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## IDRA chair resigns amid controversy

### Bari new chief

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

M Mosharraf Hossain, whose tenure as the chairman of the Insurance Development & Regulatory Authority (IDRA) was marked by controversies, has stepped down, more than a year before his contract comes to end.

Hossain resigned on June 14 and it was accepted, said the Financial Institutions Division of the finance ministry in a notice yesterday.

No reason was given from the division for the resignation. Hossain could not be reached for comments.

He quit citing "personal reasons", said an official of the finance ministry, seeking anonymity.

Also yesterday, the government appointed Mohammad Jainul Bari, a former planning and social welfare secretary, as the new chief of the insurance regulator on a contractual basis for a three-year term.

READ MORE ON B3

## WTO confce extended by a day

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA, from Geneva

The ongoing meeting of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) has been extended by one day as countries could not reach a consensus on various issues under discussion within the stipulated time.

Following the consultations by WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala with the MC12 Chair, Timur Suleimanov, the vice-chairs and the minister facilitators, delegations were informed that the MC12 will be extended until June 16.

It came after Okonjo-Iweala called on the members, late on June 14, to go the extra mile to find convergence on various issues at stake to conclude meaningful agreements.

"It requires that we work harder and work nights and do whatever it takes to be able to do it."

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## e-CAB members to vote after 7yrs

### Scams still haunt the industry

MAHMUDUL HASAN

Seven years past its formation, the e-Commerce Association of Bangladesh (e-CAB) is on way to let its 795 voters elect its executive council for the first time.

Reeling from scams of some online platforms surfacing last year, the sector has lost its growth momentum while its entities are finding it hard to acquire new customers as trust has nosedived to rock bottom.

Having tenures of one or two years, the previous executive councils, in a sense, came to office uncontested.

This makes the upcoming June 18 polls very much significant for the 1,700 or so e-commerce entrepreneur members.

A total of 31 candidates will be competing for nine posts for a two-year tenure, according to Amin Helaly, chairman of a commissionformed to hold the election.

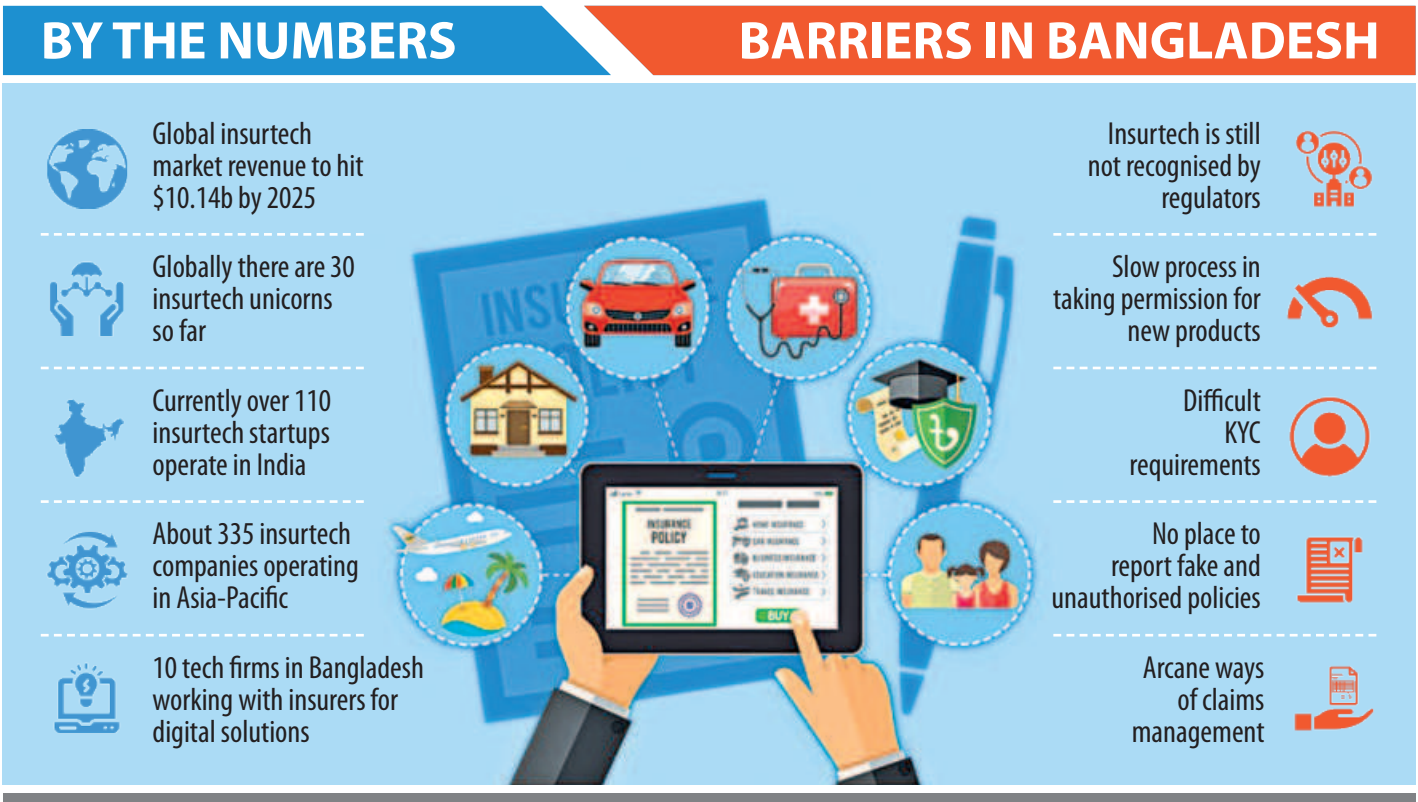
A number of voters that The Daily Star talked to were hyped at being able to have their say and expressed hoped for more representation of their hopes and aspirations.

