

Star BUSINESS

Prime Bank

**TODAY?
TOMORROW?**

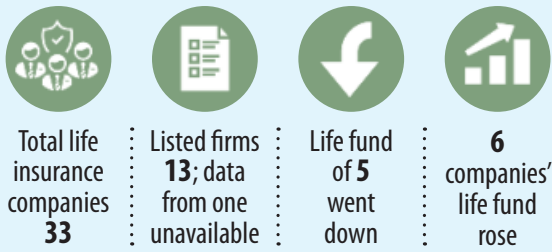
OPEN A BANK ACCOUNT
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What is life fund?

Life fund is an amount of money that is paid to and invested by insurance companies for life insurance, and from which money is paid when someone dies

BY THE NUMBERS

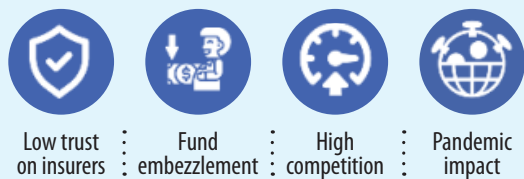


INSURANCE PENETRATION

- It is **0.4%** in Bangladesh
- Lowest in emerging Asia Pacific
- It is **4.2%** in India and **1.2%** in Sri Lanka



WHY LIFE FUND FELL

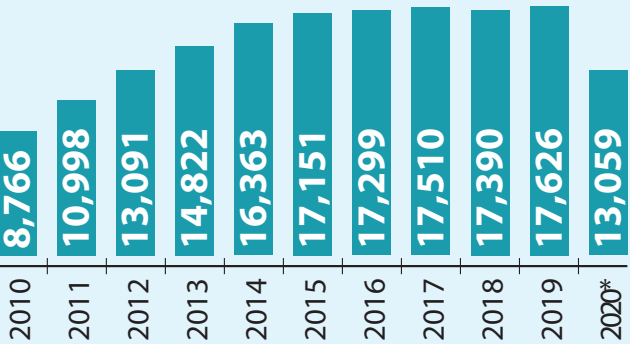


Total life fund

In crore taka;

SOURCE: ANNUAL REPORTS

*Delta, and Progressive Life insurance data yet to be published



LIFE INSURANCE business LIFELESS for long

AHSAN HABIB

Bangladesh's listed insurers' life funds, or portfolios into which policyholder's life assurance premiums are paid and claims are paid out of, have remained nearly the same in amount since 2015.

The reason – low trust on whether claims would be met and increased competition from new companies amidst the pandemic.

Of 33 life insurance companies running with approval, 13 are listed. Of the 13, life funds of five decreased and six slightly increased. Data of one was unavailable.

Though their business was bearish, share prices were on a bull run the past two years.

Some new companies opened midway of the past decade, raising competition but were capable of little market penetration, said Sheikh Kabir Hossain, president of Bangladesh Insurance Association.

The pandemic hit right when the market was showing prospects, he said, adding that digitalisation was yet to be all-encompassing while selling policies was still a door-to-door affair.

The Insurance Development & Regulatory Authority (IDRA) brought many positive policy changes to restore people's faith, he added.

"We are hopeful that business will be better," said Hossain, also chairman of Sonar Bangla Insurance Company.

Ten companies opened in

2014, according to the IDRA.

They are namely Alpha Islami Life Insurance, Astha Life Insurance Company, Diamond Life Insurance Company, Guardian Life Insurance, Jamuna Life Insurance Company, LIC Bangladesh, NRB Global Life Insurance Company, Swadesh Life Insurance Company, NRB Islamic Life Insurance and Akij Takaful Life Insurance.

Delays in the payment of some matured policies' proceeds and claims eroded the trust, said SM Shakil Akhter, executive director and spokesperson of the IDRA. Life funds of 12 companies

"When peoples' trust break down, it normally affects business," he said.

Business of some of the compliant insurers is soaring, albeit not at full potential.

The lack of trust is reducing the market penetration rate, Akhter said.

Insurance penetration in Bangladesh was 0.40 per cent in 2020 whereas 0.49 per cent a year ago, the lowest among emerging Asia Pacific countries, according to the Sigma report by Swiss Re Institute.

For neighbouring India, it was 4.20 per cent in 2020.

great growth potential but the mistrust has already hurt the market.

"The problem is that the new customer creation process is almost stagnant. The non-listed companies' situation is not better. In turn, they are worse off," he said.

"By any means, the IDRA should work on regaining the trust, otherwise the sector will not grow," he added.

Sunlife Insurance Company's life fund was down from Tk 344 crore to Tk 182 crore between 2015 and 2020.

"We have paid a huge number of claims...while clients' inclusion was little," reasoned Chairperson Prof Rubina Hamid.

Many companies emerged in the last four to five years but new clients and policies of good rates did not, so competition soared, she said.

So premium income fell and then became stable, she said, adding that life fund depletion was lower in 2020 compared to the previous year.

She hoped to see better times ahead.

Meanwhile, Popular Life Insurance Company's life fund decreased 38 per cent to Tk 1,758 crore.

It has been over 20 years since the company opened, so time has come to pay some claims, for which the life fund has been decreasing, said Company Secretary Mostafa Helal Kabir.

"Actually, the market situation is not good," he said. While they were trying to regain

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FOR INQUIRIES CALL US AT 16704

dbi CERAMICS

rose just 2 per cent to Tk 17,570 crore between 2015 and 2019.

In contrast, it soared 95 per cent to Tk 17,123 crore between 2010 and 2015, revealed their annual reports.

This analysis was limited till 2019 as Delta Life Insurance and Progressive Life Insurance are yet to publish their data for 2020.

Some 8-10 companies refused claims and embezzled funds, making survival tough for all while raising management costs, said Akhter.

A massive drive is necessary to reinstate trust and the IDRA is trying to run one, he added.

A top official of a non-listed life insurance company, preferring anonymity, said news of some insurers' malpractices surfaced around 2015 to 2017, impacting the market's potential.

New clients took a U-turn and many policyholders applied to cease availing policies, he said, adding that Bangladesh's low penetration level promises

120MW solar power plants approved

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

South Korean, Norwegian, and French companies will build two new solar power plants in Bangladesh from which the government will be able to purchase electricity at a slightly low cost.

