

EU economy in 2023 to be a lot better than feared Lagarde says

AFP, Davos

The eurozone economy will fare “a lot better” this year than initially feared, European Central Bank chief Christine Lagarde said Thursday, as hopes grow that countries can avoid a painful recession.

The economic “news has become much more positive in the last few weeks”, Lagarde told an audience at the World Economic Forum in Davos.

The rhetoric has shifted from talk of a recession in the 20-nation club to “a small contraction”, she said, with some major economies like Germany possibly dodging a contraction altogether.

The ECB is expecting 0.5-per cent growth in the eurozone in 2023, according to its latest forecast.

“So, it’s not a brilliant year, but it is a lot better than what we had feared,” Lagarde said.

The cautious optimism comes as sky-high energy prices, which soared last year because of the war in Ukraine, have started to fall.



A farmer is seen spreading vermicompost on his vegetable field in Doljor village under Aditmari upazila of Lalmonirhat. The use of vermicompost not only ensures better yields, but also acts as a safe and cost-effective alternative to manmade fertilisers. PHOTO: S DILIP ROY

Vermicompost production, sale grow in Rangpur

Use of the organic fertiliser bringing better yields

S DILIP ROY

About 10,000 farmers across five districts, namely Lalmonirhat, Kurigram, Gaibandha, Nilphamari and Rangpur, are benefitting from the production, use and sale of vermicompost, which is a natural fertiliser produced by decomposing organic material using earthworms.

Each farmer annually produces up to 10 tonnes of vermicompost at a cost of Tk 7 per kilogramme (kg), which is then sold for about Tk 12.

Other than the fertiliser itself, the farmers are simultaneously producing as much as 30 kgs of earthworms, which are being sold at Tk 900 to Tk 1,200 per kg.

The use of vermicompost for vegetable cultivation has increased significantly over the years, especially in small and marginal farms, according to sources at the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE).

As such, about 55,000 tonnes of the fertiliser are being produced each year against a demand of 75,000 tonnes in the five districts, DAE officials said.

Aduri Begum, a marginal farmer of

Bhattachara village in Chilmari upazila of Kurigram, said she produces 200 kgs of vermicompost and 10 kgs of earthworms every three weeks.

“Earthworms, cow dung, eggshells, vegetable waste, used tea leaves and rotting tree bark are decomposed to make vermicompost,” Begum added.

She went on to say that she gets the expected profit by selling the vermicompost made at home.

Salimuuddin, a marginal farmer of Paschim Sarkarpara village in the same upazila, said a non-government organisation (NGO) had trained them on the method of using earthworms to produce vermicompost.

“We sell vermicompost to local fertiliser dealers while the NGO buys earthworms from us,” he added.

Salimuuddin then said he is trying to secure more capital to increase production and that some 600 marginal farmers in Chilmari upazila are engaged in making the fertiliser.

Farmers in the region are being trained in vermicompost production through the Sustained Opportunities for Nutrition

Governance (SONGO) project.

Under the project, earthworms are bought from trained farmers and distributed among the new ones free of cost.

The project is being jointly implemented by RDRS Bangladesh and CordAid with financial support from the European Union.

Ahsanul Kabir Bulu, project manager, said many marginal farmers are producing vermicompost just to use it on their own small portions of land.

“So, we are helping farmers produce vermicompost to encourage them to grow toxin free vegetables. Currently, the use of vermicompost has increased a lot,” he added.

Nazrul Islam, a farmer of Sarpukur village in Aditmari upazila of Lalmonirhat, said he produces 400 kgs of vermicompost every three weeks.

As Islam does not need to purchase the required cow dung, his production cost comes down to about Tk 4 per kg, ensuring that he makes the expected profits.

“I myself am growing vegetables using vermicompost,” he added.

Subhash Chandra Sen, a marginal farmer of Madhupur village in Kaunia upazila of Rangpur, said fertiliser traders pay him in advance to buy vermicompost.