Industry insiders said most of the past leaders were owners of entities whose online trade was more of a secondary characteristic.

The trade body is yet to meet much of its members' expectations and protect and promote interests of entrepreneurs and consumers for proper expansion of Bangladesh's digital economy, they added.

Moreover, the recently proposed national budget for fiscal year 2022-23 did not have anything conducive to the association's major demands, including issues of VAT and tax waivers.

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# Can Bangladesh transform insurance using tech?

A tie-up between insurers and tech firms could show the way

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh, which has one of the lowest insurance penetrations in the world, is missing out on tapping the potential of the insurance sector using technologies for a lack of recognition of insurtech by regulators, said experts and industry people yesterday.

Insurtech, a combination of the words insurance and technology, refers to the use of technology innovations designed to squeeze out savings and efficiency from the current insurance industry model.

"It is important for the Insurance Development and Regulatory Authority (IDRA) to make necessary amendments to its policies to allow technology companies and insurers to work together so that they can develop and modify products to provide technology-based and hassle-free services to customers," said Masud Rana, an additional director of the Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit.

He was speaking at a roundtable styled "Potential of InsurTech in Advancing Bangladesh's Economy", organised by the Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS) at its auditorium in Dhaka.

Speakers said the role of insurtech players has to be formalised to bring about a paradigm shift in the insurance sector of Bangladesh.

The insurance sector in

other countries, including those in the sub-continent, has considerably higher market penetration with a much wider range of products than in Bangladesh.

For example, there are more than 110 InsurTech startups in India and 335 such companies in the Asia-Pacific region.

In Bangladesh, there are

facilities, leading to greater accuracy.

Claims processing after natural catastrophes will be automated, infinitely scalable, and lightning fast. The life insurance industry will bring to market "wrapped" products that seamlessly adjust coverage based on the evolving needs of their customers, said McKinsey

farms from financial losses incurred from the unexpected death or theft of cattle. Thanks to the insurance, farmers will get comprehensive protection against loss.

In the case of death and theft, a farmer will get 90 per cent compensation for the value of the cattle within 15 days of submission of the claim.

Adorsho PraniSheba uses machine learning and artificial intelligence to recognise the cattle, helping insurers insure the cattle and making claim settlements easier since technologies can recognise the insured animals, even the dead ones. "So, it becomes more transparent and hassle-free," Haq said, while presenting a paper. It has insured 300 cattle so far.

He called for a provision in the Insurance Act to allow insurtech companies to operate as digital insurance agents, or issuing a no-objection certificate until the law is revised.

"Technology can boost the insurance sector as data can transmit real-time and policy premium calculation can be done automatically with AI-powered solutions."

AKM Fahim Mashroor, chief executive officer of Bdjobs.com and AikerDeal, suggested a significant revision of the existing regulations and mandates as per current market needs. Samira Zuberi Himika, senior vice-president of the BASIS, also spoke.



around 10 companies working with insurance companies to provide insurance solutions digitally or enable insurance through information technology.

Globally, a handful of accelerating technology trends are poised to transform the very nature of insurance, said a report of McKinsey & Company is a global management consulting firm.

In auto insurance, risk will shift from drivers to the artificial intelligence (AI) and software behind self-driving cars. Satellites, drones, and real-time data sets will give insurers unprecedented visibility into the risk around

& Company. "Bangladesh needs to update the Insurance Act 2014 with provisions for insurtech companies and should allow the BASIS to contribute with an assessment of the Act and implications across industries," said Fida Haq, co-founder and CEO of Adorsho PraniSheba, an insurtech firm.

Adorsho PraniSheba has partnered with Phoenix Insurance Company and Green Delta Insurance Company to ensure value protection, loan and insurance benefits of cattle through Bangladesh's first and only IoT-based cattle monitoring platform.

Cattle insurance protects

## Bank vendors can't be those of high-ups: BB

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh Bank yesterday asked banks to refrain from procuring goods and services from firms in which directors and high officials of the lenders have ownership, be it direct or indirect.

Such vendors have been found to have taken part in the procurement processes of the lenders, violating banking norms, according to a Bangladesh Bank notice.

"This has created an impediment to establishing corporate governance in the banking sector," it said.

As per the banking companies act, there is no scope for a firm, in which a bank's directors and top officials have ownership, to take part in the



lender's procurement activities.

There is a conflict of interest of the same person holding the positions in the two different entities when they engage in business activities.

The central bank had earlier barred bank directors alongside three top officials of the management – the managing director, additional managing director and deputy managing director – to get their firms delisted from the lenders' list of vendors.

Fahmida Khatun, executive director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said such dual involvements left scopes for corruption.

It is not possible for the central bank to monitor everything banks do and there should be an internal control and compliance system to prevent malpractices at banks, she said.

But there is an unholy alliance between directors and top management of some banks, she said. This has helped delinquent directors and officials supply products to banks where they are employed, she said.

"Banking business runs on the trust of commoners. So, all should respect and protect the trust," Khatun said.

STOCKS		
DSEX ▲	CASPI ▲	
0.20% 6,374.51	0.33% 18,772.92	

COMMODITIES		
Gold ▲	Oil ▼	
\$1,831.04 (per ounce)	\$118.61 (per barrel)	

ASIAN MARKETS			
MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI
▼ 0.39% 52,541.39	▼ 1.14% 26,326.16	▼ 0.1% 3,105.85	▲ 0.50% 3,305.41



Stock investors watch fluctuations of share prices on a screen at a brokerage house at Motijheel in the capital.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

## Widen listed, non-listed tax gap

### Merchant bankers urge govt

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Merchant bankers have requested the government to further decrease the corporate tax rate for listed companies such that it attracts non-listed ones into going public.

