, board director of Rajshahi Wasa and Agrani Bank Ltd, has been elected president of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Bangladesh (ICAB) for 2022.

The new office bearers of the ICAB were elected by the members of the council (new councilors) at the council meeting held on Wednesday, according to a statement.

NKA Mobin, managing director of Emerging Credit Rating Ltd, Sidharta Barua, proprietor of MA Mallik & Company Ltd, and Fouzia Haque, director of Sadharan Bima Corporation, were elected vice-presidents.

Shortages, inflation affect US retail sales

REUTERS, Washington

US retail sales increased less than expected in November, likely payback after surging in the prior month as Americans started their holiday shopping early to avoid empty shelves.

A rotation in spending from goods back to services also appears to have held back retail sales last month, with the report from the Commerce Department on Wednesday showing a sharp drop in receipts at electronics and appliance stores.

Online retail sales were unchanged. Higher food and gasoline prices are probably curtailing discretionary spending.

The modest retail sales gain did not change views that the economy was regaining steam after a slowdown in the third quarter that was triggered by the Covid-19 Delta variant and rampant shortages.

In a nod to soaring inflation, the Federal Reserve on Wednesday said it would end its pandemic-era bond purchases in March, paving the way for three quarter-percentage-point interest rate increases by the end of 2022.

"Consumers are still doing their best to keep the economy's sails full and the recovery on track," said Christopher Rupkey, chief economist at FWDBONDS in New York.

Retail sales rose 0.3 per cent last month after surging 1.8 per cent in October.

Sales have now risen for four straight months.

They increased 18.2 per cent year-on-year in November.

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast retail sales rising 0.8 per cent.

Estimates ranged from as low as being unchanged to as high as a 1.5 per cent increase.

Several of the top US retailers reported in mid-November that they had noticed an earlier start to holiday shopping.

Retail sales could remain moderate in December, though higher savings and rising wages amid a tight labor market are supportive of spending.

Trillions of dollars in Covid-19 pandemic relief from governments across the globe fueled demand for goods, straining supply chains. The resulting shortages, ranging from motor vehicles to furniture and electronics, have raised goods prices.

Consumer prices increased a solid 0.8 per cent in November, with the year-on-year gain of 6.8 per cent the largest since June 1982. Inflation is likely to remain high for a while.

A separate report from the Labor Department on Wednesday showed import prices increased 0.7 per cent in November.

"Consumers have been bombarded with messages about the impact of supply shortages on the availability of holiday gifts," said David Berson, chief economist at Nationwide in Columbus, Ohio.

Biden's \$1.75t social spending bill faces critical year-end test

REUTERS, Washington

Having averted a government shutdown and potential default this month, Democrats in the US Congress move on to the even harder task of passing President Joe Biden's \$1.75 trillion domestic investment bill.

After months of intraparty dicker, moderate Democratic Senator Joe Manchin was withholding support for the sweeping bill to expand social

programs and invest in technology to battle climate change. His stance complicates Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer's goal of approving it before Christmas, 10 days away.

"It's going to be close," Biden said on Wednesday when asked if he hoped to see the legislation completed by the end of the year.

Manchin's office had no comment when asked if the senator was expected to talk to the president on Wednesday.

"The president's been speaking

with Senator Manchin and I look forward to hearing about further progress," Schumer said on Tuesday, sticking to his timetable but not guaranteeing success.

Schumer, Manchin and Senator John Tester, also a centrist, were spotted meeting in the Capitol on Wednesday. With no votes to spare in passing Biden's "Build Back Better" initiative amid solid Republican opposition, Schumer faces his biggest challenge since becoming majority leader in January. He is

feeling the heat from all sides.

His top lieutenant, Senator Dick Durbin, has been clamoring for a showdown that would force Manchin to either fall into line and vote for the BBB bill or defy Biden in a way that could severely damage his presidency and Manchin's own party. Asked whether Schumer should schedule votes on the bill without nailing down victory, Durbin said: "It's always a risk," adding: "Many people will sit on the fence as long as possible."



REUTERS/FIL

People shop for clothes at a Target retail chain in Westbury, New York on May 20.

EU lawmakers back rules to curb Big Tech

AFP, Strasbourg

The European Parliament on Wednesday approved its proposal for major EU legislation to impose unprecedented restrictions on how tech giants do business.

Lawmakers overwhelmingly voted in favour of their version of the Digital Markets Act, aimed at slapping far-reaching rules on behemoths like Meta/Facebook, Alphabet/Google, Amazon, Apple and Microsoft.

The landmark legislation should give the EU unprecedented powers to act quickly against these tech "gatekeepers" and impose a strict list of Do's and Don'ts on their most dominant platforms.

The final law, along with the companion Digital Services Act regulating online content, will be thrashed out with EU member states in the coming months in the hope of completing negotiations on a final

law next year.

A key parliamentary committee approved its proposal for the Digital Service Act on Tuesday and it is set to be voted on by all lawmakers in January.

Big tech companies and other interests are lobbying furiously to influence the final outcome for the laws, and member states will weigh in until the end with their own national priorities.