The cabinet committee on public purchase yesterday approved two contracts for producing a total of 120 megawatts (MW) of electricity in Pabna and Mymensingh districts at a cost of Tk 8.12 per unit.

Last week, the government made purchases at rates ranging from Tk 8.16 to Tk 21.25 from a 223.5MW solar-powered power plant.

The meeting was chaired by Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal where a total of

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The government is pushing for renewable energy and waste-based power generation. It outlined the country's ambitious goal of generating more than 4,100 megawatts of electricity from renewable energy sources by 2030 in its updated Nationally Determined Contributions submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change before the COP26.

PHOTO: STAR/FILE

FISCAL DEVICES NBR to outsource maintenance services

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The National Board of Revenue (NBR) is going to outsource from the private sector maintenance services for electronic fiscal devices (EFD).

This is aimed at ensuring proper monitoring of the machines once installed at retail and wholesale stores, thereby ensuring collection of all the value added tax (VAT) consumers pay during purchase of goods and services.

The revenue authority already called for bids from firms to install EFDs at three VAT Commissionerates – Dhaka (West), Dhaka (East) and Chattogram – and monitor and maintain the machines for 10 years.

Firms will have to have a minimum of five years' experience in human resource management in public agencies or similar experience in ICT equipment and software development, according to the NBR's tender notice.

"It is not possible for the NBR to collect VAT by installing millions of machines across the country, so we have taken this initiative to outsource EFD services," said NBR Chairman Abu Hena Md Rahmatul Muneem.

He was addressing a lottery draw of purchase

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Pharma export buoyant

JAGARAN CHAKMA

Pharmaceuticals shipment from Bangladesh grew 22.21 cent year-on-year in the first half of the current fiscal year on the back of continuous addition of anti-coronavirus drugs to the export basket, quality improvement and policy support.

Medicines worth \$105.50 million were exported in the July-December period, up from \$86.33 million in the same period a year ago, data from the Export Promotion Bureau showed.

One important addition to the export basket in recent years has been anti-coronavirus drugs as the countries scrambled to find solutions to treat Covid-19 patients when the health crisis was termed as a pandemic in March 2020 by the World Health Organisation.

The continuous shipment of anti-viral drugs

READ MORE ON B3

| STOCKS | |
|----------|-----------|
| DSEX ▲ | CSCX ▲ |
| 0.53% | 0.84% |
| 6,929.93 | 12,207.07 |

| COMMODITIES | |
|-------------|--------------|
| Gold ▲ | Oil ▲ |
| \$1,825.90 | \$77.79 |
| | (per barrel) |

| CURRENCIES | | | | |
|------------|--------|-------|--------|-------|
| | \$ USD | € EUR | £ GBP | ¥ JPY |
| BUY TK | 84.85 | 94.76 | 113.95 | 0.71 |
| SELL TK | 85.85 | 98.56 | 117.75 | 0.75 |

| ASIAN MARKETS | | | | |
|---------------|-----------|---------|-----------|----------|
| | MUMBAI | TOKYO | SINGAPORE | SHANGHAI |
| ▲ 0.61% | 60,223.15 | ▲ 0.10% | 29,332.16 | ▼ 0.56% |
| | | | 3,163.44 | ▲ 1.02% |
| | | | | 3,595.18 |



Bengal Commercial Bank Limited, a new generation bank having strong capital base, started its commercial operation since March 2021. The bank believes that it can satisfy its customers of different segments through diverse range of products and services based on innovative ideas which are relying on latest technologies. For further strengthening its team, the bank is looking for aspiring candidates who are hardworking, responsible, smart and ready to shape themselves with multifarious capabilities for its future leadership positions as "Management Trainee".

MANAGEMENT TRAINEE PROGRAM

Key Requirements

- MBA/ MBM/ Masters preferably in business discipline from a reputed local/ foreign university with minimum CGPA of 3.00 out of 4.00 and 4.00 out of 5.00 in all academic records;
- B.Sc in Engineering (Civil/EEE/Computer Science/Tele Communications) from reputed universities with minimum CGPA of 3.00 out of 4.00
- Future focused leadership capabilities
- Excellent communication and interpersonal skills
- Effective writing and verbal communication skills in both Bangla and English
- Excellent computer literacy especially in MS Office platforms

Additional Requirements

- Age not exceeding 30 (thirty) years as on January 30, 2022
- Ready to work anywhere in Bangladesh
- Finally selected candidates shall have to sign Surety Bond to serve the Bank for a minimum period of 3 (three) years from the date of joining

Benefits & Career Plan

- Management Trainee Development Program will give broad business, technical and product knowledge through fast-paced, interactive and ongoing training. Furthermore trainees shall be getting opportunities to learn from, exceptionally talented colleagues in a friendly, supportive culture where people are open-minded and approachable.
- Management Trainee will receive monthly consolidated remuneration of BDT 50,000/- (Fifty Thousand) during the probation period along with other admissible benefits within rules.
- After satisfactory completion of 1 (One) year probation period, Management Trainee will be confirmed as Senior Officer in the regular pay-scale of the Bank.

Selection Procedures

- Only short-listed candidates will be communicated
- Eligible candidates will first appear in a competitive Written Exam; qualifier in the Written Exam will be required to undergo the subsequent stages of the selection process.

Application Procedure

- Interested candidate who fulfills the eligibility requirements are invited to apply **online** through www.bgcb.com.bd/career by January 30, 2022.
- Only published academic results are acceptable
- Incomplete application will not be considered for selection process
- Misrepresentations of any information will disqualify the candidature

Bengal Commercial Bank Ltd. promotes Equal Employment Opportunity; any sort of persuasion will result in disqualification. Bengal Commercial Bank Ltd. reserves the right to accept or reject any application without assigning any reason whatsoever.



Another 92 migrant workers leave for South Korea

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Some 92 Bangladeshi workers left Dhaka's Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport for South Korea yesterday through chartered flights operated by a Korean air company as the government of the East Asian nation resumed receiving foreign workers.