Besides, many farmers looking to produce their own fertiliser buy earthworms from him as well.

Habibur Rahman, a fertiliser trader of Chilmari upazila, said he buys

vermicompost from farmers for Tk 12 per kg before selling it for Tk 17 per kg.

“The sale of vermicompost has increased manifold over the years,” Rahman added, citing how he sells around 6,000 kgs of the fertiliser each month.

Narayan Chandra Barman, a farmer of Mahendranagar village in Lalmonirhat sadar upazila, said he produces vegetables using vermicompost at his homestead.

Barman previously used other fertilisers until he eventually found that vegetables produced using vermicompost provide better yields.

Javed Ali, a farmer of Doljor village in Lalmonirhat’s Aditmari upazila, said he has been producing vegetables using the organic fertiliser for the last three years.

He produces some vermicompost at home and meets the rest of his requirement from the local market.

“I am getting good results by using vermicompost in the crop field. The soil fertility is being increased after using the organic fertiliser and I am getting better crop production as a result,” he added.

Biplab Kumar Mohanta, deputy director of the DAE in Kurigram, said they alongside various NGOs are encouraging marginal farmers to produce vermicompost.

The use of vermicompost is essential to produce toxin free vegetables.

“Marginal farmers are benefiting from vermicompost production. Many people earn their living from this sector,” he said, adding that the use of vermicompost is increasing day by day.

Cyber security threats to Smart Bangladesh

MAHTAB UDDIN AHMED



In 2016, a group of hackers calling themselves “The Impact Team” hacked into Ashley Madison dating website and exposed the personal information of 37 million users. The hackers claimed to have done this to expose the company’s use of “fembots,” or fake female profiles, to lure male users into paying for the service.

The incident was widely covered in the media and led to a great deal of embarrassment for many of the users, including some public figures. Many also found it quite amusing because Ashley Madison’s slogan was “Life is short. Have an affair.” Better be careful when you try a dating site next!

Cybersecurity Ventures, a global researcher and publisher covering the global cyber economy and a source for cybersecurity facts, expects global cybercrime costs to grow by 15 per cent per year over the next few years, reaching \$10.5 trillion annually by 2025, up from \$3 trillion in 2015. This represents the most significant transfer of economic wealth in history and risks the incentives for innovation and investment.

Cybersecurity threats can cause certain dangers to individuals, businesses, and governments. Some of the potential dangers include:

Data breaches: Hackers can access information such as financial data, personal information, and confidential business information.

Ransomware attacks: Hackers can encrypt a victim’s files and demand a ransom payment in exchange for the decryption key.

Distributed denial of service attacks: Hackers can overload a website or network with traffic, making it unavailable to legitimate users. It’s very common in telecom, and in my last job, we experienced it.

Phishing scams: Hackers can trick individuals into providing sensitive information through fraudulent emails or websites.

Malware: Hackers can install malicious software on a victim’s device, allowing them to control it or steal information.

Industrial control system attacks: Attackers can target control systems for critical infrastructure such as power plants, water treatment facilities, and transportation systems.

Overall, cyber security threats can lead to financial loss, reputational damage and even physical harm in some cases.

The field of cybersecurity is evolving as new technologies and threats emerge. Some trends and developments that may shape the future include:

Increased adoption of cloud computing and Internet of Things devices: As more businesses and individuals adopt cloud services and connect more devices to internet, the number of potential attack vectors will increase.

Greater use of artificial intelligence and machine learning: These technologies can detect and respond to cyber threats in real time, but they also raise new concerns about the potential for malicious actors to use AI to launch more sophisticated attacks.

Growing focus on supply chain security: As more companies rely on third-party vendors and partners, the potential for supply chain attacks will increase.

Quantum computing: As quantum computing matures, it will become a more viable tool for cyber attackers to break encryption and other security measures.

