



Beekeepers inspect frames of artificial beehives installed next to mustard fields. Bees help pollinate the flowers while collecting the honey, which helps bring a good yield of mustard. Officials of the Department of Agricultural Extension say the government is trying to increase cultivation of oilseed crops in the country to reduce imports of edible oil. The picture was taken at Shajahanpur upazila of Bogura recently.

PHOTO: MOSTAFA SHABUJ

28 Bangladeshi firms win SAFA Best Presented Annual Reports Awards

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Twenty-eight Bangladeshi companies have won a total of 31 accolades in the South Asian Federation of Accountants (SAFA) Best Presented Annual Reports 2021 Awards competition.

The companies obtained 13 gold, nine silver and nine bronze awards and eight certificates of merits.

ICA Nepal hosted the event at the Hotel Yak and Yeti in Kathmandu on Sunday, according to a press release of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Bangladesh (ICAB).

Bangladeshi companies won gold in the private sector banks, corporate governance disclosures, public sector banks, financial services, manufacturing, insurance, NGOs, and integrated reporting categories. They also secured five "overall winner" awards out of six.

Brac Bank became the joint gold winner in the private sector banks category and won silver jointly in the overall winner category.

Shahjalal Islami Bank became the joint gold winner in the private sector bank category and the joint gold winner in the Saarc anniversary award for corporate governance. It also secured bronze jointly in integrated reporting and silver jointly in the overall winner category.

Bank Asia became the joint gold winner in the private sector banks and in the Saarc anniversary award for corporate governance. It clinched gold in integrated reporting and bronze in the overall winner category.

State-run Janata Bank became the gold winner and Sonali Bank, another government-owned lender, achieved silver in the public sector banks category.

Reliance Insurance Ltd secured gold and City General Insurance Co Ltd and Green Delta Insurance Ltd collected the Certificate of Merit in the insurance Sector.

IDLC Finance attained silver in the financial services sector, joint gold in the Saarc anniversary award for corporate governance, and a certificate of merit in

integrated reporting.

IPDC Finance picked up bronze jointly in the financial services sector, while Bangladesh Finance Limited was the gold winner in the segment and emerged as the gold winner in the overall winner category.

Walton Hi-Tech Industries PLC was the joint gold winner in the manufacturing sector and joint silver winner in the overall winner category. British American Tobacco Bangladesh got silver jointly in the manufacturing sector.

Reckitt Benckiser Bangladesh Limited got bronze jointly in the manufacturing sector.

Grameenphone won silver and Robi Axiata took home bronze in the communication and IT sector.

Unique Hotel & Resorts collected the silver award jointly in the service sector (excluding financial services and communication and IT).

Sajida Foundation became the joint gold winner in the non-government organisation category, while Community

Development Centre won bronze jointly and Brac received the certificate of merit.

ACI Formulations emerged as the joint bronze winner in the agriculture sector and ACI Limited received a certificate of merit in the diversified holdings segment.

State-run Investment Corporation of Bangladesh won bronze jointly in the public sector while Infrastructure Development Company Limited and Bangladesh Infrastructure Finance Fund received the Certificate of Merit.

In the power and energy sector, Summit Power Limited became the joint silver winner and United Power Generation Distribution Company received a certificate of merit.

Eastern Housing Limited achieved bronze in the infrastructure and construction category.

Senior officials of the winning companies received the awards.

ICAB President Md Shahadat Hossain and Vice Presidents NKA Mobin and Fouzia Haque were present at the ceremony, the press release added.

Bangladesh could import gas from Mozambique

FBCCI says

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh and Mozambique have the opportunities to increase bilateral trade, such as of agricultural products and fish, alongside tourism, said MA Momen, vice-president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), yesterday.

Bangladesh could even import gas from the southern African nation, he said, adding that both countries were strategic business hubs and could benefit from a more robust trade and economic partnership.

Momen was addressing a meeting with a business delegation from Mozambique at the FBCCI office in Dhaka.