It was the first batch of Bangladeshi expatriate workers, who went to Korea this year, the Korean embassy said in a statement yesterday.

Forty four of the 92 workers were newly employed while the rest re-entered Korea.

The Korean government suspended accepting foreign workers in March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic and resumed receiving the expatriates from last month.

After the resumption, so far, a total of 203 Bangladeshi expatriate workers have travelled to Korea. In December, 111 Bangladeshi workers went to Korea.

Korea has been allowing medium and low-skilled foreign workers from 16 countries, including Bangladesh, under the EPS (Employment Permit System) programme. Due to the unprecedented and prolonged coronavirus pandemic, however, the Korean government suspended receiving EPS workers.

Accommodating continuous requests from the sending countries as well as from the employers, the Korean government decided to lift the suspension from November last year on a limited scale.

Bangladeshi EPS workers have played a crucial role in the Korea-Bangladesh relations, contributing not only to the economic development of Bangladesh but also to the supply of labour force to Korea, Korean Ambassador to Bangladesh Lee Jang-keun said on the occasion.



Attendees and workers chat beneath a 5G logo at the Quectel booth at CES 2021 at Las Vegas Convention Center in Las Vegas, US.

PHOTO: AFP

Do 5G telecoms pose a threat to airline safety?

REUTERS

US telecom companies and airlines have been fighting for weeks over the potential impact of 5G wireless services on aircraft, in stark contrast to the rollout of new-generation services elsewhere, which has broadly gone ahead without airing new safety concerns.

Here is some background on the dispute, in which Verizon Communications and AT&T agreed on Monday to a two-week delay in using newly acquired wireless spectrum, drawing back from a standoff that threatened to disrupt flights.

The agreement promises to avert most, but not all, potential disruption to air travel from 5G deployment.

The US auctioned mid-range 5G bandwidth to mobile phone companies in early 2021 in the 3.7-3.98 GHz range on the spectrum, known as C-Band, for about \$80 billion.

US aviation industry groups in recent months stepped up concerns and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) issued a formal warning in November of the risk of interference with flight equipment.

In the airline industry, radar altimeters, which measure altitude, operate in the 4.2-4.4 GHz range and there are concerns that there is not a big enough buffer from the frequencies to be used by the telecoms companies.

The companies have faced pressure from the White House, airlines and aviation unions to delay the deployment amid concerns about potential interference of 5G with sensitive aircraft electronics like radio altimeters.

Radio altimeters help to minimize the risk of accidents or collisions by giving an accurate reading of the proximity to the ground.

The readouts are also used to facilitate automated landings and to help detect dangerous currents called windshear.

In short, the higher the frequency in the spectrum, the faster the service. So in order to get full value from 5G, operators want to operate at higher frequencies.

Some of the C-Band spectrum auctioned in the United States had been used for satellite radio but the transition to 5G means there will be much more traffic.

Following years of international discussions, the European Union in 2019 set standards for mid-range 5G frequencies

in the 3.4-3.8 GHz range.

They have been auctioned and taken into use in many of the bloc's 27 member states so far without issue.

The European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA), which oversees 31 states, said on December 17 the latest discussion was specific to US airspace.

"At this stage, no risk of unsafe interference has been identified in Europe," it said.

AT&T and Verizon have agreed to adopt exclusion zones around many US airports similar to those used in France for six months.

FAA officials noted the spectrum used by France (3.6-3.8 GHz) sits further away from the spectrum (4.2-4.4 GHz) used for radio altimeters than in the United States and France's power level for 5G is also much lower than what is authorized in the United States.

But Verizon said it will not use spectrum that closer than what France is using for several years.

In South Korea, the 5G mobile communication frequency is 3.42-3.7GHz band and there has been no report of interference with radio wave since commercialization of 5G in April 2019.

HSBC launches My Calendar App

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC) has recently launched 'HSBC My Calendar App' to celebrate its 25-year journey in Bangladesh.

The app highlights the snippets of many memorable events surrounding Bangladesh's history and culture, according to a press release.

The digital calendar is a stepping stone to the road of sustainability and transition towards a greener tomorrow. The app with both Bangla and English calendar for 2022 helps users update about special events and occasions throughout the year.

The disability-friendly app contains brief depiction of the event with a unique tune and photo which resembles a part of the history for that date.

Every image on the calendar month represents a heritage to connect with culture and history.

The app also has year at a glance with all the special occasions and public holidays marked for the year.

The app is free, and once it is downloaded and installed, no internet connection will be needed to use it, said the bank.

Indonesia to review coal export ban

REUTERS, Jakarta

Indonesian coal miners were due to hold talks with government officials on Wednesday on a ban on the country's coal exports that has unnerved global markets for the fuel and triggered energy security concerns in some major economies.

Indonesia, the world's top exporter of thermal coal and China's largest overseas supplier, on Saturday announced a ban on exports in January to avoid outages at domestic generators.

Miners were scheduled to meet Indonesian trade minister Muhammad Lutfi starting from 0900 a.m. (0200 GMT), an official at an Indonesian coal miners' association said.

Separately, State-Owned Enterprise (SOE) Minister Erick Thohir said his ministry, along with the energy ministry, will hold talks with state power company Perusahaan Listrik Negara (PLN) to review their coal supplies.

"We will clearly map out the condition in each coal power plant, so later on we won't find any more problems as has been directed by the president," Erick said in a statement late on Tuesday. It was unclear if coal miners would also attend the meeting with PLN.

PLN on Tuesday said it had secured an extra 7.5 million tonnes of coal, but aimed to continue increasing stockpiles so it had at least enough supplies to last 20 days.

The state power company had previously said it needed 5.1 million tonnes of additional supply for January to avoid widespread outages.

Germany may clamp down on Google activities

AFP, Berlin

Germany's antitrust regulator on Wednesday classified Google a company of "paramount significance across markets", a move paving the way for the authorities to clamp down on any potentially anti-competitive activities.

The decision is the first after an amendment of the German Competition Act came in force January 2021, allowing the authority to intervene earlier, particularly against huge digital companies.

"This is a very important step since based on this decision the Bundeskartellamt (regulator) can now take action against specific anti-competitive practices by Google," said Andreas Mundt, president of the Federal Cartel Authority, in a statement.

