Stocks rebound after 4-day decline

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Stocks in Bangladesh yesterday ended a four-day losing streak as investors capitalised on declining share prices in anticipation of future gains, according to market analysts.

The DSEX, the benchmark index of the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE), rose 21 points, or 0.31 per cent, to hit 6,662 by the end of the trading session.

Similarly, the CASPI, the main index of the Chittagong Stock Exchange, gained 42 points, or 0.21 per cent, to close at 19,544.

"Stocks posted modest gains as investors are showing interest in stocks with lucrative prices," International Leasing Securities Ltd (ILSL) said in its daily market review.

Daily turnover at the DSE stood at Tk 643 crore, up 24.8 per cent from Tk 515 crore the previous day

As such, investors increased their participation in order to grab the potential of future gains by purchasing cheaper stocks, it added.

However, ILSL went on to say that investors are following a cautious stance as inflation in the country is rising gradually.

Meanwhile, daily turnover at the DSE stood at Tk 643 crore, up 24.8 per cent from Tk 515 crore the previous day.

Non-bank financial institutions booked the highest gains followed by the pharmaceutical, fuel and power, and engineering sectors.

Telecommunication experienced the highest loss while bank, and food and allied stocks followed suit, according to the daily market update by BRAC EP Brokerage Ltd. Of the total 379 securities traded at the DSE, 217 gained, 110 fell and 52 remained unchanged.

Shares of City Bank Ltd advanced 4.78 per cent to Tk 26.30 after it posted nearly 26 per cent growth in its earnings per share, which stood at Tk 5.15 in 2021.

The private lender, which became the eighth highest gainer yesterday, declared 12.5 per cent cash and 12.5 per cent stock dividends for the year.

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SOARING PRICES OF COMMODITIES

Lower-income people hung out to dry

SUKANTA HALDER *and* MD ABU TALHA SARKER

For the last two months, 35-year old security guard Saiful Islam could not send any money to his parents living in a village in Rangpur, one of the poverty-stricken divisions in Bangladesh.

Rickshaw-puller Miraj Shaikh is failing to put aside money for the treatment of his three-year-old baby.

Day labourer Anisur Rahman Mondol could not provide any meat to his family.

And van-puller Shahin Hawlader is considering returning to his village from Dhaka if the ongoing cost of living crisis persists.

These are the stories of distress of the low-income people and similar stories of struggle, anguish and helplessness could be found if you ask the low-income people in your neighbourhood about how they are coping with the high prices of essential foods.

The spike in the prices of key food items and other costs has eaten up much of their purchasing capacity, made their struggle harder and shattered their hopes to live a better life.

And it came at a time when many of them had hoped to make a turnaround as economic activities picked up from the coronavirus pandemic-induced economic slowdown and on and off lockdowns, which destroyed much of their income opportunities.

Officially, one-fifth of the nearly 17 crore population are poor but private research organisations say the number of poor people has increased after the pandemic hit Bangladesh. Now, the rise in the cost of living, fueled by higher commodity prices amid the Russia-Ukraine war, has dashed their recovery hope.

"It has become difficult for me to bear the family expenses amid the surging prices of essentials," said Abdur Rahman, a street vendor, who sells fruits in Mirpur in the capital.

"So, I have cut back on the costs on daily groceries to strike a balance between the expenses and my income," said Rahman, who has become the sole breadwinner of the six-member family after his father became sick in 2016.

Before the latest price shock, the 25-year-old used to spend around Tk 5,000 per month to buy rice, fish, eggs, vegetables, meat and other basic items. Now, he has to make do with Tk 3,500.

"It hurts. But what else can I do?" asked Rahman.

Saiful Islam works as a security guard at a house in Mugda for a monthly salary of Tk 10,000. He has to spend Tk 4,000 as house rent for his three-member family.

Even two months ago, he had to send Tk 1,500 to his parents living in the village and set aside Tk 1,200-1,300 for his two-year-old son.

The rising cost of living has forced him to cut down on the budget for his son by a quarter. He also has not been able to send any money to his parents in the last two months.

"My parents are relying on personal loans to survive," Islam said.

"Life has become miserable for us. How long will we have to survive eating rice, pulses and potatoes?"

Prices of rice, flour, pulses, oil, fish, meat, vegetables, soap and milk rose by 12 per cent in February, according to a report of the Consumers Association of Bangladesh.

The prices of essentials, including flour, edible oil, sugar, red lentil, eggs and onions, have gone up by 10 to 40 per cent in the past one year, data from state-run Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) showed.

In Bangladesh, inflation has been at a higher level for the elevated commodity prices globally, fueled by supply constraints, pent-up demand and unprecedented shipping costs.

Inflation rose 6.17 per cent in February, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

Miraj Shaikh lives in the capital's Agargaon area with his four-member family. He rides a rickshaw and can save Tk 300-350 every day after meeting all expenses.

His three-year-old son's heart has a hole and for this, he has to take him to the hospital every three months for a regular checkup.

"Doctors have told us an operation will be possible when he turns five. So, we have been depositing some money regularly for him. But we have not been able to save any money for him in the last three months," he said.

Shaikh's monthly budget for rice was Tk 1,100 before the price hike. But because of the rising expenditures, he can't afford the same quality rice as in the past.

His family used to eat eggs four days a week and fish once a week. "Now, we eat eggs twice a week. We eat rice with vegetables and lentils during the rest of the week," said the 27-year-old.