"Our presence in Africa is mostly due to the large contribution of our peacekeeping forces," said Mostofa Azad Chowdhury Babu, senior vice president of the FBCCI.

"But now we are trying to increase business ties with the southern economic bloc by enhancing trade and investment," he said.

Competitive strengths in apparel, leather goods, pharmaceuticals, frozen seafood, plastic products, ceramics, jute and leather products, home appliances and others are leading the way for business diversification, he said.

So, Bangladeshi investors can set up these industries in Mozambique and explore opportunities there to export products through Southern African Development Community, African Growth and Opportunity Act of the US and to the European Union, he noted.

Jose Matsinha, director general for Asia and Oceania at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Mozambique, led the five-member delegation.

"There is huge potential in economic relations between Mozambique and Bangladesh. We're here in Bangladesh to see which area we both can work on," he said.

"We can get experience from Bangladesh in strategic areas with mutual interest. We have a large amount of land and plenty of water in Mozambique but we lack expertise. Bangladesh can help us in the agriculture sector," he added.

Oil prices rise on China demand

REUTERS, London

Oil prices rose on Monday after tumbling by more than \$2 a barrel in the previous session as optimism over the Chinese economy outweighed concern over a global recession.

China, the world's top crude oil importer, is experiencing its first of three expected waves of Covid-19 cases after Beijing relaxed mobility restrictions but plans to step up support for the economy in 2023.

Despite a surge in Covid cases, optimism over the reopening of the Chinese economy and its accommodative policy improve oil's demand outlook, said CMC Markets analyst Tina Teng.



SM Mahfuzur Rahman, chairman of Janata Bank, and Ajit Kumar Paul, director, received an award from Tanka Mani Sharma, auditor general of Nepal, for the best presented annual reports in the private sector bank category at the South Asian Federation of Accountants (SAFA) Awards 2021 hosted by ICA Nepal at Hotel Yak and Yeti in Kathmandu on Sunday.

PHOTO: JANATA BANK

Malaysians saving less: survey

Most do not have enough in retirement funds

ANN/THE STRAITS TIMES

Malaysians are at their worst financial position in 2022 compared with the last five years, and the looming recession may push them to the brink with dwindling savings coupled with the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic.

A recent survey by Malaysian financial services website RinggitPlus revealed that 70 per cent of Malaysians saved less than RM500 per month (S\$153) in 2022 or did not save at all.

"This is compared with 52 per cent of Malaysians saving less than RM500 monthly in 2021, the largest year-on-year increase since 2018," the RinggitPlus Malaysian Financial

Literacy Survey 2022 showed.

But what is even more worrying is that some Malaysians cannot guarantee their retirement as about 3.6 million pension fund Employees Provident Fund (EPF) members have less than RM1,000 in their accounts as of November 2021. EPF has a total of 15.21 million members as of December 2021.

The country's largest pension fund said in September that members retiring in the next few years will need about RM600,000 to have a decent retired life.

The survey also showed that 63 per cent of Malaysians can survive only three months or less with the diminished savings, should they lose their jobs.

BB gives banks more time to adjust

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A stock market analyst, preferring anonymity, said the central bank's circular gave relief to the market and banks as they are not going to sell shares while the bearish trend is prevailing.

On the other hand, selling shares was not possible in the dry market as most of the stocks are not undergoing trade for the presence of the floor price.

The floor price is the lowest price at which a stock can be traded.

The Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission set the floor price of every stock in July to halt the freefall of market indices amid global economic uncertainties.

The floor price was fixed on the basis of the average of the closing prices on July 28 and the preceding four days.

Due to the presence of the floor price, around 200 stocks are getting little to no buyers and their prices have remained the same for weeks.

So, even if they had tried to sell those, it would not have been possible, added the analyst.

The recent central bank decision allowing exposure calculations based on purchase prices would put pressure on banks to make sales.

As the banks bought shares at a price higher than that prevailing at present, either their purchasing power has reduced or their portfolio has suffered overexposure, he said.

The central bank issued a circular in August after getting an order from the Ministry of Finance saying that the purchasing price of shares of other companies, mutual funds, debentures and corporate bonds will be considered during the counting of the highest exposure limit of banks.