Wielding the new legislation, the authority has over the last year opened probes into US tech giants such as Amazon and Facebook.



Benazir Ahmed, chairman of Community Bank Bangladesh and inspector general (IG) of Bangladesh Police, presides over the bank's 28th board meeting at police headquarters in Dhaka yesterday. Board members and senior officials were present.

PHOTO: COMMUNITY BANK BANGLADESH

Qualcomm inks car chip deals with Volvo, Honda

REUTERS

Qualcomm Corp on Tuesday announced deals to supply chips to automakers Volvo Group, Honda Motor Co Ltd and Renault SA, accelerating its push to partner with legacy automotive firms digitizing their product lines.

The San Diego, California, company once known for its mobile phone chips has created a range of automotive offerings, from self-driving car brains to chips that operate digital dashboards and infotainment systems.

But the chips are all aimed at the same goal of helping automakers transform their vehicles into rolling computers that can be updated over the air with paid upgrades that generate revenue for carmakers long after a vehicle has left dealer lots, a business model pioneered by Tesla Inc.

At the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, Qualcomm said it has reached a deal with Geely Holding-backed brands Volvo and Polestar to use Qualcomm's "Snapdragon Cockpit" chips and an operating system from Alphabet Inc's Google in vehicles starting later this year.

The deal will allow Volvos electric SUV, which is to begin production this year, to tap into hands-free use of Google Assistant and navigation with Google Maps.

The companies said that future upgrades will be sent out over the air. Qualcomm also said that Honda will start using its "cockpit" chips in vehicles that will hit roads in 2023.

Qualcomm also said Renault has agreed to use its automotive technology, but did not give specifics of which chips or when vehicles using them would arrive.

Japan tuna goes for \$145,000

AFP, Tokyo

The buyer of a \$145,000 tuna at Tokyo's traditional New Year auction said Wednesday he hoped the purchase would "brighten" a Covid-hit 2022.

The top price paid for a tuna at the first auction of the year at Tokyo's Toyosu fish market fell for the third year running, with demand hit by the pandemic.

The 16.88 million yen shelled out jointly by a restaurant operator and a wholesaler for the huge bluefin tuna on Wednesday was far below the 2019 record of 333.6 million yen. The first tuna auction of the year at Toyosu market is a closely watched tradition that draws a horde of fish wholesalers every year.

Bidders sometimes shell out an enormous amount to win the top-priced tuna, which is seen as bringing good luck, as well as plenty of publicity for the buyer.

Wednesday's top-priced 211-kilogram (465-pound) fish was caught off the

northern Aomori region of Japan, famous for its quality tuna, and went to Michelin-starred sushi restaurant operator Onodera Group and Japanese wholesaler Yamayuki.

Hours after the early-morning auction, the prize fish was delivered to a restaurant operated by Onodera in Tokyo's upscale Omotesando neighbourhood to be publicly sliced and filleted.

"I participated in the auction hoping to get the top-priced tuna, which is considered auspicious, and serve it to our customers to brighten their year ahead a little, even as our world remains marred by the pandemic," head chef Akifumi Sakagami told AFP.

The tuna will be offered to customers both in Japan and at the firm's restaurants abroad, including in Hawaii, New York and Los Angeles, he added.

Sushi enthusiasts gathered outside the upscale Tokyo restaurant to await the tuna, eager for a morsel.

US financial firms tighten Covid-19 precautions

REUTERS

US financial firms have been more proactive than other industries in encouraging employees back to the office, but those plans have come under renewed scrutiny due to the rapid spread of the Omicron coronavirus variant.

Most major US banks have had staff working in offices since the summer, but some are now choosing not to host holiday parties and others are strongly recommending staff to get booster shots. The following are the pandemic-related rules among Wall Street's biggest banks and financial firms.

For a FACTBOX on Canadian financial firms, click on **Bank of America Corp**

The bank is encouraging employees to work remotely in the first week of January, according to a person familiar with the matter. It will host on-site vaccine booster clinics for its staff across the country. Since late summer, the bank has also been encouraging employees to get fully vaccinated and more recently to get their booster shots when eligible. It offers onsite clinics in several locations.

Citigroup Inc
Citigroup has asked staffers to work from home during the

first few weeks of 2022, a person familiar with the matter told Reuters.

On December 15, the bank told employees at its New York City office they could work from home if they were able to through the holidays, a source with knowledge of the matter told Reuters.

The bank has been requiring employees in the United States to be vaccinated but is not mandating boosters. It is providing rapid test kits and encouraging testing for employees going into the office, a source said earlier.

Deutsche Bank
The German lender has made

Covid-19 boosters available to staff at its new midtown headquarters in New York City since early November, according to a source familiar with the matter.

Goldman Sachs Group Inc
Goldman Sachs is encouraging its eligible US staff to work from home until January 18, a spokesperson for the bank said.

Its offices will continue to remain open with previously announced Covid-19 safety protocols - a vaccine requirement, booster for all eligible populations effective February 1, bi-weekly testing effective January 10 and mandatory masks.



Local apparel manufacturers are flooded with orders and many global retailers and brands have moved orders to Bangladesh from its competitor countries.

PHOTO: STAR/FILE

Bangladesh primed for \$8B MONTHLY RMG EXPORT

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Garment manufacturers are confident about supplying garment products worth \$8 billion a month to international buyers after Bangladesh consolidated its place in the global supply chain by remaining open for businesses even during the peak of the coronavirus pandemic.

The government's bold move contrasts to many garment-producing countries that kept shut factories to tame the raging virus. What is more, apparel and textile entrepreneurs in Bangladesh have kept expanding to meet the growing demand as economies return to normalcy.

Now, local apparel manufacturers are flooded with orders and many global retailers and brands have moved orders to Bangladesh from its competitor countries.

"Bangladesh is gradually getting ready to cater garment work orders worth \$7 billion to \$8 billion every month. At

present, we are not capable of supplying products worth \$7 billion to \$8 billion, but we are expanding our capacity," said Faruque Hassan, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

The target would be double the current level.