The negotiations with MEPs will be presided by France, which has made delivering the new rules into law a major priority of its six-month EU presidency that begins on January 1.

In detail, the parliament's version strengthened the proposals put forward by the EU's executive and agreed by member states, including pushing for interoperability between different messaging services.

It also looks to beef up the powers

of national competition authorities, with key member states Germany and France eager to not leave all the power to the European Commission in Brussels.

The European Consumer Organisation said the proposal would "give consumers a greater share of the benefits of digital services" and called on member states to stick to the changes made by lawmakers.

"For example, the Parliament's amendments would give consumers more choice over which social networks and instant messaging services they use and prevent tech giants from using 'dark patterns' to distort consumers' choices," it said in a statement.

"It is crucial the EU sets the standard to the rest of world by making sure the digital economy works to the benefit of consumers rather than to the exclusive benefit of the tech giants," it said.

Tussle over Fazli mango's origin

FROM PAGE B4

DPDT officials say the GI of products is verified and published in the journal as per rules.

A product is recognised as a GI item two months after the publication in the journal if there is no objection, said Md Abdus Sattar, registrar of the DPDT.

Nihar Ranjan Barman, examiner (patent) of the DPDT, said they would send a letter to the Chapainawabganj Krishi Association seeking arguments after getting feedbacks from the Rajshahi Fruit Research Centre.

"After getting the arguments of the Chapainawabganj Krishi Association, we will give the final decision on the right of Fazli mango," he said.

According to the World Intellectual Property Organisation, GI is a name or sign used on some particular products to certify that they possess certain qualities enabled by the environment, weather and culture of a country.

This, in effect, facilitates branding highlighting traditions and reputation in the global market and creates a separate demand for the product. As a result, the path to commercial production, marketing rights and legal protection is secured.

GI-tagged products fetch higher

prices compared to similar products in other countries.

Black tiger shrimp to get GI recognition soon

Bangladesh's black tiger shrimp is set to receive the GI certificate as none, both at home and abroad, has raised any objection.

Black tiger shrimps are grown in the southern coastal belts in the brackish water.

In May 2019, the Department of Fisheries applied for the GI recognition to promote black tiger shrimp as a specialised product of Bangladesh in the world market. The DPDT issued a gazette and published it in two international journals on October 6, 2021.

None had objected before the deadline had expired on December 6. A DPDT official said the certificate is expected to be issued this month.

Shaikh Sohel Pervez, secretary of the Bangladesh Frozen Foods Exporters Association, said the government should facilitate marginal farmers in various ways to increase shrimp production.

"After getting the GI certification, you have to hold it. The sales must grow. We should see how we can expand the existing market," he

added.

According to GI Journal of the DPDT, Bangladesh is one of the top 10 producers of black tiger shrimps.

The country began cultivating the coveted food item in 1950. The farming expanded to 52,000 hectares in 1983-84, and the annual production reached 2,220 tonnes during that period.

Currently, Bangladesh is farming the shrimp commercially in more than two lakh hectares of land, mostly in coastal regions. The country produced 68,306 tonnes of black tiger shrimps in the fiscal year of 2016-17.

Black tiger shrimp is one of the export items of Bangladesh, accounting for nearly 60-70 per cent of the total fish shipment.

Nine products GI-certified
The DPDT certified Jamdani sari as Bangladesh's first GI product in 2016, and the second such product was Hilsa that was awarded in 2017. Chapainawabganj's Khirsapati mango received the certification a year later.

In March this year, six more products obtained GI certifications: Dhakai muslin, Rajshahi Silk, Rangpur's Shotoronji, Bijoypur's Sadamati, Dinajpur's Kataribhog, and Bangladesh's Kalijira paddy.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Office of the Director

Sylhet M.A.G Osmani Medical College Hospital, Sylhet

Invitation for Tender

Memo No. SOMCH/TS/2021/1429

Date: 14/12/2021

Sealed tenders are hereby invited from bonafide experienced manufacturer/agent/importer/supplier to supply Medical Equipments as per PPR-2008 terms and conditions are as follows:

1.	Ministry/Division	Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
2.	Agency	Sylhet M.A.G Osmani Medical College Hospital, Sylhet.
3.	Procuring entity name	Director, Sylhet M.A.G Osmani Medical College Hospital, Sylhet.
4.	Procuring entity code	4112315
5.	Procuring entity district	Sylhet.
6.	Invitation for	Medical Equipment.
7.	Tender Ref. No.	SOMCH/TS/2021/1429/15 Date: 14/12/2021

KEY INFORMATION

8.	Procurement method	Open Tender Method (OTM).
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FUNDING INFORMATION

09.	Budget and source of funds	GOB.
10.	Development partners	N/A.

PARTICULAR INFORMATION

11.	Project/program code	N/A.
12.	Project/program name	Sylhet M.A.G Osmani Medical College Hospital, Sylhet.
13.	Tender name	Procurement of Medical Equipment.
14.	Tender publication date	14/12/2021
15.	Tender last selling date	19/01/2022 up to 12.00 Noon.
16.	Tender closing date and time	20/01/2022 at 12.00 Noon.
17.	Tender opening date and time	20/01/2022 at 12.30pm.