Although the government recently proposed to reduce the corporate tax rate by 2.5 percentage points in the national budget for fiscal year 2022-23, the gap in tax paid by the two types of firms remains the same at 7.5 percentage points.

The request came at a post budget meeting organized by Capital Market Journalists' Forum (CMJF) and Bangladesh Merchant Bankers Association (BMBA) on the former's premises in the capital yesterday.

Prof Shamsul Alam, state minister for planning, said the government was

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Bitter gourd is primarily a summer vegetable rich in carotene, calcium and iron. Seeds are either sown directly or raised into 15-20 day-old seedlings for transplantation from March to May, preferably in sandy loamy soils for better growth and quality, according to Banglapedia. Some 59,371 tonnes were produced on 27,484 acres of land around the country in fiscal year 2019-20, as per the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. The photo was taken at Shajapur of Bogura's Shahjahanpur upazila earlier this month. At that time each maund (around 37 kilogrammes) was selling for Tk 1,600 to Tk 1,700. Now the price has fallen to around Tk 700 to Tk 800.

PHOTO: MOSTAFA SHABUJ

# India all but sinks WTO sustainable fishing deal

AFP, Geneva

India all but sank the WTO's bid to net a long-sought deal on curbing harmful fishing subsidies, insisting Tuesday it would not sign up without a 25-year exemption.

Negotiations towards banning subsidies that encourage overfishing and threaten the sustainability of the planet's fish stocks have been going on at the World Trade Organization for more than two decades.

The global trade body only takes decisions by consensus and its 164 members were seemingly closer than ever to sealing a deal at their four-day conference of trade ministers, which is scheduled to wind up on Wednesday.

But India stuck to its demand for a quarter of a century in which to adapt to the proposals on subsidies – a position many others are at odds with.

"The transition period of 25 years sought by India is not intended as a

permanent carve-out. It is a must-have for us and for other similarly placed non-distant water fishing countries," Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said in a statement.

"Without agreeing to the 25-year transition period, it will be impossible for us to finalise the negotiations, as policy space is essential for the long-term sustainable growth and prosperity of our low-income fishermen."

Besides fisheries, the WTO conference in Geneva is trying to strike deals on e-commerce, agriculture, food security, Covid-19 vaccine patents and WTO reform. But some emerging from the negotiating rooms are pointing the finger at Indian intransigence on not just fisheries but on every topic being thrashed out at the WTO's lakeside headquarters.

"India is being obstructive across the piece, whether it be on e-commerce, fisheries, agriculture," said one Geneva-based diplomat.

"In no negotiation are they playing a constructive part," Goyal said the concerns of a small number of fishermen were prevailing over the lives of nine million fishermen in India.

"This is completely unacceptable! And that is the reason India is opposed to the current text," he said.

Fishing subsidies is the flagship deal that the WTO's leader Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala was hoping to get passed at the global trade body's first ministerial conference in nearly five years.

The Nigerian former finance minister, who took office in March 2021, has staked her leadership on getting deals over the line, breathing new life into the organisation by proving it has a role to play in tackling big global challenges.

On fisheries, special treatment for the poorest countries is widely accepted, but some self-identified developing countries have been holding out for an exemption from subsidy constraints, including large fishing nations like India.

EU trade commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis said that some countries were taking "very strong positions, very far-reaching demands".

That "weakens the purpose of this agreement which is to ensure the sustainability of fish stocks and ensure that the way fishing is subsidised does not contribute to unsustainable fishing practices", he told reporters.

Okonjo-Iweala, who turned 68 on Monday, hoped that a couple of the topics being negotiated in Geneva would reach a conclusion.

"My own dream for my birthday is to get a successful ministerial," she said.

"One or two packages passed... I think that would do." WTO spokesman Daniel Pruzin said late Tuesday that the organisation was "still optimistic of getting some outcomes" from the conference.

"The not so good news is that we're running out of time. It's crunch time," he added.



Chowdhury Akhtar Asif, additional managing director of Mutual Trust Bank, hands over a cheque to Subarna Chakma, chairperson of the Society for the Welfare of Autistic Children (Swac), at the latter's office in Adabor, Dhaka recently for the aid of the physically challenged children. Naquib Uddin Khan, vice-chairman of the Swac, Mohammed Sarwar Hossain, secretary, and Tahmina Zaman Khan, head of sustainability and risk governance functions of the bank, were present.

PHOTO: MUTUAL TRUST BANK



Tarek Reaz Khan, managing director of Padma Bank, inaugurates the bank's 59th branch at Dynasty Tower in Gulshan, Dhaka yesterday. Mashrur Arefin, managing director of City Bank, Syed Rafiqul Haque, former additional managing director of Mutual Trust Bank, Faisal Ahsan Chowdhury and Zabed Amin, deputy managing directors of Padma Bank, were present.

PHOTO: PADMA BANK

## Fed ponders huge rate hike

FROM PAGE B4  
US central bankers began raising interest rates off zero in March as buoyant demand from American consumers for homes, cars and other goods clashed with transportation and supply chain snarls in parts

of the world where Covid-19 remained – and remains – a challenge.

That fueled inflation, which got dramatically worse after Russia invaded Ukraine in late February and Western nations imposed steep sanctions

on Moscow in response, sending food and fuel prices up at a blistering rate.

US gasoline prices have topped \$5.00 a gallon for the first time ever and are setting new records daily.

