

BSEC eases SME board trading rules

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC) has eased one condition for trading shares on the small capital board to bring about more vibrancy.

Any investors registered with the stock exchanges' electronic subscription system and maintaining a minimum investment of Tk 20 lakh in listed stocks will be allowed to trade on the SME board, said a notification yesterday.

The investment figure can be calculated based on market value or cost, whichever is higher as per the portfolio statement, said the stock market regulator.

The DSE SME, a small-cap board, was rolled out on April 30, 2019, so that small and medium enterprises (SME) having a paid-up capital between Tk 5 crore and Tk 30 crore could avail financing from the stock market.

Previously, the eligibility hinged on being registered and having an investment of at least Tk 50 lakh.

The Central Depository Bangladesh Ltd will provide detailed information of the eligible investors based on the minimum investment condition on a quarterly basis. The BSEC eased the condition in response to requests of several merchant banks.

Though it may bring about more vibrancy at the board, stock investors need to be cautious in investments and analyse the potentials of companies beforehand.

IMF chief urges G20 to move faster on debt relief

AFP, Washington

Advanced nations should "immediately" provide relief to developing nations whose debt burdens have swelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic, IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said Wednesday.

In a message to Group of 20 finance ministers and central bankers gathering in Jakarta this week, the IMF chief renewed her call for urgent action from creditors, warning of dire consequences if they fail to do so.

New trade tools needed to fight China state-led trade

REUTERS, Washington

The United States needs to pursue new strategies and update its domestic trade tools to deal with China's "state-led, non-market policies and practices", the US Trade Representative's office said on Wednesday in a new assessment report.

USTR said in its annual report on China's compliance with World Trade Organization rules that the "Phase I" trade agreement signed by the Trump administration two years ago failed to address fundamental US concerns with China's industrial policies and supporting policies, including "massive financial resources."

It said such support, which includes favorable regulatory support to Chinese industry and limited market access for imported goods and services, is often aimed at specific targets for capacity, production and market share.

The report, issued annually to Congress since China joined the WTO in 2001, is the first issued under US Trade Representative Katherine Tai and reflects her China trade strategy.

It follows final 2021 trade data showing Beijing's failure to meet promised two-year targets for purchasing US goods, services and energy under the Phase I deal, which eased a tariff war between the world's two largest economies.

"China has not moved to embrace the market-oriented principles on which the WTO and its rules are based, despite the representations that it made when it joined 20 years ago," Tai said in a statement.

"China has instead retained and expanded its state-led, non-market approach to the economy and trade."



Workers are loading timbers onto trawlers on the banks of the Sandhya river in Nesarabad upazila of Pirojpur. The largest hub for wood in Bangladesh has become the mainstay of the economy of the upazila. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Timber trade in Nesarabad sees Tk 1,000cr annual sales

SUSHANTA GHOSH and HABIBUR RAHMAN

The timber trade that has been running on the banks of the Sandhya river in Nesarabad upazila of Pirojpur for decades has emerged as the largest hub for woods in Bangladesh.

Woods worth more than Tk 500 crore are sold every year from the wholesale hub and the activity has become the mainstay of the local economy.

Traders, buyers and government officials say the timber business is the country's largest wood trading hub thanks to lower price, availability, higher quality and water connectivity.

Traders say although the timber business in the area has been going on for more than a hundred years, the main centre on the banks of the Sandhya has been established about 50 years ago.

Woods also come from various districts of the Barishal division alongside neighbouring Bagerhat and Khulna districts.

Selim Hawladar, president of the Swarupkathi Char Kath Babosayee Samity, a forum of timber traders, has been involved in the trade for almost four decades.

He says local timbers are sent to Dhaka, Sylhet, Kishoreganj and Narsingdi through cargo vessels and trawlers. Every day, at least four cargo vessels carry 25,000 to 30,000 cubic feet of wood worth Tk 2 crore.

More than 900 traders are members of the association. Besides, there are at least 5,000 workers involved in various stages of the trade, including loading and unloading.

The timber business has expanded to other parts of the upazila and at least 50,000 people are involved in this profession, said Hawladar.



"It is the main economic activity of Nesarabad." Ruhul Amin, another trader, says the main timber comes from raintree, chambal and mahogany trees.

Mahogany is sold at a price of Tk 2,000 per CFT, raintree at Tk 900 and chambal tree at Tk 500.