For the first time in the history of Bangladesh, the monthly export of garment items crossed \$4 billion in December, helped by a surge in demand in keeping with the global recovery from the severe fallouts of Covid-19.

Hassan shared his views at an event styled "ERF Dialogue" at the conference room of the Economic Reporters' Forum (ERF) in Dhaka yesterday.

The pandemic is far from over, and what is more, Omicron, the latest variant of Covid-19, is spreading fast across the world although it has not proved to be fatal like that of the Delta variant.

But the virus is sweeping across Europe and the US, the

two main export destinations of Bangladesh and home to more than 80 per cent garment shipment from the country.

But Hassan is unflinching. "Garment exporters are not worried as no work order has been cancelled or suspended because of Omicron so far. Only a few buyers have demanded deferred shipments for 10 to 15 days." The reason for Hassan's bullishness is some export destinations are increasingly becoming major buyers. And he is hopeful that shipment to a number of Asian markets, including India, China, South Korea, and Japan will surge in the near future as buyers are placing more orders.

In Asia, only Japan has turned into a \$1-billion market for Bangladesh. But India, China, and South Korea would soon follow suit, he said.

Since the garment export is on the rise, a lot of investment will flow to the spinning, weaving, dyeing and other primary textile sectors in 2022,

according to the entrepreneur.

The spinning sector witnessed a major jump in investment last year as entrepreneurs set up 26 new mills to meet rising demand. Entrepreneurs pumped Tk 5,970 crore in the new manufacturing plants.

"The current trend of garment exports will continue up to April this year as we are booked with a huge quantity of orders," said Hassan. Garment export from Bangladesh to the US is also rising.

And Hassan called on the US to reinstate the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) as manufacturers had improved the workplace safety and compliance in sync with global standards and the conditions set by the American government.

The US suspended GSP for Bangladesh in June 2013, citing serious shortcomings in labour rights and workplace safety.

The BGMEA chief stated that there were some issues related to the National Board

of Revenue, the customs department and the port that should be resolved through discussions for maintaining the current positive course of exports. Despite the major strides made by the garment sector in Bangladesh in recent years, both the number of workers and active factories have declined. Hassan, however, could not say immediately how many factories were closed and workers lost jobs.

The BGMEA is carrying out three studies on technical garment products, fibre diversification and the post-Covid-19 roadmap to lift the industry to the next league.

"The studies are aimed mainly at finding out the potential markets and how to shift the production base to high-end garment items and technical clothing items," Hassan added.

SM Rashidul Islam, general secretary of the ERF, moderated the dialogue, which was chaired by M Shafiqul Alam, acting president of the association.



Maksudha Khanam Md Zoshim Uddin Bhuiyan

Exim Bank promotes two to deputy MD

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Exim Bank has recently witnessed the promotion of two of its additional deputy managing directors to the posts of deputy managing directors.

Of the duo, Maksudha Khanam joined the bank in 1999 as a principal officer, says a press release.

She started her banking career with National Bank in 1995 as a probationary officer on obtaining her bachelor's and master's degrees in economics from Jahangirnagar University.

Meanwhile Md Zoshim Uddin Bhuiyan joined the bank as a principal officer in 2000.

He started his banking career with City Bank in 1989 as a probationary officer on obtaining his bachelor's and master's degrees in accounting from the University of Chittagong.

Euro zone recovery stumbles

REUTERS, London

The euro zone's economic recovery stuttered in December as a renewed wave of Covid-19 infections curtailed growth in the bloc's dominant service industry, a survey showed on Wednesday, and could weaken further if tighter restrictions are imposed.

As the Omicron coronavirus variant spread rapidly at the end of last year governments reimposed measures to contain infection rates, particularly in Germany, Europe's largest economy.

That meant IHS Markit's Composite Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), a good gauge of overall economic health, sank to 53.3 in December from 55.4 in November, its lowest since March.

While the final reading was below an earlier 53.4 "flash" estimate it did hold above the 50 mark separating growth from contraction.

"The final Composite PMIs for December confirm that the euro zone economy ended 2021 on a weak note. The economy lost momentum at the end of last year but still appeared to be expanding," said Jack Allen-Reynolds at Capital Economics.

US triumphs over Canada in trade dispute

AFP, Washington

The US government on Tuesday said it had won its fight with Ottawa over restrictions in the Canadian dairy market, claiming victory in the first-ever dispute under the revamped North American free trade pact.

But rather than remove a point of conflict between the trading partners, the issue may exacerbate stresses, since both sides have vowed to fight to protect their own industries and workers.

120MW solar power plants approved

FROM PAGE B1

seven proposals were approved worth Tk 4,145.70 crore. South Korean companies Daehan Green Energy and HI Korea Company and Pabna Solar Power will jointly build an 80MW grid-tied solar power plant in Pabna's Ishwardi upazila.

The government will purchase electricity from it for 20 years at Tk 8.12 per unit for a total cost of Tk 1,843.20 crore.

Another venture among French company Total Eren SA, Norwegian Renewables Group AS and Urban Services will build the 50MW grid-tied solar power plant in

Mukttagachha upazila of Mymensingh.

Each unit will cost Tk 8.12, bringing the total cost to Tk 1,315.20 crore. This is also for the next 20 years.

Meanwhile, the government approved a four-year extension of a contract for a 40MW gas-based rental power plant in Bhola of Bangladesh Power Development Board with sponsor Venture Energy Resources. The total cost for purchasing electricity is Tk 360.90 crore, with each unit being of Tk 2.7176.

The government also extended the tenure of at least four gas-based rental power plants by 1 to 5 years last week.