Name and address of the offices

a) Selling tender schedule	Office of the Director, Sylhet M.A.G Osmani Medical College Hospital, Sylhet.
b) Receiving tenders schedule	(1) Office of the Director, Sylhet M.A.G Osmani Medical College Hospital, Sylhet. (2) Deputy Commissioner, Sylhet and (3) Superintendent of Police, Sylhet.
c) Opening tender schedule	Office of the Director, Sylhet M.A.G Osmani Medical College Hospital, Sylhet.

19. Place/date/time of pre-tender meeting

19.	Place/date/time of pre-tender meeting	No pre-bid meeting.
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INFORMATION FOR TENDERER

20.	Brief description of goods	Medical Equipment (Anesthesia Machine, Ventilator, O.T Table, O.T Light, syringe pump, infusion pump, Diathermy machine etc.).
21.	Brief description of related services	Not applicable.
22.	Procedure of payment of tender schedule	Through Treasury Chalan, Taka, 3,000/- (three thousand) to be paid at Bangladesh Bank/Sonali Bank against Code No. (1) (2)(7)(1)(1) (0) (0) (0) (2)(3)(6)(6). Tender schedule should be collected from SOMCH office on submitting the original challan.
23.	Tender security amounts	Taka 15,00,000.00 (fifteen lac only) Bank Draft or Pay Order in favor of Director, Sylhet M.A.G Osmani Medical College Hospital, Sylhet.

PROCURING ENTITY DETAILS

24.	Name of official inviting tenders	Director, Sylhet M.A.G Osmani Medical College Hospital, Sylhet.
25.	Designation of official inviting tenders	Director, Sylhet M.A.G Osmani Medical College Hospital, Sylhet.
26.	Address of official inviting tenders	Office of the Director, Sylhet M.A.G Osmani Medical College Hospital, Sylhet.
27.	Contact details of official inviting tenders	Office of the Director, Sylhet M.A.G Osmani Medical College Hospital, Sylhet.

(Signature)

Brig. Gen Brayan Bankim Halder
Director
Sylhet M.A.G Osmani Medical College Hospital, Sylhet
Email: magomch@hospi.dghs.gov.bd

GD-2324

ISPAB gets new office bearers

STAR BUSINESS DESK

The Internet Service Providers Association of Bangladesh (ISPAB) recently elected new office bearers for a two-year term (2021-2023).

Emdadul Hoque Molla, director of Optimax Communication Ltd, Saiful Islam Siddique, managing director of ICC Communication Ltd, and Md Anwarul Azim, managing director of Chattogram Telecom Services Ltd, were elected as president, senior vice-president, and vice-president respectively.

A total of 13 directors have been elected with nine of them having been elected from the general members' category and four from the associate members' category.

The newly elected members of ISPAB's executive committee are: Nazmul Karim Bhuiyan of KS Network Ltd, Md Abdul Kaiyum Rashed of Triangle Services Ltd, Mohammad Anwar Hossain of Sun Online, Md Assaduzzaman of Antorongo.com, Md Jakir Hossain of Unified Core Ltd, Mahbub Alam of Circle Network, Sakif Ahmed, director of InfoLink Ltd, AM Kamal Uddin Ahmed Salem of BCL Online Service, Fuad Muhammad Shorfuiddin of Fisa Communication, and Md Nasir Uddin of Speed Tech Online.

The election commission, led by Chairman Mohammad Nazrul Islam Babu, a member of parliament from the Narayanganj-2 constituency, was conducted by Abdullah H Kafee, managing director of JAN Associates Ltd, and Birendra Nath Adhikary, director of Excel Technologies Ltd.

Eurozone growth slows after new Covid wave

AFP, Brussels

Economic growth in the eurozone slowed to a nine-month low in December as a fresh wave of the coronavirus rattled businesses, especially in Germany, a closely watched survey said Thursday.

The purchasing managers' index (PMI) from IHS Markit, which measures business activity, slipped to 53.4 in December, after posting 55.4 points in November and hitting a high 59 points in August. A figure above 50 indicates growth.

Despite the headwinds, the outlook for the future remained strong, with survey respondents confident that pandemic related problems, especially on supply chains, would retreat next year.

But Chris Williamson, Chief Business Economist at IHS Markit, warned that the new Omicron variant posed "further downside risks to the growth outlook as we head into 2022". Any revived disruption to supply



AFP
ECB President Christine Lagarde addresses a press conference following a meeting of the governing council of the ECB in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany yesterday.

chains "could result in price pressures spiking higher again", he said in a statement.

The inflationary push seen across

the global economy has largely been downplayed as a short-term phenomenon by economists and central bankers.

ECB begins step-by-step stimulus exit

AFP, Frankfurt

The European Central Bank on Thursday said it would wind down pandemic-era bond buys as the eurozone comes under pressure from soaring inflation, even as concerns grow about the fast-spreading Omicron variant of the coronavirus.

