

## Dhaka Travel Mart on June 2

STAR BUSINESS DESK

The 17th edition of Dhaka Travel Mart 2022, a three-day travel and tourism fair, is scheduled to begin on June 2, organised by fortnightly The Bangladesh Monitor with US Bangla Airlines as the co-sponsor and online travel agency Triplover the title sponsor.

Mohammed Abdullah Al Mamun, managing director of US Bangla Airlines, and Kazi Wahidul Alam, editor of The Bangladesh Monitor, signed a deal to this end at the former's corporate head office in Dhaka recently, said a press release.

## Inflation in Sri Lanka hits new record

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's inflation hit a seventh consecutive record high in April as a petrol shortage worsened and food prices rose sharply, official data showed Monday.

The National Consumer Price Index rose 33.8 per cent year-on-year in April, more than six times the 5.5 per cent inflation of a year earlier. Annual food inflation stood at 45.1 per cent, according to the latest data released by the Department of Census and Statistics.

Hammered by a foreign exchange crisis, the country's 22 million people have been enduring acute shortages of essentials – including food and medicines – for months.

Protests are continuing outside President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's office demanding his resignation over the unprecedented economic turmoil.

Inflation is likely to rise further in May as fuel price hikes of 35 per cent for petrol and 65 per cent for diesel – commonly used in public transport – feed into the wider economy.



Masum pedals his for-hire rickshaw around Khulna city, managing to earn at best Tk 400 a day for his five-member family. Ensuring the upkeep of such low-income families is increasingly becoming challenging for fresh surges in prices of daily essentials. The photo was taken in front of New Market kitchen market in Khulna city recently.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

# Turkey dreams of far-fetched gas pipeline with Israel

AFP, Istanbul

Turkey is ready for energy cooperation with Israel after years of enmity, reviving a project to pipe Israeli gas to Europe as Ankara seeks to reduce its dependence on Russia.

But the plan faces Israeli scepticism over past diplomatic tensions and seems a pipe dream in the eyes of experts due to its logistical complexity and cost.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has voiced readiness to "cooperate (with Israel) in energy and energy security projects" with the prospect of shipping Israeli gas to Europe through Turkey as the conflict in Ukraine triggers supply fears.

"Turkey has the experience and capacity to implement such projects. The recent developments in our region has shown once again the importance of energy security," he said in March.

Israeli President Isaac Herzog made a landmark visit to Ankara in March to build relations with his Turkish counterpart when both leaders proclaimed a new era following more than a decade of diplomatic rupture.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu will visit Israel on Wednesday. Energy Minister Fatih Donmez is also expected to travel but it was not immediately clear if he will accompany Cavusoglu.

But according to some experts, there is little Israeli interest in energy cooperation with Turkey.

"Energy relations are forged by cooperative, trusting states – certainly not how one would describe the current dynamics between the two countries," Gabi Mitchell, policy fellow at the Mitvim Institute in Israel, told AFP.

"There are those in Israel who argue that Erdogan is an untrustworthy party," he said. The Turkish leader is known for his angry outbursts at the Jewish state, especially over its policy towards the Palestinians.

In 2009, he stormed out of a Davos panel after a heated exchange with the then Israeli president, Shimon Peres.

NATO member Turkey had been Israel's key ally in the Muslim world until a 2010 crisis where 10 civilians died in an Israeli raid on a ship seeking to breach a blockade

on the Gaza Strip.

In 2016, the two countries agreed to start examining the feasibility of an undersea pipeline to pump Israeli gas to Turkish consumers and on to Europe.

But no progress has been made amid the tension between the two sides, with Erdogan seeing himself as a champion of the Palestinian cause and a strong backer of Hamas.

Yet Erdogan has been muted in his criticism in recent months and only voiced sadness over the Israeli-Palestinian violence at the flashpoint Al-Aqsa mosque compound, in a phone call with Herzog in April. The pipeline project runs through controversial waters in the eastern Mediterranean, where Turkey and EU members Cyprus and Greece are often at odds.

Mitchell said: "This isn't something Israel is interested in pursuing as it would damage relations" with Cyprus, Greece and the European Union.

"I've never thought the project feasible," the Foreign Policy Research Institute's Middle East Programme director Aaron Stein told AFP.

## Foodpanda looks to tap growth Stocks stop

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"As foodpanda operates across competitive markets, such data can be used by others to make any calculations."