5G and 6G: As the world moves to 5G and 6G networks, the number of IoT devices will increase, bringing new challenges to security at the edge, device security, and network security.

Overall, the future of cybersecurity will involve a continued emphasis on technological and human-based solutions, a greater focus on collaboration between public and private sectors, and up-to-date education.

True that cyber security is preparing us for what is next and not last. While Bangladesh is transforming itself from a digital to a smart country, its cyber security will be the critical enabler. When you get smart, the government also gets smart and vice versa. Here, smartness without security is like a headless chicken.

The author is a telecom and management expert

60% sub-branches of banks must be outside city corporations: BB

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

At least 60 per cent of sub-branches will have to be in areas located outside city corporations and top-tier municipalities, according to a Bangladesh Bank notice yesterday.

The sub-branches would be under the supervision of the nearby branches and the sub-branches can’t be established within one kilometre of their supervisory branch.

The central bank came up with the latest changes in its guideline on setting up business centres, renting or leasing, with a view to helping the banking industry expand its reach and taking banking services to the unbanked people, thus accelerating financial inclusion.

The central bank said banks can turn approved branches into SME or agriculture ones and those branches have to be outside divisional cities or city corporations and in the areas that don’t have access to banking services.

The SME or agriculture branches can run all banking activities except for foreign currency-related transactions and loans equal to at least 50 per cent of the deposits with the branches would have to be disbursed in the areas covering the branches.

The BB will consider the branches in city corporations and top-tier municipalities as urban branches and the rest as rural branches. The rural branches would have to make up at least half of the brick-and-mortar outlets approved by the central bank.

READ MORE ON B3

Only 8.5% of Western firms have left Russia: study

AFP, Geneva

Despite widespread outrage over Moscow’s war in Ukraine, only a small number of Western companies have deserted Russia, according to a Swiss study.

Researchers at the University of St. Gallen and at the IMD institute in Lausanne have delved into how many companies based in the European Union and in G7 countries have actually divested from Russia since its full-scale invasion of Ukraine began last February.

Their findings reveal “a very limited retreat of EU and G7 firms from Russia, (and) challenge the narrative that there is a vast exodus of Western firms leaving the market,” St. Gallen University said in a statement Thursday.

“In effect, many firms headquartered in these nations have resisted pressures from governments, the media, and NGOs to leave Russia since the invasion of Ukraine.”

The study, which was published last month by the online Social Science Research Network (SSRN) — a publisher of “pre-print” studies not subjected to scientific peer-review — showed that only less than 10 per cent of EU and G7 companies with Russian subsidiaries had divested them.



People shop at a supermarket in Moscow. A study revealed that only less than 10 per cent of EU and G7 companies with Russian subsidiaries had divested them. PHOTO: AFP

When Moscow launched its invasion, 1,404 companies based in the EU and the G7 counted a total of 2,405 subsidiaries that were active in Russia, the study showed.

By late November, only 120, or about

8.5 per cent of those companies, had divested at least one subsidiary in Russia, study authors Niccolo Pisani and Simon Evenett found.

There were more confirmed exits by companies headquartered in the United

States than those based in Europe and Japan.

But even with the United States, fewer than 18 per cent of US subsidiaries operating in Russia had been completely divested since the invasion began, the study showed.

By contrast, 15 per cent of Japanese firms and only 8.3 per cent of EU firms had divested from Russia, it said.

Of those who have left their Russian subsidiaries in place, 19.5 per cent are German and 12.4 per cent are US-owned, according to the study.

The research also showed that the exiting Western firms only accounted for 6.5 per cent of the total profit before tax of EU and G7 firms with active commercial operations in Russia.

They meanwhile accounted for 15.3 per cent of the total number of employees working for such firms in Russia.

This indicates that, on average, the exiting firms tended to have lower profitability and larger workforces than the firms that remain in Russia, the study said.

These findings, the university statement said, “call into question the willingness of Western firms to decouple from economies their governments now deem to be geopolitical rivals.”