The eurozone has "become better at coping with the pandemic waves", said ECB President Christine Lagarde, adding that progress in the economic recovery "permits a step-by-step reduction in the pace of our asset purchases over the coming quarters."

Lagarde admitted however that Omicron and the potential emergence of other variants created "extra uncertainty", and said the bank was ready to react to any "negative shocks".

The ECB's chosen course sets it apart from the US Federal Reserve, which is speeding up its stimulus exit and has flagged a number of rate hikes over the coming years to tame inflation.

In Frankfurt, the ECB confirmed the end of its 1.85-trillion-euro (\$2.1 trillion) pandemic-era bond purchasing programme (PEPP) in March 2022, and said it would start slowing the pace of purchases in the first quarter.

The pandemic emergency bond-buying programme, currently hovering around 70 billion euros worth of assets every month, is the ECB's main crisis-fighting tool, aimed at keeping borrowing costs low to stoke economic growth.

To avoid an abrupt drop in its bond-buying in March, the ECB will ramp up its pre-crisis asset purchase programme (APP) to soften the transition. This would be increased in the second quarter to 40 billion euros, and reduced to 30 billion in the third quarter, the ECB said.

Wheat flour prices rising on higher import costs

FROM PAGE B1

July and the upward trend continued until November, discouraging price-sensitive consumers.

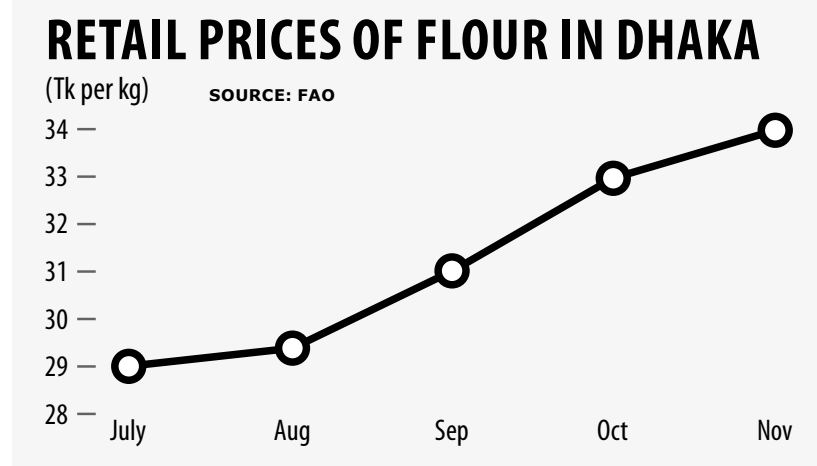
"Demand for flour has reduced as prices are high. Our capital requirement has increased, while it has become difficult to make a profit because of the higher prices," said Sk Wazed Ali, president of the Auto Flour Mill Business Cooperative Society.

The food ministry in its daily food situation report said wheat price was \$322.8-\$333 per tonne on December 10. And the possible prices of imported wheat would be Tk 33.69-Tk 33.86 per kg.

A year ago, the prices of the grain, the second most-consumed items in Bangladesh, were \$238.6-\$257 per tonne, food ministry data showed.

Against the backdrop of the increasing cost, businesses have become cautious in importing the grain. In Bangladesh, most of the local demand is met through imports for inadequate domestic production.

Bangladesh is the fifth-largest wheat importer after Egypt, Indonesia, Algeria, and Brazil. "There is concerns among businesses that it would be tough to sell the grain because of



such a high import cost," said Anup Kumar Saha, chief operating officer of Nabil Group, one of the biggest wheat importers.

Wheat imports declined 23 per cent year-on-year to 18 lakh tonnes between July 1 and December 14 from 22 lakh tonnes a year ago, owing to a massive drop in private imports, according to data from the food ministry.

Globally, production has declined for unfavourable weather in major producing countries. On the one

hand, global prices soared for reduced production. On the other hand, the depreciation of the taka caused a spike in import costs, said Abul Bashar Chowdhury, chairman of BSM Group, a Chattogram-based major commodity importer.

"All are importing in small quantity because of their worries about potential losses," said Biswajit Saha, director for corporate and regulatory affairs of City Group, one of the largest commodity importers and processors in the country.

Qantas turns to Airbus for domestic fleet

AFP, Sydney

Australian flag carrier Qantas on Thursday announced a deal to buy 40 Airbus aircraft, to renew its domestic fleet.

The purchase, which is expected to be finalised at the end of the next financial year, is for 20 long-range A321XLRs and 20 A220s.

"Financial details of the deal are commercial in confidence but represent a material discount from list prices," Qantas said in unveiling "the largest aircraft order in Australian aviation history".

The order is a blow to US planemaker Boeing, which currently supplies much of Qantas' domestic fleet with its 737-800 and B717 models.

The deal also comes as France and Australia move on from a recent diplomatic spat engendered by the collapse of a multibillion-dollar submarine deal.

Paris was furious after Australia ditched the deal in September, saying it had been given no warning that Canberra was negotiating a new defence pact with the US and Britain, which left France rethinking its alliances in the Indo-Pacific. Qantas has been battered by the Covid-19 crisis, which has seen Australia's borders closed for much of the last two years.