Foodpanda launched pandamart, also an online platform, at the end of 2020, with an aim to deliver groceries and daily essentials at the doorsteps of customers within 30 minutes.

The idea came up as people found it difficult to come out of their houses for groceries owing to the risk of catching the virus and lockdowns.

"So, we grabbed the opportunity and partnered with major groceries," said Siddiky, who studied economics at the North South University.

After the rollout, pandamart faced some challenges since it could not track the inventory live. As a result, customer experience was not at its best since many did not receive their desired products after ordering.

This led the company to introduce dark stores, or warehouses, which gave pandamart complete control over inventory. This also increased its control over the supply chain.

Subsequently, customer experience improved. "The delivery time has been brought down to 20 minutes to 30 minutes," Siddiky said.

Currently, pandamart runs its operations through 32 warehouses in 16 districts, including the capital city and plans to expand further.

Siddiky thinks the food and groceries market is under-penetrated in Bangladesh.

"The food and groceries market size can be valued at \$9-10 billion. The online

industry has not had even 2-3 per cent penetration."

The young entrepreneur describes Bangladesh as a very good market in terms of profitability.

"We are on a path toward profitability. If we can't make a profit, the business will not be sustainable."

"If we constantly keep burning money, we will run the risk of losing investment. We need to prove that we are on our way to building a sustainable business, and we are doing just that."

Siddiky says if there are constant complaints against a particular restaurant, it intervenes and takes action.

"The percentage of mistakes is very low on our platform. We have a large team to ensure absolute minimisation of mistakes."

Foodpanda has a dedicated team to train restaurants, both online and offline.

"We do what we can to avoid our customers having a negative experience. If necessary, we may also delist restaurants from our platform."

Siddiky alleges that there were instances where customers harassed riders.

"In such cases, we have blocked the customers and taken appropriate legal actions."

He refuted complaints that foodpanda takes a hefty commission from restaurant owners, saying the average commission rate is low.

"Other companies, around the world, charge a higher rate than we do in Bangladesh. Even in the Indian market, aggregators charge a higher commission than us on average."

For a food delivery aggregator, a commission below 25-30 per cent leads

to the unsustainability of the business, he added.

In order to ensure the safety of riders, foodpanda trains them on safety issues while onboarding them. It has insurance that covers their treatment cost.

"Women, transgenders and even differently-abled individuals are working as foodpanda riders," Siddiky said.

He also shared his thoughts about the ongoing debate on the benefits and rights of the gig economy workers.

"Considering the nature of the job, we provide them with the opportunity to work whenever they want. We don't force them to work a certain number of days. We give them the freedom and flexibility to choose when they want to work."

"This independence is an amazing part of the gig economy. Alongside this, we are always working to provide an equal and safe working environment to everyone."

Foodpanda has invested heavily in logistics, making the system one of the best.

Currently, the company has more than 800 full-time employees as well as many contractual workers. In total, it employs over 1,000 people.

"We are also generating many jobs and income opportunities outside the office," Siddiky said.

There is indirect job creation as well. For example, restaurants are also generating employment opportunities thanks to the additional orders from online platforms.

"We play an important role in income generation and we will keep playing the role as we move forward," Siddiky said.

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Turnover of the premier bourse dropped 3 per cent to Tk 658 crore.

The stock market bounced back following the government intervention after a sharp fall over eight days, said International Leasing Securities in its daily market review. The finance minister held a meeting with the central bank governor, finance secretary, and financial institutions division secretary on Sunday to devise mechanisms for preventing further falls of the stock indices, it said.

The minister instructed regulators to help stabilise the stock market, said the review.

He also advised to keep the investments of banks made through the Investment Corporation of Bangladesh out of the purview of their capital market exposure limit, it added.

This initiative gave a little confidence to investors and got them to wait and see what impact it had on the market, it added.

In the stock market, the DS30, the blue chip index, and the DSES, the Shariah-based index, gained 32.59 points and 15.26 points respectively.

Among the major sectors,

textile surged 4.8 per cent while jute 4.5 per cent.

Based on the turnover, investors' activities were mostly concentrated on miscellaneous (15.6 per cent), pharmaceuticals (13.3 per cent) and banks (9.4 per cent).

Paramount Textile topped the gainers' list, rising 9.94 per cent. S Alam Cold Rolled Steels, MIDAS Financing, National Feed Mills and VFS Thread Dyeing are in the list.

