



Land development nearing completion by the Jamuna river for an industrial park of the Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation in Sirajganj. However, only five out of 17 categories of works have been completed, with the authorities set to seek a one-year extension of the completion deadline. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU

Sirajganj industrial park set for further delay

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, back from Sirajganj

Having already faced several cost revisions and deadline extensions, an industrial park of the Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC) in Sirajganj is on way to be delayed by yet another year.

The project began its journey in December 1999 with an estimated budget of Tk 197 crore with a view to creating 1 lakh jobs, spurring economic activities and reducing poverty in the poverty-prone northern districts. The completion date was set at June 2004.

But the plan was scrapped altogether in April 2004 before being revived in August 2010 with a revised budget of Tk 379 crore and a completion date of June 2014.

Another revision took the project cost to Tk 489.96 crore and deadline to 2015.

The project suffered two more corrections, taking the cost to Tk 628.10 crore and then to Tk 719.21 crore and end dates to June 2019 and then to June 2021 respectively.

Afterwards, there has been only one single time extension, up until June 2022.

But the project director, Md Abdul Khaleque, now wants another year. He said he would apply for it soon and that the government would likely grant it.

Talking to The Daily Star, he assured that the cost would remain the same.

"We have already finished 73 per cent of the physical work while 63 per cent of the project cost has been spent," he said.

The recent developments give hope that the 829 industrial plots being prepared on 400 acres of land by the Jamuna river for investors of small and medium industrial units will create 2 lakh new jobs.

On the delays, the project director blamed land acquisition taking up too much time alongside necessary approvals from different authorities.

"We got the handover of land in 2014 but we were unable to start the work due to the lack of necessary approvals from different authorities," said Khaleque.

"After getting environment clearance, water ministry's clearance and other official papers, land development work began in 2018. Price revisions were in tune with the situation as of that moment," he added.

A visit to the project site revealed land development and construction of a BSCIC building nearing completion.

Construction of roads, drainage, boundary walls, power sub-station, gas connection and greening was underway.

"We have 17 items to work on and of them five have been completed while the rest are underway," Heronmoy Borthon, a BSCIC assistant engineer.

"Just 5 kilometres out of the planned 17 kilometres of roads have been constructed while 7 kilometres out of 34 kilometres of drainage," he said.

Apart from greenery, the industrial park will have 20 acres of ponds.

2 Lakh New Jobs
"...once investors come to invest...2 lakh jobs will be created," Md Saizidul Islam, assistant manager of the BSCIC's Sirajganj office.

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Stocks turnover plunges 25pc

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The main index of the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) yesterday stretched its gaining streak to two sessions in a row despite a massive fall in market turnover thanks to renewed interest among investors.

The DSEX, the benchmark index of the country's premier bourse, edged up 14 points, or 0.20 per cent, to close the day at 6,771.

However, turnover, an important market indicator, dropped 25 per cent to Tk 836 crore at the same time, from Tk 1,116 crore the previous day.

Stocks ended on a positive note for the second day running as investors are showing interest in cheaper stocks while also putting fresh bets on sector-specific issues, International Leasing Securities said in its daily market review.

Investors were mostly focused on shares of non-bank financial institutions amid the release of their December-end declarations.

However, turnover decreased due to shorter trading hours for the month of Ramadan.

Besides, some investors are still following a cautious stance and reducing their exposure in fear of the price hike of necessary commodities during the month, it added.

Among the sectors, financial institutions rose 2.9 per cent, cement increased 2.9 per cent, and mutual funds edged up 0.9 per cent.

Losers took a modest lead over gainers as out of the 379 traded issues, 195 declined, 129 advanced, and 55 remained unchanged.

The DS30, the blue-chip index, and DSES, the Shariah-based index, gained 13 points and 2 points respectively.

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Focus on sustainability sparks innovation

Says Amanda Murphy, head of commercial banking of HSBC for South and Southeast Asia

SOHEL PARVEZ and AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

The Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC) has set a goal to provide between \$750 billion and \$1 trillion in financing and investment globally in the next decade to support its clients to lower carbon emissions and achieve sustainable growth.

"HSBC is going to provide its clients the access to the fund to encourage them to turn their production facilities green in order to guide them towards net zero emission," said Amanda Murphy, head of commercial banking of the bank for South and Southeast Asia.