Pharma export buoyant

FROM PAGE B1

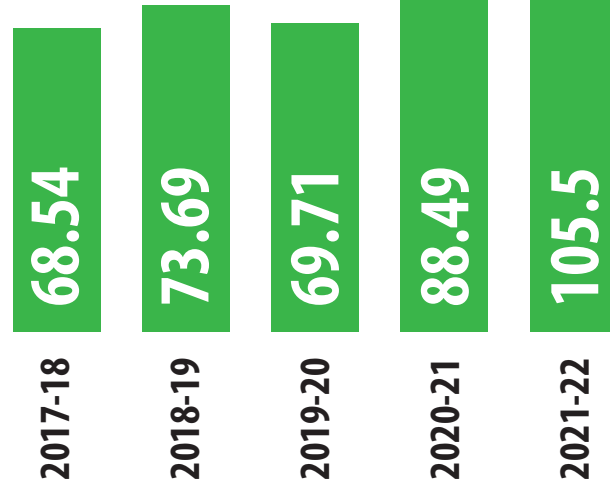
Remdesivir and Favipiravir – used to treat coronavirus patients has expanded the export basket of the pharma sector. Now, around 20 companies from Bangladesh, including Eskayef, Beximco, Incepta, Beacon, Square, Popular, Opsonin, ACI, Renata, and Ziska Pharmaceuticals export Covid-19 drugs.

Mohammad Mujahidul Islam, executive director for marketing & sales at Eskayef Pharmaceuticals Ltd, said although the pandemic has brought many challenges, the company has kept the supply of its regular medicines uninterrupted across the globe.

Apart from its regular basket of products, the company has contributed tremendously to the foreign sales of anti-coronavirus drugs as well. It introduced Remivir, the first global generic version of anti coronavirus drug Remdesivir, which was manufactured by US company Gilead Sciences Inc. "We have served Covid-19 patients in 43 countries with Remivir," Islam said.

SHIPMENTS (In million \$; Jul-Dec)

SOURCE: EPB



Eskayef has also exported the first generic version of oral anti-Covid medicine Molnupiravir under the brand Monuivir.

Recently, Eskayef launched the first-generation generic version of US FDA-approved oral anti-Covid-19 combination drug "Nirmatrelvir and Ritonavir" under the brand name "Paxovir" as its sole purpose of serving the humanity.

"Our pharmaceuticals industry is proving its capability by manufacturing the generic version of anti-coronavirus drugs and supplying them globally.

This is helping us boost the export growth of the sector," said Monjurul Alam, director for global business at Beacon Pharmaceuticals.

"It was the result of timely decision of the government and courageous initiative of the

local manufacturers." Beacon, however, is not taking new export orders for anti-coronavirus drugs as it has decided to cater to the local demand.

Alam thinks the pharmaceuticals sector will achieve significant growth in exports this year as companies are increasingly getting registration for new drugs and in new destinations.

Bangladesh also exports high-value drugs. For example, oncology products account for at least 20 per cent of the total export earnings from the local pharmaceuticals industry.

Rabbur Reza, chief operating officer of Beximco Pharmaceuticals Ltd, says the pharma export value is gradually improving, and the growth will be faster in the coming years.

"This is because we continue to enter and consolidate our position in the emerging and developed countries."

The exports are not without challenges. "We are facing challenges, especially in terms of rising costs of

many raw materials and freight costs," said Reza.

For example, the cost of shipping a 40-foot container unit has eased some 15 per cent from record highs above \$11,000 touched in September, according to the Freightos FBX index. But before the pandemic, the same container cost just \$1,300, reported Reuters in December.

Bangladesh exports more than 2,000 types of pharmaceuticals products to over 150 countries.

Of the total, antibiotic and oncology products account for 50 per cent of the items, said the Bangladesh Association of Pharmaceutical Industries (BAPI). SM Shafiuazzaman, managing director of Hudson Pharmaceuticals and secretary general of the BAPI, says the government is placing emphasis on the sales of pharmaceutical products abroad to raise exports.

Bangladesh's exports are largely concentrated in garments, which made up about 85 per cent of the annual external sales of \$38.76 billion in the last fiscal year.

NBR to outsource maintenance services

FROM PAGE B1

receipts issued to customers by retails through the EFDs to award prizes and encourage customers to seek receipts.

He said with the current manpower of the NBR, it can cover around one-third of the VAT area. "We cannot cover all the places to ensure proper collection of VAT from the retails," he said.

It will bring good pace in retail VAT collection if electronic fiscal device (EFD) machines could be spread across the country through the outsourcing process, he said at the event at the NBR headquarters.

The move comes more than one year after the NBR began to install the much-talked-about electronic cash registers to fight VAT dodging, in August 2020 at the retails, mainly in Dhaka, for free after purchasing the devices using taxpayers' money.

The revenue authority initially planned to install 10,000 EFDs and Sales Data Controllers (SDC) by June 2021 under the initiative.

It decided to expand the coverage gradually so that the state gets actual receipts of VAT, evasion of which is alleged to be rampant, particularly at

retails. It also launched a lottery to encourage consumers to ask for receipts of purchases issued by the EFDs.

Until now, the NBR could install nearly 3,500 EFDs, use of which is mandatory for 25 types of businesses, including shops, hotels, restaurants, sweet stores, clothing, furniture and electronics outlets and jewellers.

As per the latest plan to outsource the EFD, SDC and EFD management systems, the NBR would accept bids from interested firms until January 16, 2022, according to the tender notice.

Life insurance business lifeless for long

FROM PAGE B1

business, the pandemic hit. "We are really trying," he added.

Simultaneously, Fareast Islamic Life Insurance Company's life fund plunged 21 per cent to Tk 2,474 crore.

CEO Mohammed

Alamgir Kabir did not receive phone calls or reply to text messages.

Meanwhile, Padma Islamic Life Insurance's life fund plummeted 96 per cent to Tk 13 crore.

Company Secretary Shakhawat Hossain also did not receive phone calls

and reply to text messages. During this time, Sandhani Life Insurance Company's life fund dropped around 12 per cent to Tk 797 crore.