Anisur Rahman Mondol, a daily-wage labourer in the capital's Gabtoli area, earns Tk 300-350 a day and lives in a rented room with wife and four children.

"None of my family members have eaten fish or meat for nearly a month. When my children ask me why there has been no fish or meat, I have no answer."

The average prices of pumpkin, cauliflower, cabbage, papaya, green bean, gourd, cucumber, brinjal, radish, carrot, tomato, and pea have risen by about 60 per cent. Ayesha Begum works as a domestic help in Kachukhet and earns Tk 9,000. She became the breadwinner of the four-member family after losing her husband a few years ago.

"What I earn today is not enough to run the family. So, I have borrowed some money," said the 33-year-old.

The family's house rent is Tk 3,500 and it has been unpaid for the last two months.

"The homeowner has already told me to clear the dues or leave. I am at a loss," she said.

Afsar Ali, a construction worker, came to Dhaka from Barishal 20 years ago. He lives in Merul Badda with his parents, wife and a daughter, who has been divorced recently.

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How do you define a good boss?

MAMUN RASHID

Just after leaving Citibank early in the second quarter of 2011, I met an HR specialist in Singapore. An investment banker friend introduced me to her over dinner and upon learning about my recent decision to leave commercial banking after 25 years, she asked: "How were you as a boss?"

The question was simple and short, but it really got me thinking. And now, after eleven years, I can tell you with confidence that ensuring the best out of your colleagues warrants a lot of empathy and handholding from the boss.

Of course, I had my fair share of mistakes, possibly a few too many. You might be a terrific revenue driver but given the choice, would your employees ever want to work for you again? Most importantly, do you know how it feels to work for you? Beyond the quantitative metrics we measure bosses by, these human factors determine your efficacy to a large extent.

The happiness factors

If you ask someone what makes employees happy at work, many are likely to think in terms of tangible rewards: a good salary, pleasant workspace, generous benefits, and the like.

However, workplace specialists are increasingly discovering that for many workers the "happiness factor" depends on intangibles such as respect, care, trust, fairness, engagement, mentorship, and according to many management "gurus", empowerment.

It is in fact the small things which make employees feel committed to an organisation.

Workplace happiness often depends on two components: the institution, its culture, and the boss.

Workplace specialists are increasingly discovering that for many workers the "happiness factor" depends on intangibles such as respect, care, trust, fairness, engagement, mentorship and empowerment

A boss may often be considered an institution by himself, one who sets the corporate culture, creates a positive and a dynamic work environment, sets high standards, and ultimately gets people engaged in their work. It may happen that you are happy in your work but not happy in a specific environment due to a variety of factors, such as a bad boss, a bad corporate culture, or a colleague who makes your life miserable.

People have different opinions on what brings them happiness and satisfaction on the job, but certain priorities remain constant in terms of what employees say makes them happy.

The boss vs the company

Bosses indeed play a key role in determining a worker's happiness factor. More than half of the employees responding to an annual job-satisfaction survey admit they do not leave companies, they leave bosses. This leads to a question: When workers accept employment, do they only join institutions, or do they join for the leaders too?

It is not easy to be a good boss: you must be fully present and responsive to the complexities of each new situation and manage a diverse group of people, including your employees whom you must develop.

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Russia jacks up its emergency spending fund by $3.5b

REUTERS

The Russian government said on Sunday it has increased its reserve fund used for emergency spending by 273.4 billion roubles ($3.52 billion) to ensure economic stability against the backdrop of Western sanctions over Ukraine.

The sanctions, imposed after Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24 in what Moscow describes as a "special military operation", cut Russia off from the global financial system and supply channels.

Western nations are also moving closer to a complete ban on energy from Moscow to strip the Kremlin of its biggest source of revenue. The government has already pledged more than 1 trillion roubles in anti-crisis support to businesses, social payments and to families with children, which will take up all of this year's incoming revenues, so there will be no budget surplus.

"The funds, among other things, will be used to implement measures aimed at ensuring economic stability in the light of external sanctions," the government said in a statement on Sunday.

The government's reserve fund is a cash cushion to be used for unexpected spending that was not projected in the state budget. Last year, it was used for one-off social payments and to fight the pandemic.

The government said the main source of the reserve fund's increase was 271.6 billion roubles in additional energy revenues received in the first quarter, as oil and gas prices rose in response to the recovery from the impact of Covid-19 and the Russia-Ukraine conflict raised the risk of disrupted supply. Russia supplies around 40 per cent of the European Union's natural gas consumption, which the International Energy Agency values at more than $400 million per day.

A string of cargo ships are docked at the Black Sea port of Odessa in the war-hit Ukraine. The country yesterday banned all imports from Russia, which was one of its key trading partners before the war, when its annual imports were valued at $6 billion. PHOTO: REUTERS/FILE

Ukraine bans all imports from Russia

REUTERS, *Melbourne*

Ukraine has banned all imports from Russia, one of its key trading partners before the war with annual imports valued at about $6 billion, and called on other countries to follow and impose harsher economic sanctions on Moscow.

"Today we officially announced a complete termination of trade in goods with the aggressor state," Economy Minister Yulia Svyrydenko wrote on her Facebook page on Saturday.

"From now on, no Russian Federation's products will be able to be imported into the territory of our state."

Since the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on Feb 24, exchange of goods and services between the two neighbouring countries has been virtually non-existent, but Saturday's move makes the termination of imports a law.