In recent years, the London-headquartered but Asia-focused lender has stepped up its green lending in Bangladesh as well.

HSBC Bangladesh has structured tailored sustainable finance solutions of more than \$300 million in the last two years. It also introduced the first-ever sustainability linked loan, which is connected to environmental, social and governance performance targets, for Square Group in 2020.

"We will continue to assist clients to achieve their sustainability goals. As part of that commitment, HSBC Bangladesh has taken the leading position in Bangladesh to drive sustainable financing," Murphy said in an interview with The Daily Star in Dhaka.

"We also believe, as a global bank, it is our duty to take a pole position in terms of tackling the climate challenge."

Murphy was in the capital last month to celebrate the silver jubilee of the international bank in the country.

The British multinational lender opened its first office in Dhaka in 1996.

Today, it accounts for 10.5 per cent of the market share in trade financing and facilitation as it offers a full range of banking services to customers through wholesale banking and wealth and personal banking.

HSBC has a presence in all of the eight export processing zones to facilitate international trade.

During her stay, Murphy visited several factories financed by HSBC, one of the world's largest banking and financial services organisations. "One of the things that really impresses me so much for Bangladesh's customers is that all of them are talking about their commitment to climate change. They are talking about their commitment to social goals," she said.

This was her third visit to the country.

She joined HSBC in 1994 and now oversees 13 markets, including Australia, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, New Zealand and Singapore.

Murphy said there have been many changes in Bangladesh in the last 10 years.

"Leading factories are being built here. They are committed to sustainable principles and are working closely to be internationally recognised."

She thinks making factories green would benefit entrepreneurs.

Big buyers in the US and Europe want to source goods from the factories that have the right certified standards.

"So, we are seeing that shift," she said.

"Years ago, we did not necessarily have an understanding perhaps. Now all the western companies, the big buyers have expectations of what they want to see in the labour conditions."

The top official of HSBC shared the bank's focus on digitalisation.

"Technology is important for speed,

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US labour market nears full recovery

AFP, Washington

The US labour market has almost recovered from the mass joblessness caused by the pandemic, adding hundreds of thousands of positions last month and sending the unemployment rate nearly to where it was before Covid-19 broke out nationwide.

The Labor Department reported Friday that the unemployment rate fell more than analysts had predicted in March to 3.6 per cent, a hair above its February 2020 level of 3.5 per cent, while the economy added 431,000 jobs in the month.

Though the hiring total was slightly below analysts' forecasts, it was nonetheless a strong figure that underscored how far the economy has come since the pandemic started two years ago.

The economy has "gone from being on the mend to being on the move," President Joe Biden said Friday at the White House, as his administration grapples with low approval ratings driven in part by inflation, which has hit record levels during his presidency.

The economy has also added millions of jobs since Biden took office last year, but analysts said they doubted that the robust pace of hiring could be maintained.

"Today's job report is great news as it means the economy has almost fully recovered from the blow caused by the pandemic," Mark Zandi of Moody's Analytics wrote on Twitter.

"But it is somewhat disquieting in that the job market must cool off quickly, or inflation, our number one economic problem, will soon be a much bigger one."

The data was released as the Federal Reserve undergoes a delicate process of fighting price increases by raising interest rates from the zero level they held them at when the pandemic was at its worst, while simultaneously trying not to harm the recovery.



People order food at a taco stand in Los Angeles, California. The US added 431,000 jobs in March and the unemployment rate fell to 3.6 per cent, bringing the labour market closer to where it was before the Covid-19 pandemic began, the government said on April 1.

PHOTO: AFP

Baltic states stop Russian gas imports

AFP, Riga

The head of Latvia's natural gas storage operator said Saturday the Baltic states were no longer importing Russian natural gas.

"If there were still any doubts about whether there may be any trust in deliveries from Russia, current events clearly show us that there is no more trust," said Uldis Bariss, CEO of Conexus Baltic Grid. "Since April 1st Russian natural gas is no longer flowing to Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania," he told Latvian radio.

He added that the Baltic market was currently being served by gas reserves stored underground in Latvia. The move comes as Russian President Vladimir Putin has sought to leverage Russia's status as an energy power.

With his economy crippled by unprecedented international sanctions, Putin warned EU members that they would need to set up rouble accounts to pay for Russian gas.