Claim settlements have been higher than premium income, reasoned CEO Nemai Kumar Saha,

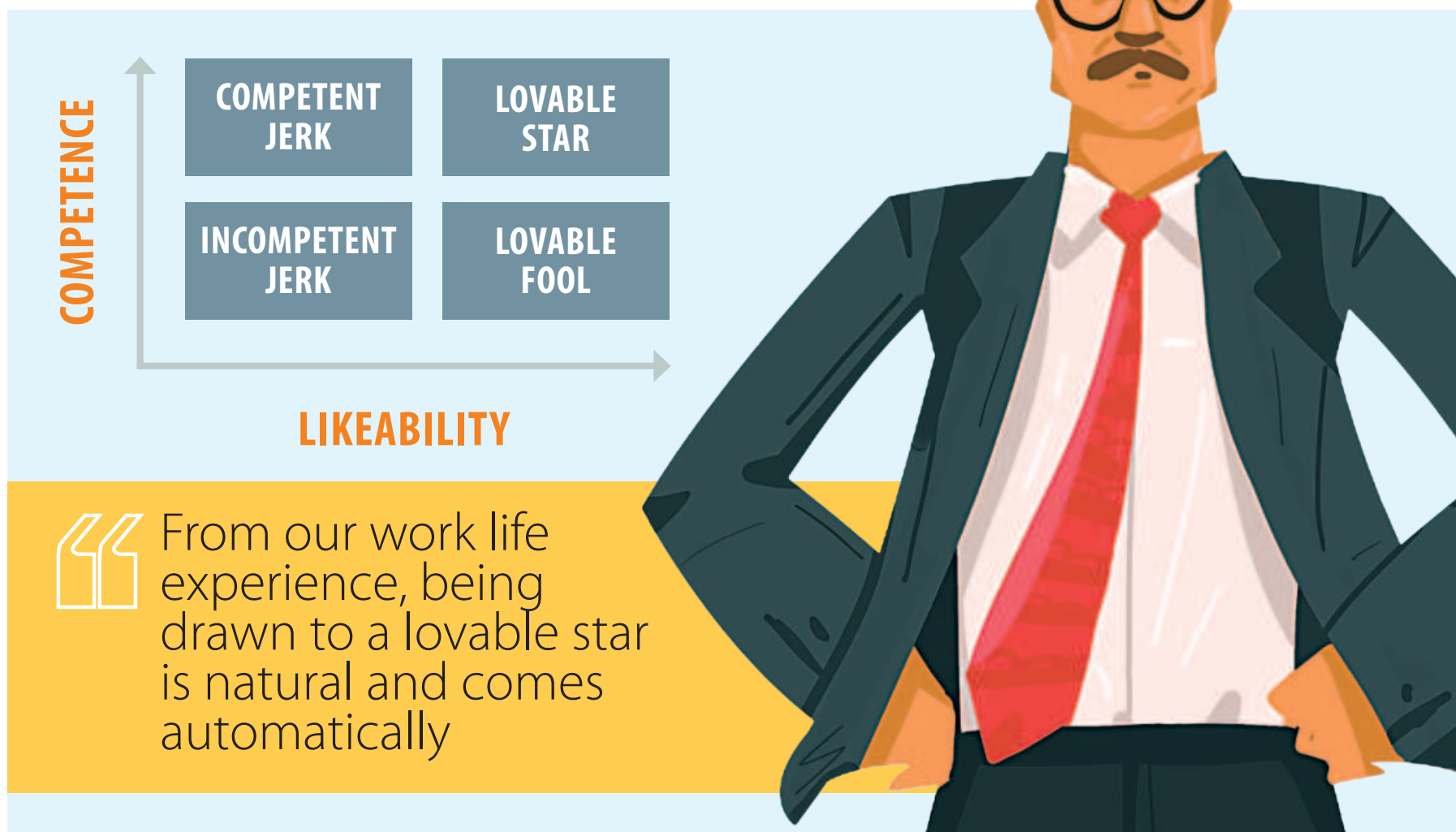
adding, "So, our liability is falling."

He lamented that business growth had not been that good while some insurers had not abided by rules, affecting the overall business.

"Our business is now growing," he added.

Its share price rose 80 per cent to Tk 36 in the last two years.

Stocks of Padma Life Insurance climbed 193 per cent to Tk 51, Sunlife 95 per cent to Tk 39, Fareast Islamic Life Insurance 56 per cent and Popular Life slightly up at Tk 85.



“From our work life experience, being drawn to a lovable star is natural and comes automatically”

DO YOU WANT A BOSS who is a competent jerk or a lovable star?

It may not be easy to upgrade a Lovable Fool to a Lovable Star by coaching or mentoring alone. This group needs to focus more on functional skills by attending functional as well as on-the-job training

MAHTAB UDDIN AHMED

It is a universal truth that criticising colleagues and bosses is basic to all work cultures although it hurts to admit it. A recent study found that the most talked about, rather criticised, in any organisation is the boss and its HR practices.

Most of us would agree that this practice often becomes a key recreation in the work environment where our wounded imagination and malicious wishes go in all directions. The bosses who are criticised and hated far outnumber the lucky few who earn the hallowed respect.

Faltu Boss! Arrogant Boss! Kichhu Bujhe Na! How often do we hear all this! However, the gap between perception and reality is a matter that is too often ignored; it is a grey area that renders close inspection for the optimum benefit.

A study conducted on 10,000 work relationships in five organisations by Tiziana Casciaro and Miguel Sousa Lobo of Harvard Business School and published later by Harvard Business Review, classified work partners into four archetypes: the Competent Jerk (mostly avoided), who knows a lot but is unpleasant; the Lovable Fool (mildly wanted), who may not know much but is a delight to work with; the

Lovable Star (desperately wanted), who is both smart and likable; and the Incompetent Jerk (desperately avoided), who is neither capable nor likeable and keeps the gossip mill the busiest!

From our work life experience, being drawn to a Lovable Star is natural and comes automatically. Similarly, the aversion of working with the Incompetent Jerk comes as no surprise. But the problem starts when people prefer the Lovable Fool over the Competent Jerk.



Recently, I carried out a voting on the above matrix as a part of my Facebook Live! It reaffirmed the original study carried out in 2005 which resulted in the general preference for the Lovable Fool over the Competent Jerk. Does that mean, we prefer likeability over competency? The answer is not so simple.

At different stages of organisation transformation, it needs a different set of competencies. In other words, these jerks and fools and stars, with their own unique broods, tantrums and antics, are all integral to the growth of a company.

A large majority of people like the Lovable Fool who can bridge gaps between diverse groups that might not otherwise interact. Their networking skills can significantly improve the company's engagement with the

disintegrated people who work in silo. So, in certain contexts, an organisation needs the Lovable Fools to bring and hold it together.