The company on Thursday also announced it was about US\$4 billion in debt, but expected domestic capacity to return to pre-Covid levels by March 2022.

The deal includes an agreement in principle for a further 90 orders over the next ten years.

US industrial production hits pandemic high

AFP, Washington

US industrial production climbed in November to its highest level since the Covid-19 pandemic began, the Federal Reserve said Thursday.

The 0.5 per cent overall gain in the month was less than expected but brought the index to its highest level since September 2019, and 5.3 per cent above its level in November 2020, according to the report.

Mining and manufacturing each posted 0.7 per cent gains, while utilities fell 0.8 per cent, the central bank data said.

There was solid growth in big-ticket manufactured goods production last month, and motor vehicles and parts made up a large part of that, according to the report, indicating the sector is working its way through the semiconductor shortage that hobbled production in recent months.

However, auto and parts production was 5.4 per cent below where it was a year ago.

Ian Shepherdson of Pantheon Macroeconomics said the data boded well for American manufacturers.

Airlines place their bets, looking past pandemic

REUTERS, Paris

As the world hunkers down for Omicron, some investors might expect the global jet market to be withering away. Far from it.

Business has begun humming again as airlines look to snap up the greener passenger and freight planes they believe will give them an edge in a post-pandemic recovery driven by predicted travel demand plus the relentless rise of online shopping.

From Arizona to Amsterdam, some of the industry's sharpest buyers are eyeing efficient jets for the second half of the decade, aiming to get ahead of the long waiting lists they fear could derail their growth and environmental targets.

On Wednesday, Singapore Airlines kicked off a trio of major decisions expected in coming days, with a tentative order to replace its cargo fleet with a new A350 lightweight freighter offering from Airbus.

Purchase decisions on small passenger jets are expected shortly from Air France-KLM and Australia's Qantas.

"People are thinking about long-term fleet plans and especially about ESG (environmental, social and governance)," said Rob Morris, global head of consultancy at Ascend by Cirium.

"It's a case of: 'If I don't think about my replacement cycle now, am I going to get left behind,'" he added.



REUTERS/FILE
Aircraft sit on static display during the fifth day of the Dubai Air Show in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates.

Airbus and Boeing are sold out on benchmark medium-haul models until mid-decade after a previous, much larger order boom that was losing momentum when the pandemic wreaked havoc.

But with such long lead times before jets can be delivered, the focus is now turning towards the second half of the decade and a move to get in the front of the queue for future capacity.

"It's a buyer's market and a great time to take advantage of that," said aviation consultant Brendan Sobie.

The starting pistol was fired

last month when two industry heavyweights, Air Lease Corp Executive Chairman Steven Udvar-Hazy and a stable of airlines led by Indigo Partners founder Bill Franke, ordered over 300 jets at the Dubai Airshow.

Some were sceptical, noting the PR value of such events. But others said the delivery dates pointed to a preemptive strike.

"It is pretty obvious that ESG considerations are going to be critical through this cycle. There is a bit of a feeding frenzy again with people worried they will not be able to get enough slots," Morris said.

Rules toughen for new ADP schemes

FROM PAGE B1

A total of 1,534 projects were included in the ADP of the current fiscal year with unapproved projects numbering about 609. Besides, 141 projects that were included in the list are set to be implemented through foreign assistance.

According to the circular, the approved allocation for particular

projects cannot be used for other projects, even if left unspent.

In addition, project expenditure will have to be reported as per the economic code.

The finance ministry made a similar announcement in July earlier this year, stating that a maximum 50 per cent of the budgetary allocation for purchasing motor vehicles and

arranging overseas travel for relevant government officials can be spent.

Considering the coronavirus fallout, the purchase of motor vehicles and international travel for government officials had been halted until June 30. However, the finance ministry informed that funds left unspent has to be returned rather than being put to use elsewhere.

Fed signals three rate hikes in 2022

REUTERS, Washington

The Federal Reserve said on Wednesday it would end its pandemic-era bond purchases in March and pave the way for three quarter-percentage-point interest rate hikes by the end of 2022 as the economy nears full employment and the US central bank copes with a surge of inflation.

"The economy no longer needs increasing amounts of policy support," Fed Chair Jerome Powell said in a news conference in which he contrasted the near-depression conditions at the onset of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 with today's environment of rising prices and wages and rapid improvement in the job market.

The pace of inflation is uncomfortably high, he said after the end of the Fed's latest two-day policy meeting, and "in my view, we are making rapid progress toward maximum employment," a combination of circumstances that has now convinced all Fed officials, even the most dovish, that it is time to exit more fully the pandemic policies put in place two years ago.

The scenario laid out by the central bank in its new policy statement and economic projections envisions the pandemic, despite the spread of the Omicron variant, giving way to a particularly benign set of economic conditions - a "soft landing" in which inflation eases largely on its own, interest rates increase comparatively slowly, and the unemployment rate is pinned to a low 3.5 per cent level for three years.