2022: a year of revival, struggle

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a power crisis in a year the country brought 100 per cent of the population under electricity coverage. The escalated tension in domestic politics even stoked concerns that economic activities would be disrupted.

One silver lining was that the economy has not faced Sri Lanka like situation. The island nation had plunged into a crisis due to economic mismanagement and drying up of forex reserves.

"The decade-long achievement in macroeconomic stability helped the country withstand any macroeconomic disastrous situation amid the current crisis," said Selim Raihan, executive director of the South Asian Network on Economic Modeling.

Overall, the economy was under pressure due to a number of factors, including the continuous decline of the foreign currency reserves, the unprecedented hike in the US dollar rate, supply disruptions, deteriorating governance in the banking sector, the lower tax-to-GDP ratio, the skyrocketing of the prices of daily essentials, and the failure to control money laundering.

"Bangladesh was able to save the economy from the downward trend and handle the situation although it was not managed entirely in the way many had hoped to. It was a big achievement for the economy," said Salehuddin Ahmed, a former governor of the Bangladesh Bank.

"The opening of Padma bridge has brought joy to the economy." Export growth remained in positive territory despite record inflation and the energy crisis in the western economies, and the forex shortage and the higher cost of production because of the increase in gas and oil prices, all driven by the war-induced global crisis, at home.

Ahmed identified the failure to restore discipline in the banking sector and manage the forex reserves properly as two major

disappointments in 2022.

Reserves have fallen by a quarter in the year amid higher import payments and lower-than-expected remittance receipts and moderate export earnings.

Another challenge for the country was the unabated money laundering, said Ahmed.

"This is a matter of frustration for the nation. It will continue if the government can't deal with it strongly."

Muhammad Islam, a former president of the Bangladesh Economic Association, described the opening of the Padma bridge and 100 per cent population coming under electricity coverage as the major highlights of the outgoing year.

"Despite the war-induced crisis, the economy did not collapse. Even the government was able to secure foreign funds to tackle the crisis," he said.

Prof Islam thinks the government was not able to mobilise revenue as expected. "Money laundering and the inability to manage the exchange rate were major concerns."

Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh, said the economy had rebounded from the Covid-19 crisis and the export reached the pre-pandemic level before the war broke out.

"The government saved the economy from falling into a crippling situation. Export performance and remittance inflows have provided the breathing space."

According to the former official of the International Monetary Fund, the vulnerability in the banking sector and rising non-performing loans were major risks.

"The central bank has completely failed to establish governance in the banking sector and control inflation. Despite a number of initiatives, the government has not been able to rein in the prices of essentials."

He also pointed out the inefficiency of the National Board of Revenue to

increase the tax-to-GDP ratio.

Fahmida Khatun, executive director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said amidst various challenges, exports and remittance inflows were positive and these can be considered major achievements in 2022.

She said the crisis in the banking sector has remained unresolved and the list of failures in the sector is rather longer than in any other sector.

"The problem in the banking industry has continued for a long time."

Fahmida said the opening of the Padma bridge would bring a long-term positive impact on the economy.

"Connectivity is always positive for an economy."

Selim Raihan highlighted insufficient and ineffective management of the exchange rate.

The cap on the lending rate has restricted the major monetary policy tool to act properly amid inflationary pressure, he said.

The central bank has maintained a 9 per cent ceiling on the interest rate on loans since April 2020.

"The ineffective measures against domestic market imperfections and market anomalies further exacerbated inflationary pressure," said Raihan.

"The huge reliance on the imports of liquefied natural gas and fossil fuel for power generation and a lack of progress in renewable energy were among the failures."

The professor of the economics department of the University of Dhaka said some steps have been taken by the government to maintain macroeconomic stability in terms of releasing pressure on the balance of payments.

The developments that exposed the weaknesses of the economy included the scams in the financial sector, stagnant private sector investment, inability to attract large-scale foreign direct investment, the cost-override and time-override of projects, and rampant corruption, he added.