The risk with this group is that they often drive likeability at the expense of job performance which can make them vulnerable to downsizing when the need for engaging the team is over. To get the most out of them, leaders need to protect them and put them in positions that don't waste their bridge-building talents.

It may not be easy to upgrade a Lovable Fool to a Lovable Star by coaching or mentoring alone. This group needs to focus more on functional skills by attending functional as well as on-the-job training.

In case of the Competent Jerks, often their expertise goes untapped by people who just can't put up with them like accountants, engineers, researchers etc. But they can be conditioned by social engagements, professional coaching or by being held accountable for bad attitude.

This group is also called the backbone of the organisation as they are needed in every phase of the organisation's development. The potential of this group to shift to Lovable Star is likely to be high with professional coaching and mentorship.

Our five fingers are not the same in terms of shape, size and functionality but we can't do without any one of them. Likewise, an organisation needs all types of bosses. Using such a model would help us to create more Lovable Stars in the organisation and achieve business goals more efficiently, as the direct relationship between the number of Lovable Stars in the organisation and its overall business performance is undeniable.

The author is a telecom and management expert.

Stocks' rally continues

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Dhaka stocks finished higher yesterday compared to the preceding day as traders hoped for the index to better perform in the upcoming days.

The benchmark index of Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE), the DSEX, edged up 36 points, or 0.53 per cent, to 6,929. This is fifth consecutive trading days' rise for the index.

Investors' participation was higher in the market. Turnover of the premier bourse soared by around 20 per cent to Tk 1,414 crore.

As the market is rising, people are regaining their confidence, said a top official of a stock brokerage firm.

So general investors are also pouring in funds and the stock index is rising, he said, adding that they should not lose hope when it undergoes a correction.

They should invest in good stocks so that their investments remain safe, even if the Omicron variant has a big impact in the country, he added.

If anyone invest in companies with good performance records, they will not be detrimentally impacted in the long run, he added.

At the DSE, 218 stocks advanced, 121 fell and 39 remained the same.

Among the major sectors, non-bank financial institutions (NBFIs), services and real estate and textile closed in the positive. Life insurance, mutual funds and pharmaceuticals faced correction, according to UCB Stock Brokerage.

Bangladesh Shipping Corporation topped the gainers' list, rising 9.94 per cent, followed by Robi Axiata, National Housing Finance and Investments, Bangladesh Thai Aluminium, and Taufika Foods and Lovello Ice-cream.

Prime Insurance Company stocks shed the most, eroding 5.75 per cent, followed by National Life Insurance Company, Popular Life Insurance Company, Sonali Paper and Board Mills, and Sonali Life Insurance Company.

Stocks of Beximco were traded the most, worth Tk 100 crore, followed by Bangladesh Shipping Corporation, Fortune Shoes, Power Grid Company of Bangladesh, and Saif Powertec.

The stock bourse of Dhaka continued its gaining streak as the buoyant investors went on a purchase spree in sector-specific stocks, said International Leasing Securities in its daily market review.

Chittagong Stock Exchange (CSE) also rose yesterday. The CASPI, the main index of the bourse of the port city, rose 172 points, or 0.85 per cent, to 20,326.

Alibaba, Tencent fined for failing to report deals

REUTERS, Shanghai

China's top market regulator said on Wednesday it has fined units of Alibaba Group Holding Ltd, Tencent Holdings Ltd, and Bilibili Inc for failing to properly report about a dozen deals.

According to public filings, China's State Administration for Market Regulation (SAMR) placed penalties of 500,000 yuan (\$78,692) on the companies per deal, the maximum under China's 2008 anti-monopoly law.

Alibaba, Bilibili, and Tencent did not immediately respond to requests for comment. The penalties come amid an ongoing regulatory crackdown on a range of industries in China, with the tech sector as a main target.

SAMR in particular has targeted unreported deals involving tech giants. Last November it listed 43 investments that companies failed to report and levied a 500,000 yuan fine for each one.

US manufacturing catches breath

REUTERS, Washington

US manufacturing activity slowed in December amid a cooling in demand for goods, but supply constraints are starting to ease and a measure of prices paid for inputs by factories fell by the most in a decade.

The Institute for Supply Management (ISM) survey on Tuesday also suggested some improvement in labor supply, with a gauge of factory employment rising to an eight-month high.

Still, Timothy Fiore, chair of the ISM manufacturing business survey committee, noted that "shortages of critical lowest-tier materials, high commodity prices and difficulties in transporting products continue to plague reliable consumption."

The survey does not fully capture the impact of the Omicron Covid-19 variant, which is rapidly spreading across the United States and abroad.

Sky-rocketing infections could force workers to stay home and halt the tentative supply-chain progress.

"There's still a lot of ground to make up before supply chains fully normalize, but cooling prices and increased employment are positive signs," said Will Comperolle, a senior economist at FHN Financial in New York.

The ISM's index of national factory activity fell to a reading of 58.7 last month, the lowest level since January 2021, from 61.1 in November.

A reading above 50 indicates expansion in manufacturing, which accounts for 11.9 per cent of the US economy. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast the index would fall to 60.1.

All of the six biggest manufacturing industries - chemical products, fabricated metal products, computer and electronic products, food, transportation equipment, and petroleum and coal products - reported moderate-to-strong growth.



A GMC Hummer EV truck is seen at the General Motors' Factory Zero in Detroit, Michigan. All of the six biggest manufacturing industries in the United States reported moderate-to-strong growth.

PHOTO: AFP

Oil slips below \$80

REUTERS, London

Oil prices slipped below \$80 a barrel on Wednesday after OPEC+ producers stuck to an agreed output target rise for February and investors assessed the impact of a spike in Covid-19 cases caused by the Omicron variant.

Brent crude futures were down 18 cents, or 0.23 per cent, to \$79.82 a barrel by 0945 GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures declined 23 cents, or 0.3 per cent, to \$76.76.

OPEC+ producers, which include members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries along with Russia and others, on Tuesday agreed to add another 400,000 barrels per day of supply in February, as they have done each month since August.

While OPEC+ raised its output target, it will likely struggle to reach it, as members face difficulties ramping up production, Barclays analysts said.