Some analysts were skeptical. "This is a forecast that implicitly has favorable developments that allow them to leave accommodation but get favorable inflation," said Vincent Reinhart, chief economist at Dreyfuss & Mellon, noting that the three-year rate hike cycle projected by Fed officials never reaches levels that would be considered restrictive, yet inflation is still expected to fall.

"Is that the way to bet?" he said. The core of Fed officials thinks so. In their new economic projections, policymakers forecast that inflation would run at 2.6 per cent next year, an increase over the 2.2 per cent they projected in September, but then fall to 2.3 per cent in 2023 and 2.1 per cent in 2024.

Unemployment is seen dropping to 3.5 per cent next year, well below the point Fed officials feel is sustainable in the long run, and remaining there through 2024.

As a result of that combination of rising prices and strong employment, officials at the median projected the Fed's benchmark overnight interest rate would need to rise from its current near-zero level to 0.90 per cent by the end of 2022.

That would kick off a hiking cycle that would see the policy rate climb to 1.6 per cent in 2023 and 2.1 per cent in 2024 - still loose by most estimates.

Dropped from the latest policy statement was any reference to inflation as "transitory, with the Fed instead acknowledging that price increases had exceeded its 2 per cent target "for some time." Annual inflation has been running at more than double the Fed's target in recent months.

To open the door to higher borrowing costs, the Fed announced it was doubling the pace of its bond-buying taper, putting it on track to end the purchases of Treasuries and mortgage-backed securities (MBS) by March.

Until recently, the central bank had been buying \$120 billion of Treasuries and MBS each month to help fuel the economic recovery.

US stocks closed higher with the S&P 500 gaining more than 1.6 per cent, while yields on Treasury securities were also up.

The dollar initially strengthened after the release of the Fed statement and projections before surrendering the gains to trade lower on the day against a basket of major trading partners' currencies.

Bangladesh makes a name in suit export

FROM PAGE B1

Mohammad Ali Khokon, president of the Bangladesh Textile Mills Association, says local textile millers don't have significant capability to supply the fabrics used in making suits despite higher demand. As a result, manufacturers mainly import the fabrics from China and South Korea.

The sourcing of suits, blazers and other woven formal garment items from Bangladesh had slowed down during the peak of the coronavirus pandemic as demand dropped. The business is now rebounding thanks to the waning of infections.

"The suit business is also picking up in the western markets in keeping with the re-opening of economies in the Europe and the US," said the country chief of the British retailer.

"But, if the Covid-19 situation deteriorates, the business of formal clothes, especially suits, will again be affected."

Four fast-track projects on course

FROM PAGE B1

Power Development Board (PDB) officials said the plant would start generating electricity on an experimental basis in March next year while it may add electricity to the national grid from May or June.

The Tk 18,034.47 crore Chattogram-Cox's Bazar Rail Link project saw progress of 65 per cent in its physical works while 33.88 per cent of its allotted fund was spent till November, the IMED report said.

The project aims to bring the tourist town under a railway network and establish connections with the Trans-Asian railway corridor.

The Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant project in Pabna recorded physical progress of 42.12 per cent with 40.44 per cent financial progress as of November.

The project is expected to become operational from 2023, months ahead of the scheduled 2024 timeframe, according to its project director Shaikat Akbar.

Originally, the first unit of the nuclear power plant was scheduled to open by 2024 and the second unit by 2025.

Now, the first unit will be running in 2023 and power would be supplied to the national grid accordingly, Akbar told a group of journalists in October.

The second unit will become operational six to eight months after the first unit is opened, he said. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurated the reactor pressure vessel installation work in the first reactor building of the plant on October 10.

The Payra Deep Seaport project, involving an estimated Tk 4,374.47 crore, achieved 83 per cent physical progress and 71.24 per cent financial progress.

Meanwhile, the Tk 39,246 crore Padma Bridge Rail Link project saw 48 per cent physical progress while achieving 51.82 per cent financial progress till November, the report added.

Tussle over Fazli mango's origin

Chapainawabganj objects to Rajshahi's move to receive GI tag

SUKANTA HALDER

Rajshahi's move to secure a geographical indication certificate for its Fazli mango has suffered a setback after Chapainawabganj claimed the renowned fruit as its own.

The department of patents, designs and trademarks (DPDT) of the industries ministry published an article in its GI journal on October 6, 2021, declaring Fazli mango as "Rajshahi's Fazli mango". The state agency also published it in two international journals.

But on December 5, a day before the official deadline to raise any objection to the DPDT recognition expired, the

The Daily Star.

According to the association's notice, once South Malda was famous for mango cultivation. After the partition in 1947, the whole South Malda became Chapainawabganj district. The naming of Fazli mango is related with one Fazlibibi of Gaur.

The Rajshahi Fruit Research Centre applied to the DPDT for the geographic labeling of Fazli mango on March 9, 2017.

"We have presented all the historical facts and evidences along with the application letter earlier, all of which are in our favour that Fazli mango belongs to Rajshahi," said Alim Uddin, principal scientific officer of the centre.



Chapainawabganj Krishi Association submitted a notice to the department, staking a claim that the fruit belongs to Chapainawabganj and opposed the registration.