## Cattle traders readying

FROM PAGE B4  
costs have risen by 30 to 40 per cent compared to last year," said Raju Ahmed, a cattle farmer of Ramkharua village in Sirajganj's Shahzadpur upazila.

Raju was forced to sell six of his cows a month ago after failing to bear the burden of excessive maintenance costs.

"Although I started fattening the six cows in anticipation of a handsome profit in the festival market, I had to sell them beforehand," he said.

Md Saiful Islam, secretary of the Bangladesh Dairy Farmers' Association (Pabna unit), said each maund (37 kilogrammes) of dairy meat is selling for

about Tk 25,000 at present, which is not enough for fattened animals.

"Due to excessive maintenance costs for increasing feed prices, the fattening cost of each maund of meat reaches about Tk 25,000. So, farmers can only make a profit by selling the fattened cows at a minimum of Tk 30,000 per maund," Islam added.

However, livestock officials claimed the price of sacrificial animals is never fixed as it depends on supply, demand and choice of the customers.

Meanwhile, farmers will have the opportunity for online marketing this year, they said.

## Germany races

FROM PAGE B4  
But this year, the stakes are higher than ever.

With the war in Ukraine raging and Moscow increasingly seen as an unreliable supplier, governments across Europe are scrambling to store supplies before Moscow decides to reduce the flow of gas, or close the taps altogether.

"The security of supply this winter will depend on two factors: how full the storage facilities are and how much new gas keeps arriving" from abroad, said Sebastian Herold, a professor of energy economics at the Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences.

Russian deliveries will play a "decisive role" in this, Herold said.

Efforts by successive

German governments to build closer economic ties with Moscow have left the country hooked on Russian energy imports, a policy now widely seen as misguided.

Fears that a sudden shortage of Russian gas could bring Europe's biggest economy to its knees recently prompted the German government to adopt legislation requiring all of the nation's gas reservoirs to be 90 per cent full by November.

Altogether, the above and underground sites have enough capacity to cover 25 per cent of Germany's natural gas consumption. They act as a kind of buffer in times of strain on the gas market or if demand spikes during unusually cold weather.

## SOARING INFLATION

# Biden blames it on Russia, Republicans

AFP, Philadelphia

President Joe Biden on Tuesday blamed Republicans and the Russian invasion of Ukraine for soaring US inflation, in a bid to deflect voter anger over his inability to keep prices down.

Speaking to trade unions in Philadelphia on the eve of the Federal Reserve's likely decision to raise interest rates again, Biden said inflation is "sapping the strength of a lot of families."

Biden said he feels Americans' pain, having grown up in a family where news that the price of gasoline had gone up "was a conversation at the dinner table. It mattered."

But he rejected arguments that his government's massive spending to stimulate the economy at the tail end of the Covid-19 pandemic was to blame, instead citing shockwaves from Ukraine and Republican obstruction.

"Under my plan for the economy we made extraordinary progress and put America in a position to tackle a worldwide problem," Biden said of inflationary pressure on economies around the globe.

He said the bloody attack by oil-rich Russia on Ukraine, a major wheat supplier, had sparked fuel and food price increases.

But he also said "Republicans in Congress are doing everything they can to stop my plans to bring down costs on ordinary families. That's why my plan is not finished and why the results aren't finished either."

Biden said inflation is overshadowing a successful US exit from the pandemic economy, including wage increases, record numbers of applications for small businesses, and "the greatest jobs recovery in American history."

## Australia hikes minimum wage as inflation soars

AFP, Sydney

Australia raised the minimum wage by over five per cent on Thursday, a slower than inflation increase as prices for basic goods soar.

The Fair Work Commission set the new minimum rate at Aus\$21.38 (US\$14.75) an hour, a 5.2 per cent increase. Inflation is forecast to hit seven percent by the end of the year, according to central bank governor Philip Lowe.

Food, fuel and other costs have been pushed higher by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, supply chain problems from Covid lockdowns in China and floods on Australia's east coast.

At the same time wage growth has been stalled in Australia for years, despite ultra-low unemployment of 3.9 per cent and many businesses struggling to find staff.

The Reserve Bank of Australia has tried to cool soaring price rises by repeatedly raising lending costs – with more interest rate rises expected in the months to come.



Md Mahbub Ul Alam, chairman of Social Islami Bank Ltd, virtually inaugurates the bank's 10 agent banking outlets in Noakhali's Jahajmara, Cumilla's Chandla Bazar and Choumohani, Narayanganj's Nabiganj, Natore's Dhanaidaha Bazar, Jhalakathi's Putiakhali Mirerhat and Rajapur Sadar, Jashore's Magura Bazar, Laxmipur's Gondhobbo Bazar, and Sathkira's Kalibari Bazar from the bank's head office in Dhaka recently. Zafar Alam, managing director, and Abu Reza Md Yeahia, additional managing director, were present.

PHOTO: SOCIAL ISLAMI BANK



Nur Mohammed, chairman of the board of directors at Jamuna Bank Ltd, virtually presides over its 21st annual general meeting on Tuesday. The meeting approved a 17.50 per cent cash dividend for 2021. AKM Mosharrat Hussain, Md Atiqur Rahman, Md Belal Hossain, and Kanutosh Majumder, directors of the bank, Md Humayun Kabir Khan, chairman of the audit committee, and Mirza Elias Uddin Ahmed, managing director, were present.

PHOTO: JAMUNA BANK



Tarique Afzal, managing director of AB Bank Ltd, cuts a ribbon to inaugurate a relocated branch of the bank in Mymensingh recently.

PHOTO: AB BANK





The platform will help women entrepreneurs, who are not associated with major buyers, come into the mainstream supply chain, said Mafizur Rahman, managing director of the SME Foundation.

