

Star BUSINESS



D-8 wants to make PTA operational by Oct

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The members of the D-8 Organisation for Economic Cooperation want to make the Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) operational by October this year, as the bloc targets taking the intra-regional trade nearly three times to \$400 billion by 2030.

Currently, the trade among the D-8 member countries is \$129 billion, which was \$14 billion 25 years back.

"We want to take the trade to \$400 billion by 2030," D-8 Secretary General Ambassador Isiaka A Imam told journalists after the D-8 ministerial meeting at the Hotel InterContinental in Dhaka yesterday.

He said the D-8 is looking at developing a payment card just like that of Mastercard for quick and effective payment among its members.

"We are also looking at barter system so that we can reduce pressure on our foreign reserve," Imam said.

He made the comments taking into

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Solar-run irrigation pumps have emerged as a blessing for many farmers in Bangladesh amid inadequate rain, frequent power cuts and higher prices of diesel as the Aman cultivation season has kicked off. Supported by a project of the Bangladesh Rural Electrification Board, Mohammad Hannan Sarkar has set up a solar irrigation pump in Bororia village under Gharinda union in Tangail sadar upazila to supply water to nearby paddy fields. The photo was taken on Tuesday.

PHOTO: MIRZA SHAKIL

Slow progress in BREB solar pump project

MD ASADUZ ZAMAN and MIRZA SHAKIL

A project undertaken by Bangladesh Rural Electrification Board (BREB) to install 2,000 solar-powered irrigation pumps has been advancing at a snail's pace.

The BREB, under the energy and power ministry, took up the Tk 394 crore project in 2018 to reduce dependency on electricity generated by fossil fuels and reduce carbon emissions.

Four years have passed and the state agency could so far install 75 of the pumps, which is just 4 per cent of the target.

Now only five months remain till the project's implementation deadline.

The BREB has already requested Asian Development Bank, the project's prime financier, to let the project be extended by another two years.

The BREB blames a lack of interest of farmers and cent per cent electrification in the country.

As per the project requirements, a farmer has to provide land and bear 35 per cent of the cost to set up a pump.

Of the cost, 10 per cent has to be deposited as down payment, which is difficult for many farmers to arrange at one go, said a top official involved in the project.

The government is to bear the rest of the cost and buy the excess electricity to cut fossil fuel-based power generation.

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FOREX CRISIS BB teams inspect money changers

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

Ten inspection teams of Bangladesh Bank yesterday visited foreign exchange shops around Dhaka city to investigate whether they were intentionally hoarding US dollars for hiking their rate against the taka in the open market.

Md Serajul Islam, spokesperson of the BB, confirmed the issue to The Daily Star, saying that the banking regulator had started to conduct strict monitoring to see whether the shops were abiding by the central bank's rules and regulations.

Money changers have to avail a licence from the central bank to operate their business.

The exchange rate of the dollar against the taka on Tuesday logged a record of Tk 112 whereas it was Tk 107 on Monday.

The rate, however, decreased yesterday to Tk 107 in the open market.

A Bangladesh Bank official, on condition of anonymity, said a vested quarter might have hoarded dollars to artificially hike the exchange rate.

Some money changers might be involved, prompting the BB to decide on carrying out the sudden inspections, said the official.

Hoarding of the dollar might have pushed up the exchange rate in the open market substantially.

The central bank is now scrutinising financial information availed from the money changers.

If any money changer is found to have been involved in the malpractice, the BB will consider cancelling its licence, he said.

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Solar irrigation pumps prove a boon for farmers

Growers can now transplant Aman on time, avoid power cuts and diesel pumps

KONGKON KARMAKER and MOSTAFA SHABUJ

Farmers who depend on rainwaters to grow Aman paddy in Dinajpur have been left distraught from early July owing to a drought-like situation in the absence of rains.

But many growers have been busy transplanting seedlings of the second-largest paddy crop in the country on their land during the same time in the areas of the northern district that have access to solar-supported irrigation systems.

What is more, the solar-based irrigation pumps have allowed them to avoid frequent power cuts and costly diesel run pumps to grow the crop.

The picture is the same in many other districts where similar irrigation facilities have sprouted up in recent years in a country where more than 90 per cent of the total cultivable land of 85.6 lakh hectares is irrigated.

Farmers depend on pumps usually to water their Boro paddy fields to grow rice during the dry season and they rely on rainfall to

cultivate Aman. Since there has been less than usual rainfall this month compared to the previous years, growers have been forced to turn to pumps to irrigate lands.

There are around 13.4 lakh diesel-operated pumps, supplying water to 34 lakh hectares of land.

Currently, there are 2,659

farmers irrigate their land at reasonable costs and cut electricity and diesel costs, according to the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE)

Around 4,000 acres of land are now under irrigation coverage and the number of beneficiary farmers in the seven upazilas is around 15,000.

During a visit to a number of villages in Birganj on Wednesday, it was found that the farmers in the upazila have brought a large part of their farmland under Aman cultivation on time this season despite lesser rainfall. The drought has been prevailing in the district since early July, affecting the Aman cultivation in the district. The meteorological office in Dinajpur recorded rainfall of only 2 millimetres between July 3 and July 15.