Munjer Alam, secretary of the association, says they have had enough evidence to prove that the Fazli mango belongs to Chapainawabganj, not Rajshahi.

"The history of Fazli is related with the district, not with Rajshahi," he told

According to Alim, Fazli mango is being cultivated in nine upazilas of Rajshahi. Among the upazilas, Fazli of Bagha upazila is well-known. Bagha Fazli was even well-known in Kolkata 200 years ago.

The DPDT has sought a written argument from the research centre in this regard by February. "We are preparing ourselves accordingly," he said.

READ MORE ON B2

Nilphamari has good potential for tourism

Could boost national economy through proper initiatives, locals say

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

Tourism in Rangpur's Nilphamari could be a boon for the national economy as the district has glorious historical and natural sites to see, including some related to the Liberation War.

Of the prominent tourist spots in Nilphamari, one is the 12th century Buddhist temple at Gar Dharmapal village in the district's Jaldhaka upazila.

The Buddhist temple complete with a circumbinary passage, boundary walls and other facilities is believed to have been built in the 12th century during the Pala era. The site was unearthed by the Department of Archaeology (DOA) in 2016.

According to the well-known book on antiquary, "Bangladesher Protnosampad", written by Abul Kalam Md Zakaria: The second ruler of the Pala Empire -- Dharma Pala (son of king Harsha Dev of Kamrup empire) -- shifted the capital to the site 900 years ago. The area is named Gar Dharmapal after him.

In addition, about 42 domed mosques were built at Satesher danga adjacent to Patkapara village in the same upazila during the Sultani



PHOTO: STAR

The remains of a Buddhist temple pictured above are just one of the many tourist attractions available in Nilphamari, which could turn into a hotspot for travellers if right initiatives are taken. The photo was taken recently at the district's Gar Dharmapal village.

DISTRICTS IN FOCUS

period. These were also unearthed by DOA almost at same time and could be another attraction for tourists.

DOA authorities reburied both sites maintaining due procedure to undergo some official process which should be completed immediately to open them to visitors, locals said.

The historic Nil Kuthi at Notkhana village in Sadar upazila built by English indigo traders during the British era may also be a good tourist spot as the DOA proposed it as reserved archaeological site.

Published by Bangla Academy, the book "Nilphamarir Itihas" gives a brief description of the Nil Kuthi as a brick-built structure that bears testimony to the cruelty and oppression of foreign indigo traders who forced local farmers to cultivate indigo instead of paddy.

"Even the name of Nilphamari is believed to be derived from two words -- Nil and Farm -- in line with indigo farming," said Zahangir Alam Sarker, the book's author.

However, these spots need some nursing and the authorities could take some simple steps in this regard to meet the people's thirst for amusement.

Shafiqul Alam Dablu Shah, a former member

of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry in Nilphamari, said the Chilahati-Holdibari rail link between Bangladesh and India was recently inaugurated in the district, creating enthusiasm among locals about the possibility of travelling to the nearby Indian tourist spot of Darjeeling in the future.

This touring habit may create an interest among them to visit places in their own country and so, the authorities should use this opportunity by developing local tourist spots.

"Besides, Indian travelers may also visit these sites through the new rail link," he added.

Every year, thousands of visitors come to see the giant Teesta barrage and arrange picnics in the surrounding forest.

In the absence of government initiatives, local entrepreneurs decorate the banks of the river with colourful cloths and umbrellas and also arrange luxury boat rides up to its entry point from India at Kaliganj village in Dimla upazila.

But the effort is inadequate and not recommended by the Water Development Board (WDB).

However, Ashfauddoula, executive engineer of the WDB in Dalia division of Nilphamari district, said that an architectural team visited the area to frame out a project to turn it into a

tourist spot.

Since flocks of migratory birds from remote Sybaria come to Nilsagor, a vast waterbody built by King Virat in ancient times at Dhoba Danga village in Sadar upazila, it was declared as a bird sanctuary.

This site is a good place for entertaining tourists as the chirping of birds and their bathing in water amazes people.

The mass graveyard at Golahat in Saidpur upazila could also be a tourist spot for Liberation War history buffs as more than 400 people were victims of genocide in 1971 by the Pakistan army.

People are also greatly attracted to the Saidpur railway workshop, which is the largest of its kind in Bangladesh, and the Nilphamari museum.

When contacted, Nahida Sultana, deputy director of the DOA for Rangpur and Rajshahi, said archaeological sites in Nilphamari have great significance and so, work is ongoing to make them more attractive before opening to visitors.

"We have a plan to boost tourism in Rangpur division, including Nilphamari, and such work is going on at division's Peerganj upazila," said Mahamud Kabir, general manager of the Bangladesh Parjaton Corporation.

World Bank unveils \$93b boost for poorest nations

AFP, Washington

The World Bank's fund to help the world's poorest nations got a \$93 billion injection of cash to help scale up aid for pandemic recovery and other programs, the institution announced Wednesday.

It was the biggest replenishment ever for the International Development Association (IDA), which provides grants for 74 countries, most of which are in Africa, the Washington-based development lender said.