PHOTO: STAR/FILE

# SME suppliers' platform set up for women entrepreneurs

SUKANTA HALDER

The SMEF Suppliers Platform for Women Entrepreneurs has been created in collaboration with the World Bank and SME Foundation to support the sale of products produced by women entrepreneurs to corporate houses in Bangladesh.

An official of the SME Foundation said the platform will help women entrepreneurs find a market for their products, especially to ensure that they sell their products to corporate houses.

In addition, financial institutions will be able to present their loan information for women entrepreneurs on this platform to be managed by the SME Foundation.

The SME Foundation thinks that women entrepreneurs, corporate houses and financial institutions using can all benefit from using this platform.

Mafizur Rahman, managing director of the SME Foundation, said there is a chance for entrepreneurs who are not associated with major buyers to be brought into the mainstream supply

chain through the platform.

With the help of its local concerns, the World Bank will monitor the platform's efficiency all over Bangladesh, he added.

Rahman went on to say that the number of local female entrepreneurs is increasing at a significant rate every year due to the creation of a supportive work environment and various incentives. However, the participation of women entrepreneurs in corporate supply chains is very low, and that is why the platform was created.

Women entrepreneurs who are not able to connect with corporate houses due to various reasons, including inability to produce quality products, lack of necessary resources, inability to connect with a suitable market, and lack of information about the needs of corporate houses can benefit from the platform.

Due to the lack of necessary platforms, lack of ability to work with women entrepreneurs, lack of information about products, corporate houses are not interested in buying

products of women entrepreneurs, he added.

The SME Foundation said one-third of the small-and-medium enterprises (SMEs) worldwide are owned by women.

Meanwhile, research conducted through the SME Foundation shows that market connectivity or marketing of products is one of the major barriers for women entrepreneurs. This problem is even more acute in the first phase of a business's launch.

The study found that while 37 per cent of women entrepreneurs in business reported a capital crisis, 20 per cent of them identified product marketing as their main problem.

There are about 10 lakh small-and-medium scale industries and 68 lakh cottage industries in the country, of which 7.21 per cent are being run by women.

A study conducted on 80 multinational corporations conducted by Fortune 500 found that out of an average of \$1 trillion in annual purchases and sales, only 1 per cent are with companies owned by women

entrepreneurs.

Meanwhile, the platform is scheduled to be officially launched at an event today, where Industries Minister Nurul Majid Mahmud Humayun is expected to act as chief guest.

Mercy Miyang Tembon, country director for Bangladesh and Bhutan of the World Bank, will act as special guest.

Meanwhile, with the efforts of the SME Foundation to procure at least 25 per cent of the country's public procurement from the SME sector, the Ministry of Industries has already finalised the draft sub-contracting law.

The comprehensiveness of the commodity market for the SME sector is expected to increase significantly if the act comes into force.

The SME Foundation has advised SME entrepreneurs, especially those who are women, to make necessary preparations to take advantage of this opportunity.

Cottage, micro, small-and-medium enterprises, account for nearly a fourth of Bangladesh's gross domestic product.

## ICC gets first woman chairperson

STAR BUSINESS DESK

The 212th World Council of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) unanimously elected its vice-chairperson Maria Fernanda Garza as chairperson for a two-year term.

A Mexican businesswoman, Garza is the first woman chair of the world business organisation, according to a press release. Her term runs from July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2024.



Garza is chief executive officer of Orestia, a manufacturing home improvement solutions company, which exports its products to the US, Canada, Mexico as well as Latin-American and Asian countries.

She was the chairperson of the ICC Mexico from 2014 to 2020.

The council also elected Philippe Varin, chair of ICC France, as the first vice-chair of the ICC, and Prof Nayla Comair-Obeid, a partner of Obeid Law Firm in Lebanon, and Harsh Pati Singhania, vice-chairperson and managing director of J K Paper Ltd in India, as vice-chairpersons.

ICC Bangladesh President Mahbubur Rahman, Vice-President AK Azad and Secretary General Aatur Rahman virtually attended the council.

## Global Islami Bank IPO gets nod

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Global Islami Bank got the nod to raise funds of Tk 425 crore from the stock market by offloading ordinary shares through an initial public offering (IPO).

The Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC) approved the IPO during a commission meeting held at its office in Dhaka yesterday.

With the IPO proceeds, the bank will invest in the SME sector, government securities and stock market.

Its weighted average earnings per share was Tk 1.08 for the last five years.

LankaBangla Investments and Prime Bank Investments is the issue manager of the IPO.

Following the direction of the central bank, the BSEC allowed the bank to allot 25 per cent shares for non-resident Bangladeshis. The remaining 75 per cent of shares will be broken into two allocations with 75 per cent going to general investors and 25 per cent to eligible investors.

## e-CAB members to vote

FROM PAGE B1

Many members said the e-CAB's reputation took the biggest hit amidst the pandemic in 2021 when reports surfaced of over 25 e-commerce platforms having offered hefty discounts against advance payments only to cheat customers of a huge amount of money.

According to a Bangladesh Bank report, controversial e-commerce platforms received Tk 6,050 crore in just four months last year. Most of their customers and merchants have not been able to get their money back.

"There were demands from the e-commerce sector to take action against platforms like Evaly but the e-CAB was very slow to take action against them," said AkerDeal CEO AKM Fahim Mashroor.

The veteran entrepreneur of the industry had been vocal against the controversial platforms since the very beginning.

Evaly CEO Mohammad Rassel and Chairman Shamima Nasrin were arrested in mid-September 2021.

But the association suspended its membership at the end of the month alongside that of Dhamaka, whose Managing Director SMD Jashimuddin Chisty has fled the USA.