There are 91 factories in the Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC) area under the upazila, according to Nesarabad BSCIC Industrial City Officer Md Shadadat Hossain.

Of them, 40 are involved in the trading of timber products. At least 2,200 workers are employed there, he said.

There are also about 40 sawmills, hundreds of furniture shops, four or five cricket bat factories, and a variety of wood-based factories in the upazila, he said.

Mosharraf Hossain, upazila nirbahi officer of Nesarabad, says the government gets revenue of Tk 60 lakh every year from one point of the Sandhya.

There are 15 other timber trading spots in the upazila, including Swarupkathi Pilot High School, Akolom, Jagannathkathi, Mahmudkathi and Inderhat, said Faruq Hossain, a timber trader in Sutiakathi union under the upazila.

These centres together with the Nesarabad hub see as high as Tk 1,000 crore in annual trade, according to traders.

If all of these centres are brought under the revenue collection system, the government would earn crores of taka, Mosharraf Hossain said.

"The timber business is the livelihood of 50,000 people in the region."

The Great Resignation: Are we ready for it?

MAHTAB UDDIN AHMED

Patrick in the US recently quit his job and decided to do something new so that he can control his lifestyle. Seeing the resignation letter, the boss asked the reason for the resignation. In reply, he categorically said that he likes to take control of his own life instead of being a slave to the company.

When asked, what he plans to do? He said he would open a news webpage that will only provide positive news. Anyone who would log in to the webpage wouldn't find any news! Why? Because "no news is good news".

Patrick is just one of the profiles of people who are going for mass resignation post Covid-19 and spoiled by the stimulus from the government.

The Great Resignation is a phenomenon that describes record numbers of people leaving their jobs after the pandemic ends which many experts could not anticipate like the supply chain fiasco.

The economy is bigger

than the pre-Covid period but employment is down by 5 million US workers. The trend is similar in Europe, Australia and other developed countries. Quitting rates are particularly high among low-paying industries.

As per the US Bureau of Statistics, the hardest-hit industries (in order of higher number of resignations) include leisure and hospitality; trade, transportation and utilities; professional and business services; education and health; manufacturing; and construction.

Interestingly, there is a direct relationship

between growth and the number of resignations. According to a recent survey carried out by Fortune in collaboration with Deloitte, 73 per cent of the CEOs say that labour or skills shortage is the biggest external impediment to disrupt their business in 2022. Therefore, attracting, recruiting and retaining talents would be the biggest challenge for them in the post-Covid scenario. Good news for our HR friends!

Because of the above, a great shift from employer-dominant market to employee-dominant market is taking place. The power is shifting to employees which many of us have not seen during our lifetime. The trend may have been driven by "pent-up resignations" during the pandemic, generous government stimulus, and increased inflation, which reduced the buying power of employees and forced them to look for increment. Many retained people are burned out after working too hard for a long period, realising the importance of balancing family life.

In light of the challenges, the good companies have already taken certain steps to mitigate the impact like increased flexibility (balancing work from home and work from the office); more emphasis on well-being, mental health and increased pay; attention to culture; and ring-fencing. Some of the countries are even considering three to four days' work week instead of five to six days.

On the employee front, they are preferring part-time jobs over full-time, freelancing, investment in the stock market (a maximum

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In the current world of a constantly changing environment driven by innovation and digitalisation, we should not be comfortable assuming that the developed market phenomena are not going to impact us



US Trade Representative Katherine Tai said China has a long history of violating, disregarding and circumventing WTO rules to achieve its industrial policy objectives.

PHOTO: AFP

Canada inflation hits 30-year high

AFP, Ottawa

Canadian inflation rose to 5.1 per cent in January -- far outpacing economists' expectations -- as price increases hit a 30-year high, the government statistical agency said Wednesday.

Rising fuel prices, along with food and shelter costs, were again major contributors to the monthly gain. The figure was up from 4.8 per cent in December.

"Covid-19 pandemic-related challenges continue to weigh on supply chains," adding to consumers' fuel and grocery bills, Statistics Canada said in a statement.

The largest price increases at the checkout were for meat, margarine, condiments, spices and vinegars, fresh fruit and bakery products, as well as beer and wine, the agency said. Drivers also paid more at the pump as "concerns over global oil supplies in response to international political events" drove up gasoline prices, it said.