The package includes \$23.5 billion of contributions from 48 high- and middle-income countries as well as financing raised in the capital markets and the World Bank's own contributions, according to a statement.

"Today's generous commitment by our partners is a critical step toward supporting poor countries in their efforts to recover from the Covid-19 crisis," World Bank President David Malpass said.

The IDA fund is replenished every three years, but because of the pandemic, the latest cash injection was pulled forward by a year and will be in place through June 2025.

The World Bank said the funds will help countries better prepare for future crises, including pandemics, financial shocks and natural disasters.

Sri Lanka economy slumps in face of forex crisis

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's economy shrank in the third quarter as a foreign exchange crisis wrecked its recovery from the coronavirus pandemic, official data showed Thursday.

GDP contracted 1.5 per cent on-year in the three months to September, the department of census and statistics said, ending four consecutive quarters of growth.

The island's tourism-dependent economy was hammered by the pandemic and authorities responded to falling foreign exchange reserves with a broad import ban, triggering shortages including food, fuel and medicines.

The crisis has spread to affect manufacturing and services and the department said: "Increased input prices of producers due to import restrictions imposed as a solution for declining foreign money reserves also contributed to the slowdown."

"The Sri Lankan economy had grown 12.3 per cent in the second quarter but a third wave of infections that forced a 41-day curfew saw services and industries heavily affected, the department noted.

India to shell out \$10b to woo global chip makers



AFP/FILE

A person scans a QR code on an Apple Watch to temporarily send their digital driver's licence to another mobile phone at a Harmons Grocery store in Salt Lake City, Utah in the USA on August 4.

REUTERS, New Delhi

India has approved a \$10 billion incentive plan to attract semiconductor and display manufacturers, its technology minister said on Wednesday, as part of a deepening push to establish the country as a global electronics production hub.

Under the plan, India's government will extend fiscal support of up to 50 per cent of a project's cost to eligible display and semiconductor fabricators, the government said in a statement.

Israel's Tower Semiconductor, Taiwan's Foxconn and a consortium from Singapore have shown interest in setting up chip factories in India while Vedanta Group was keen to

set up a display plant, a government source told Reuters.

Tower, Foxconn and Vedanta did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

"The program will usher in a new era in electronics manufacturing by providing a globally competitive incentive package to companies in semiconductors and display manufacturing as well as design," the government statement said.

The drive comes as some companies look to diversify their manufacturing bases beyond China due to the ongoing trade war between Washington and Beijing and is a sign India is trying to move up the electronics value chain.

India's plan to incentivize

semiconductor manufacturing also comes at a time when automakers and tech companies around the world are grappling with a global chip shortage.

New Delhi also approved an incentive plan to support 100 local firms working on integrated circuit and chipset designs.

Technology Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw told a news briefing the plan would help develop "the complete semiconductor ecosystem - from the design of semiconductor chips to their fabrication, packing and testing in the country."

The government said it expected the scheme to create about 35,000 high-quality positions, 100,000 indirect jobs and attract investment worth 1.67 trillion rupees (\$8.8 billion).

ECB plots stimulus exit as inflation looms

AFP, Frankfurt

European Central Bank policymakers were to gather on Thursday for a crunch meeting, as soaring inflation heaps pressure on the bank to wind down its stimulus just as a new coronavirus variant threatens to derail the recovery.

The Frankfurt-based institution is expected to confirm the planned end of its massive pandemic-era stimulus plan in March, currently hovering up around 70 billion euros (\$78 billion) worth of assets every month.

The 1.85-trillion-euro pandemic emergency bond-buying programme (PEPP) is the ECB's main crisis-fighting tool, aimed at keeping borrowing costs low to stoke economic growth.

The challenge for the ECB's 25-member governing council is finding a way to smooth the transition to avoid upsetting markets or jeopardising the eurozone's fragile rebound from the initial coronavirus shock.

Boosting the bank's pre-pandemic asset purchase programme (APP), currently running at 20 billion euros a month, or creating a new envelope for financial support through 2022 and beyond are two of the options discussed by observers.

The ECB will want to avoid a "cliff-effect" in asset purchases and would settle on an overall rate "between 40 and 60 billion euros" in the second quarter next year, said Konstantin Veit, portfolio manager at Pimco.

In November, prices rose 4.9 per cent year on year in the eurozone, a record in the history of the single currency.

While the ECB has up to now described the spike as "transitory", attributing it to one-off pandemic related factors, inflation has progressed at a rate that has exceeded observers' expectations.

The emergence of the more contagious Omicron variant has raised fears of more pandemic-related disruption, aggravating supply bottlenecks that have pushed prices up faster and hampered economic growth.

Alongside its monetary policy decisions, the ECB will publish its latest set of economic forecasts, including its first set of figures for 2024.

Last updated in September, the bank expected the economy to grow by five per cent in 2021, 4.6 per cent in 2022 and 2.1 per cent in 2023.

On the inflation side, price rises were expected to be 2.2 per cent in 2021 for the whole year, before dropping under the ECB's two-percent target for the next two years at 1.7 and 1.5 per cent.