Both companies allegedly cheated customers of hundreds of crores of taka but also sponsored different e-CAB programmes.

According to the auditor's report of the e-CAB for 2021, Dhamaka, which also took the name of Invariant Telecom, provided Tk 18.5 lakh while Evaly Tk 10 lakh.

The same practice

was adopted by other controversial e-commerce platforms such as Falguni, E-orange and Alesha Mart.

Asked why the e-CAB accepted the money in spite of knowing about the surging number of complaints, Mohammad Sahab Uddin, vice president of the current executive committee, said any member can be a sponsor.

"It's not up to the executive committee to select sponsors. It is managed by the e-CAB secretariat," he added.

On e-CAB cancelling memberships only after the arrests were made, he said the association must obey its constitution to act against a member and due process was maintained in Evaly's case.

"We wrote a letter to Evaly in May 2020 warning them as many complaints were coming against them," he added.

Uddin said the current committee has many successes and achievements in the e-commerce sector.

"We first introduced the escrow concept in a meeting at the Prime Minister's Office in 2019 and Bangladesh Bank was later instructed to execute it," he said.

"We also helped formulate standard operating procedure for digital commerce to keep the sector free from anomalies," he said.

He said the existing committee took the initiative to ensure continuation on operations and logistics support in sale and deliver of grocery items during the pandemic lockdowns.

THE ELECTION

The election will mainly be contested by three panels consisting of nine members

each.

One is Agrogami, led by the current president, Shomi Kaiser, and general secretary, Muhammad Abdul Wahed Tomal. It also includes four of the current committee's members.

Of them, Mohammad Sahab Uddin, vice president of the e-CAB, has an online pharmacy called Diabetes Store.

Nasima Akter Nisha, joint secretary of the association, facilitates thousands of female f-commerce entrepreneurs to sell products through her community marketplace Women and e-Commerce Trust - WE.

Of the panel's new three members, Ambareen Reza is the co-founder of foodpanda Bangladesh. As a managing director, she led the platform to take the number one spot in terms of both deliveries and revenue generation.

A similar feat by attained Shahriar Hasan, co-founder and CEO at logistics platform Paperfly.

Uddin said Agrogami wants to set up a "smart secretariat", enhance member services, develop members' capacity, develop and promote scalable startups and undertake entrepreneur friendly policies.

"Besides, we will take initiatives to increase women entrepreneurs in the sector and expand the market from rural to global," he said.

Logistic company iXPRESS Services CEO Md Tazul Islam, a member of a nine-member Oikko panel, said their main aim was to develop a logistics ecosystem in the country.

"In Bangladesh, the e-commerce courier service

is not up to the mark. We will train people across the country so that skilled manpower is developed to deliver products to customers' doorsteps properly and efficiently," he said.

Another panel named as "The Change Makers" is apparently led by Waseem Alim, co-founder and chief executive officer of Chaldal.

Alim's leadership helped the home-grown online platform to become the number one online grocery platform in terms of both the number of deliveries and sales revenue.

One of the panel's members, Biplob Ghosh Rahul is the CEO of digital logistic service provider eCourier, which was now expanding globally.

The Change Makers' sole female member, Nusrat Akhtar Lopa, is a successful f-commerce entrepreneur who started selling products through Facebook back in 2015 with a starting capital of Tk 1,200.

She now employs dozens of people and sells thousands of clothing items through f-commerce page HUR Nusrat which has about a million followers.

"We want to transform e-CAB into a strong, mature organisation and retain customers' trust as well as provide our members guidance for scaling up operations," said Alim of Chaldal.

"Most importantly we, The Change Makers panel members, want a transparent e-CAB, which will be able to deliver its demands strongly to the policymaker to bring about a positive change in the sector which will rule the roost in future," he said.

## IDRA chair resigns

FROM PAGE B1

Until he joins, IDRA Member Moinul Islam has been directed to lead the regulator as its acting chairman.

In September 2020, the government made Hossain the chairman of the IDRA for a three-year term. And controversy hit him from the very beginning.

In December 2020, Delta Life Insurance, where Hossain worked previously, accused him of seeking Tk 50 lakh in bribes for

giving approval to the reappointment of the company's chief executive officer and renewing the actuarial valuation basis.

The insurer also complained against him to the Anti Corruption Commission on December 7. On December 9, it sent another letter to the commission, alleging that he demanded the kickback.

Delta presented the recordings of phone calls and the audio clip to the

commission in support of the allegation.

After Delta's complaint to the ACC, Hossain filed a general diary with the Motijheel Police Station, stating that one official of the insurance company tried to bribe him and that all recordings of the mobile conversations had been tampered.

In November last year, the High Court asked four government agencies – the finance ministry, the ACC, the National

Board of Revenue, and the Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit -- to explain why they failed to investigate the corruption allegations against Hossain, following a writ petition.

The allegations against him included owning two companies anonymously, questionable sources of funds for the firms, investing in the stock market, taking bribes, laundering money and abusing power, according to the writ petition.

## Widen listed, non-listed tax gap

FROM PAGE B1

candid in developing the capital market so that it could contribute more to the economy and to the capital generation process of the private sector.

The government wants to see more companies in the stock market so that general investors can participate in the running of conglomerates, he said.

On the opportunity of whitening black money, Alam said he supported it as the entry of undisclosed

money into the economy could bring about a good outcome.

"So, I may talk to the government to continue the money whitening opportunity through the stock market," he added.

To increase the market's depth, companies with good performance records need to be brought in but the present corporate tax gap cannot be considered lucrative, said BMBA President Sayadur Rahman. He proposed reducing

the corporate tax for listed companies to 15 per cent from the recently proposed 20 per cent.