Bangas shed the most, dropping 4.78 per cent. The Rangpur Dairy & Food Products, Dhaka Insurance, International Leasing and Financial Services and Bangladesh National Insurance Company were in the list of those suffering losses.

Beximco became the stock to be traded the most, with shares worth Tk 48 crore changing hands, followed by Shinepukur Ceramics, JMI Hospital Requisite Manufacturing, Bangladesh Shipping Corporation and IPDC Finance.

Chittagong Stock Exchange (CSE) also rose. The CASPI, the price index of the port city bourse edged up 322 points, or 1.78 per cent, to 18,400. Among the 274 stocks to undergo trade, 207 advanced, 51 fell and 16 remained the same.

## Biden says

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"We have problems the rest of the world has but less consequential," he said.

While acknowledging the high fuel prices and food supply crunches caused by the war in wheat-producing Ukraine, Biden said his administration would continue to "grow our economy, create jobs".

## Eligible investors asked to raise funds in stocks

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC) has raised the investment requirement for eligible investors to qualify for the quota benefit during initial public offerings (IPOs).

The regulator took the decision yesterday at a commission meeting in a bid to increase the liquidity in the stock market through institutional investors. BSEC Chairman Prof Shibli Rubayat UI Islam presided over the meeting.

The decision came as the market suffered massive losses in the last few weeks.

The DSEX, the benchmark index of the Dhaka Stock Exchange, lost 556 points in eight trading days before recouping 118 points yesterday.

Each eligible investor, except for the pension fund, approved provident fund and gratuity fund, will have to increase their investment to Tk 3 crore from the existing Tk 1 crore on the cut-off date to avail the IPO quota benefit.

Each approved pension fund, provident fund or gratuity fund needs to raise its investment to Tk 1.50 crore from Tk 50 lakh.

Meanwhile, the BSEC ordered the electronics subscription system team of the stock exchanges to analyse the approval letter of the National Board of Revenue, the audited financial reports and bank statements of each pension fund, provident fund and gratuity fund.

These funds will not be allowed to invest in excess to the amount cited in their financial reports during IPOs, it added.

## StanChart wins Best CSR Bank accolade

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Standard Chartered Bangladesh recently won the "Best CSR Bank" in Bangladesh award given by International Finance for innovative community engagement initiatives.

International Finance, a premium business and finance magazine published by UK-based International Finance Publication Ltd, recognised the bank's commitment to empowering all members of the community and for enabling both long-term and sustainable progress, growth, and recovery for the award.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the bank has facilitated lasting economic and social recovery while addressing the pressing need to save lives, a press release said.

"The employment and entrepreneurship opportunities launched by Standard Chartered Bangladesh are geared to future-fit individuals facing an evolving work environment. Digital pathways are built into our education initiatives, and our partner community hospitals are setting the standard for community healthcare," said Naser Eazaz Bijoy, chief executive officer of Standard Chartered Bangladesh.

The jury of International Finance made all the selections, wherein they assess candidates based on category-specific criteria.

The International Finance Awards recognise and celebrate leadership, innovation, agility, and the ability to foster connections and perform in both the local and international sphere.



Md Monzur Mofiz, managing director of One Bank, received a certificate of appreciation from Fazole Kabir, governor of Bangladesh Bank (BB), on the central bank premises in Dhaka recently for achieving a loan disbursement target of a special refinance scheme under a Covid-19 stimulus package of Tk 5,000 crore. AKM Sajedur Rahman Khan, deputy governor of the BB, Md Abdul Hakim, executive director, and Md Awlad Hossain Chowdhury, general manager, were present.

PHOTO: ONE BANK



Md Abdul Malek, vice-chairman of Mutual Trust Bank, cuts a cake at MTB's Sylhet branch recently to celebrate a customer service week. Syed Mahbubur Rahman, managing director, Md Khalid Mahmood Khan and Rais Uddin Ahmad, deputy managing directors, and Sharmin Ahmed, head of service quality, were present.

PHOTO: MUTUAL TRUST BANK



Md Mahbub UI Alam, chairman of Social Islami Bank Ltd, inaugurates a "Remittance and Deposit Product Campaign-2022" at the bank's head office in Dhaka on Sunday. Zafar Alam, managing director of the bank, Abu Reza Md Yeahia, additional managing director, and Md Shamsul Hoque and Mohammad Forkanullah, deputy managing directors, were present.

PHOTO: SOCIAL ISLAMI BANK