Ziaur Rahman, a solar irrigation pump operator in Nizpara village of Birganj, has been running the pump for the last four years, supporting around 80 farmers.

He said farmers do not need irrigation support to plant Aman seedlings as they get sufficient rains during this time of the year to prepare their land.

"But things have been different this year since there has been a drought-like situation. So, I started to irrigate the land after farmers requested me," said Rahman.

He charges Tk 2,000 to Tk 4,000 to irrigate each acre

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solar irrigation pumps in Bangladesh, with an installed capacity of around 50 megawatt-peak (MWp), according to the Sustainable and Renewable Energy Development Authority.

In Dinajpur, at least 324 solar-run irrigation pumps have been installed in seven upazilas, out of its total 13 upazilas, since 2017 to help

Five companies, including Solargaon Ltd, Gazi Renewable Energy Ltd and Rahimafrooz Bangladesh Ltd, have set up the pumps in the upazilas.

Of them, the highest number of pumps is in Birganj upazila, at 143. There are 63 pumps in Biral, 57 in Bochaganj, 54 in Kaharol, five in Khansama, and one each in Chirirbandar and Parbatipur

Bangladesh moves to join RCEP

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Bangladesh has taken up the initiative to join Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) to retain duty benefits once it makes the United Nations status graduation from a least developed country to a developing one in 2026.

An inter-ministerial meeting agreed that the county will join the RCEP, an agreement comprising the world's largest trade bloc led by China, if an opportunity is created after negotiations, said the commerce ministry.

"So, we discussed different aspects of a study on joining to the RCEP conducted by the Bangladesh Trade and Tariff Commission (BTTC)," said Tapan Kanti Ghosh, senior secretary to the commerce ministry, yesterday.

Seeking opinion from different ministries and departments concerned is the beginning of

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STOCKS	
DSEX ▼	CSCX ▼
1.21%	0.94%
6,038.00	17,801.60

COMMODITIES	
Gold ▼	Oil ▲
\$1,714.90	\$96.51
(per ounce)	(per barrel)

ASIAN MARKETS			
MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI
▲ 0.99%	▲ 0.22%	▲ 0.41%	▼ 0.05%
55,816.32	27,715.75	3,205.14	3,275.76

Record \$10b foreign aid used last fiscal year

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and AHSAN HABIB

Bangladesh's use of foreign assistance reached a new record high of \$10 billion in fiscal year 2021-22, primarily behind vaccinations, one-time budget support, economic recovery from the pandemic and implementation of mega projects.

This disbursement of development partners, the highest ever for Bangladesh, was 25.7 per cent higher than the \$7.96 billion provided in the previous fiscal year, according to data of Economic Relations Division (ERD).

Despite the SWIFT ban on Russian banks over the war with Ukraine, Russia provided a loan of \$1.22 billion, the fourth largest, the majority of which was spent on the Rooppur nuclear power plant project.

The funds from Russia are in the form of equipment and technology.

The plant is estimated to cost Tk 113,092 crore and Tk 55,689 crore has been spent up until last fiscal year.

The project is about 49.2 per cent complete as of June, the best performance exhibited among the mega projects as of last fiscal year. Progress has been as per schedule with a first unit to open by 2024 and a second one by 2025.

The project is being constructed on a build-and-finance deal with Russian state agency Rosatom, which is responsible for 76 per cent of global nuclear technology exports.

Asian Development Bank (ADB) topped the fund disbursement list with \$2.57 billion.

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'Work on youths to utilise demographic dividend'

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh should work on the young population now for future development as the country has only 15 years left to reap the benefits of the demographic dividend, an economist said yesterday.

The demographic dividend is the economic growth potential that can result from shifts in a population's age structure, according to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

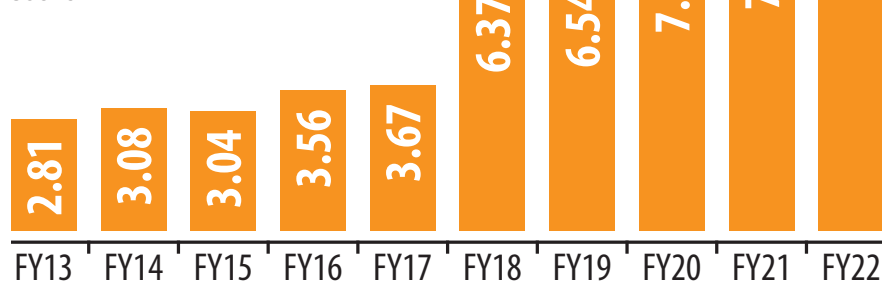
A country enjoys demographic dividend when it has higher working-age (15 to 64) population than non-working and the window opened for Bangladesh in 2007 and it will end in 2037, according to data of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

"Bangladesh is not on

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UTILISATION OF FOREIGN AID

In billion \$
SOURCE: ERD



FOREIGN AID FLOW (FY22)

In million \$

Dev partners	Commitment	Disbursement
ADB	1,602	2,569
WB	1,734	1,667
AIIB	715	297
JAPAN	1,729	2,208
INDIA	0	324
CHINA	1,127	1,004
RUSSIA	0	1,224
OTHERS	1,298	709