There is no legal binding on a company when it comes to offloading shares, he said, adding that the market capitalization to GDP ratio remains low due to the low number of companies in the market.

Considering the gloom prevailing over businesses in the aftermath of the pandemic, the BMBA proposed that the

## WTO confce extended

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The good news is that progress is being made but it needs a little more work and more time," Okonjo-Iweala told delegates.

"The not-so-good news is that we are running out of time, so I think it is really time for ministers to make the requisite decisions that need to be made," she said in a statement.

"They feel that we really can cross the line on some of these things if we give it a bit more time, so I just

throw that out there for your consideration."

The delegates from the member countries have assembled at the Ministerial Conference, the topmost decision-making body of the global trade body, to strike deals on food security, e-commerce, fishing subsidies, extending tariff benefits to graduating least-developed countries and TRIPS waiver, and reform of the WTO.

However, the participating countries failed to reach

consensus during the original scheduled, which was June 12 to June 15.

Hafizur Rahman, director-general of the WTO Cell under the commerce ministry of Bangladesh, said it was good that time has been extended. This usually happens when negotiators are optimistic about the possibility of reaching consensus, he said.

Mustafizur Rahman, a distinguished fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said the extension may bring

some positive outcomes.

For instance, the member countries were closer to a deal on the reduction of fisheries subsidies, but it did not materialise at the end.

This is because India wants a 25-year waiver on fisheries subsidies as the South Asian nation has a lot of small fisheries on which millions of farmers are dependent to make a living.

The EU and the US wanted continuation of fisheries subsidy for three to five years.





**Bulls are seen being fed at a cattle farm in Char Balarampur village in Pabna sadar upazila. With Covid-19 nearly a thing of the past, traders are preparing additional cattle for the sacrificial animal market centring the upcoming Eid-ul-Azha.**

PHOTO: AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU

# Cattle traders readying for Eid market

They expect good business this time as pandemic ebbs

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU

The alarming Covid-19 situation had badly hampered the sacrificial animal market for Eid-ul-Azha in the last couple of years but cattle farmers are anticipating good business this time around as the situation has greatly improved.

Approximately 1.21 crore sacrificial animals have been prepared this year, which is 33 per cent higher than last year's total sales, according to the Department of Livestock Services (DLS).

"Last year, traders sold a total of 90.83 lakh sacrificial animals for Eid-ul-Azha, including 40.53 lakh cows and buffalos, and 50.28 lakh goats and lambs, to get business worth Tk 46,000 crore amid the pandemic," Zinat Sultana, deputy director (farm) of the DLS, told The Daily Star.

"As the pandemic threat is ending, we are expecting much better festival sales and so, additional animals are being prepared," she said.

"More than 1 crore animals may be sold this year with traders expecting to get more than Tk 50,000 crore collectively from the festival market," Sultana added.

Of the 1.21 crore prepared for sacrifice, around 46.11 lakh are cows and buffalos while 75.11 lakh are goats and lambs.

The DLS deputy director went on to say that the Eid market is the biggest opportunity to do business for cattle farmers, who fatten up their herds ahead of the festival season each year.

"Buyers want to get good looking



animals for sacrificing in the festival so the fattened animal business hits its peak ahead of Eid," Sultana said.

Around 42.40 lakh of the 46.11 lakh cows and buffalos are fattened while 33.48 lakh of the 75.11 lakh goats and lambs have been similarly plumped.

"Local production will meet the demand this year as additional animals have been prepared," she added.

Of the country's total production, Pabna and Sirajganj are the biggest sources of fattened animals, as per DLS data.

"This year, a total of 172,729 cows, 111,325 of which are fattened, have been prepared for sale in the festival market," said Krishno Mohon Halder, district livestock officer of Pabna.

In total, 605,774 sacrificial animals

have prepared in the district, he added.

Similarly, a total of 3.91 lakh sacrificial animals have prepared in Sirajganj, of which 1.71 lakh are cattle, according to Gourango Kumar Talukder, the district livestock officer of Sirajganj.

Of the cattle prepared, around 1.21 lakh are fattened, he added.

Cattle fattening gets costly as feed prices soar.

Md Habib in Pabna's Balarampur village started cattle farming a couple of years ago as a hobby but now, it is one of his biggest businesses.

"This year, I have prepared 31 cows for sale with 22 of them weighting between 600 and 900 kilogrammes," he said.

Habib bought the cows after Eid-ul-Azha last year and followed a sufficiently organic nursing method to rear the

cattle.

"But now I am worried about getting the expected prices," said Habib, who bought each cow for Tk 1.2 lakh to Tk 1.5 lakh and spent a further Tk 70,000 to Tk 1.25 lakh on nursing each of them for the last 11 months.

The businessman said he used various nutritious food ingredients with timely medical care following the guidelines of veterinarians so that his cattle could grow up without disease.

Habib himself made mixed food powders comprised of wheat, peas, lentils and corn to ensure proper nutrition for his animals.

He also gave them straw and grass regularly.

"I need Tk 200 to Tk 225 for feed and labour costs of a middle-sized cow each day while it costs Tk 300 to Tk 325 for big cows as the price of dairy feed has been soaring rapidly in the last few months," Habib said.

Other than meeting their nutritional needs, he also gave the cattle various vitamin and vaccine shots so that they could stay healthy.

"But fattening costs have ballooned by 30 to 40 per cent this year due to soaring feed prices," he added.

Each bag of wheat bran is currently selling for Tk 1,900 to Tk 1,950, lentils Tk 1,800 to Tk 1,850, lentil bran Tk 1,300, pea bran Tk 2,000 and rice bran Tk 700.

"The price of all kinds of dairy feed has jumped by Tk 200 to Tk 400 in the last couple of months and so, fattening

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## Stocks return to the black

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Dhaka Stock Exchange snapped a four-day decline yesterday, riding on ceramic, travel, leisure, services, and real estate stocks.

The DSEX, the benchmark index of the premier bourse in Bangladesh, added 13.12 points, or 0.20 per cent, to close at 6,374.

The DSES Index, which comprises the Shariah-based listed companies, was up 0.14 per cent at 1,389.59 and the DS30 Index, which represents the best-performing securities of the exchange, gained 0.04 per cent to 2,301.92.

Turnover stood at Tk 943 crore, up 7.89 per cent from Tk 874 crore a day ago. Of the securities traded on the day, 175 advanced, 161 declined and 46 remained unchanged.

"The bargain-hunters showed their buying interest in sector-specific stocks at lucrative prices as the market lost 119 points since the budget for the next fiscal year was unveiled. Some of the stocks got investors' attention due to the budgetary incentives," said International Leasing Securities Ltd in its daily market review.

Ceramic, travel, leisure, services and real estate stocks largely rose, whereas general insurance, jute and food shares declined.

Among the individual companies, Meghna Insurance and RAK Ceramics jointly topped the gainers' list with a 10 per cent gain.

Hakkani Pulp and Paper Mills, KDS Accessories, Legacy Footwear, Fu-Wang Ceramic Industries, and Coppertech Industries also posted significant gains.

Bangladesh Industrial Finance Company suffered the highest fall at 5.88 per cent. Bangladesh General Insurance Company lost 5.48 per cent and Purabi General Insurance Company gave up 5.33 per cent.

Beximco Ltd was the most-traded stock on the day with its shares worth Tk 65 crore transacted. RAK Ceramics, Shinepukur Ceramics, MI Hospital Requisite Manufacturing, IPDC Finance, and Bangladesh Shipping Corporation also witnessed heavy trading.

The Chittagong Stock Exchange also rose.

The CASPI, the main index of the bourse in the port city, jumped 61.97 points, or 0.33 per cent, to close the day at 18,772.

Of the issues, 131 advanced, 128 declined and 39 did not see any price movement.

Turnover, however, fell more than 23 per cent to Tk 42.6 crore. It was Tk 55.54 crore on Tuesday.

## UK axes subsidy for electric plug-in cars

AFP, London

Britain on Tuesday axed its 1,500 (\$1,800) subsidy for buyers of new plug-in cars as it focuses on other types of electric vehicles, but the news drew anger from the auto sector.

"The government is today closing the plug-in car grant scheme to new orders after successfully kickstarting the UK's electric car revolution," the Department for Transport (DfT) said in a statement. The grant was launched in 2011 to help encourage Britons to ditch high-polluting diesel and petrol cars.

It has since supported the sale of almost half a million electric cars, the DfT added, stressing that the subsidy was always a "temporary" policy.

Sales of fully electric cars rocketed from less than 1,000 in 2011 to almost 100,000 vehicles in the first five months of this year alone.

However, the government is now switching its focus to offer subsidies on sales of new plug-in electric taxis, motorcycles, vans, trucks and wheelchair-accessible vehicles.

Britain plans to ban new sales of diesel and petrol cars in the UK from 2030, as part of its goal to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Tuesday's announcement drew stark criticism from industry body the Society of Motor Manufacturers & Traders (SMMT).

## Fed ponders huge rate hike to fight inflation

AFP, Washington

The US Federal Reserve is poised to raise borrowing costs Wednesday amid the troubling acceleration of inflation, with the only question being whether officials will opt for the biggest hike in nearly three decades or a smaller step up.

The central bank seemed set to increase the benchmark interest rate again by 0.5 percentage points, but a resurgence of consumer and producer prices in May has fueled growing speculation of a 75-basis-point hike.

While some economists continue to argue that such an aggressive step would indicate rising panic among policymakers who are usually reluctant to surprise financial markets, others argue that the Fed is behind the curve and needs to react strongly to prove its resolve to combat inflation. "It is possible that by Wednesday the only way for the Fed to surprise markets would be to raise rates by 50 bp," Harvard economist and former White House advisor Jason Furman tweeted.

If policymakers decide on a giant step, it would be the first 75-basis-point increase since November 1994.

The policy-setting Federal Open Market Committee is due to announce the rate decision at 1800 GMT at the conclusion of two days of deliberations. Fed Chair Jerome Powell will hold a press conference after the meeting to provide more details on the central bank's plans.

President Joe Biden has fully endorsed the Fed's battle against the steepest rise in prices in more than 40 years, as he watches inflation erode his popularity and deflect attention from other milestones, including a rapid recovery of the world's largest economy and record job growth.

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**An employee of Uniper Energy Storage inspects the above-ground facilities of a natural gas storage unit in Bierwang, southern Germany.**

PHOTO: AFP/FILE

## Germany races to stockpile gas before winter

AFP, Unterreit

Germany's race to wean itself off Russian energy and stockpile enough gas before winter is playing out largely hidden from view, some 1,600 metres (one mile) below ground in the foothills of the Bavarian Alps.

Surrounded by rolling farmland near the banks of the river Inn, the former Bierwang natural gas field in Unterreit serves as one of Germany's largest underground gas storage facilities.

Run by German operator Uniper, Bierwang can hold more than 800 million cubic metres of gas – enough to power the nearby city of Munich for eight months.

Like other storage sites, Bierwang replenishes its stocks between winters, to keep homes heated and Germany's energy-hungry industry humming during the cold months when demand is highest.

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