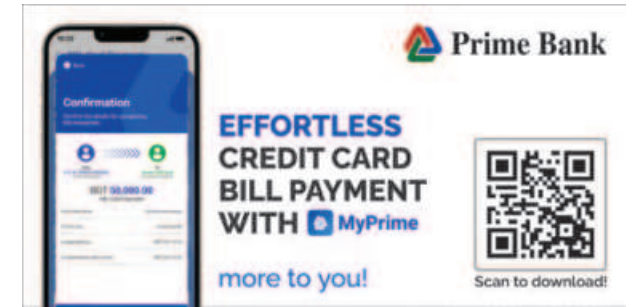


Star BUSINESS



Interest rate hike won't bring down inflation

Says FBCCI president
STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Inflation or prices of many products, including essential commodities, will come down if the same happens in international markets or if import duties are adjusted, not if interest rates are hiked, said FBCCI President Md Jashim Uddin yesterday.

"If the interest rate is increased, will people buy less? Already people are buying less in the current economic situation. Since then, the price of many products has increased," he said.

"As long as the interest rate was low, investment has been higher," he added.

Although inflation in Bangladesh has maintained a downward trend for the past five consecutive months, it is

The FBCCI chief announced that a three-day Bangladesh Business Summit 2023 will begin in Dhaka from March 11

still high enough to affect those living in the middle-income category and below, experts say.

The Consumer Price Index rose 8.57 per cent last month, a decrease of 14 basis points from 8.71 per cent in December, according to data from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

January's inflation figure was the lowest since August when consumer prices surged to a 10-year high of 9.52 per cent.

The interest for lending came to the spotlight last month when Bangladesh Bank unveiled its monetary policy statement for the January-June period. The key targets of any monetary policy are usually set to diffuse the price pressure.

The banking sector has been following a 9 per cent cap on interest for lending since April 2020 as per the instruction of the central bank.

Jashim was addressing a press conference at InterContinental Dhaka to inform of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) in partnership with the government organising

READ MORE ON B3

CAREER

- Started his career in a pharmaceutical company
- Was the resident manager of two American pharma companies in Bangladesh
- Was in the senior management position in Jamuna Oil Company
- He started his own business in 1979
- Was founding chairman of Rangs Group, Rancon Group, Sea Resources Group
- Was the founder director of Mediaworld, the parent company of leading English daily The Daily Star
- Spearheaded the creation of Bank Asia in 1999 by acquiring the Bangladesh operations of the Canadian Bank of Nova Scotia



A Rouf Chowdhury
(1937-2023)

BUSINESS INTERESTS

Bank, automobiles, pharmaceuticals, real estate, IT, deep-sea fishing, telecom, electronics, food processing, insurance, etc.

TOTAL COMPANIES

Founded over 50 companies in the last four decades

MAJOR VENTURES

- Bank Asia
- Rangs Motors
- Rangs Pharmaceuticals
- Ranks Real Estate
- Ranks Construction
- Ranks Power Tech
- Sea Resources
- Sea Fishers

A Rouf Chowdhury: a dreamer and a trailblazer

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN and KHONDOKER MD SHOYEB

Bangladesh's banking sector has long been going through a difficult time as a majority of banks are plagued by challenges stemming from a lack of corporate governance. But Bank Asia Ltd stands out thanks to its unwavering focus on following rules strictly under the leadership of a strong board of directors led by A Rouf Chowdhury.

Chowdhury died yesterday at the age of 86, ending an illustrious entrepreneurial journey spanning more than four decades during which he set up over 50 companies and created jobs for around 35,000 people.

He not only built a successful bank. Rather, the prolific businessman founded companies with business interests in automobiles, pharmaceuticals, real estate, IT, deep-sea fishing, telecommunications, electronics, food processing and insurance.

Chowdhury spearheaded the creation of Bank Asia in 1999 by acquiring the Bangladesh operations of the Canadian Bank of Nova Scotia. It later acquired the Bangladesh operations of Pakistani bank Muslim

Commercial Bank.

He helped Bank Asia become an efficient financial institution, which is described as a model when it comes to financial inclusion as it took banking services to the doorsteps of millions of unbanked people through its agent banking.

The ratio of default loans, a key indicator of the health of

underbanked and has already had 55 lakh account-holders.

Md Arfan Ali, a former managing director of Bank Asia, worked with Chowdhury from 1999 to 2022.

"During my career at the bank, we rolled out several digital banking products, including agent banking. The management of Bank Asia would not have been able to

September 22 in 1937 and went on to study business management at the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the United States.

He started his career at a pharmaceutical company. He began his own business in 1979.

He founded Sea Resources Group (SRG) in 1982 with a vision to establish the deep-sea fishing sector in Bangladesh as one of the prominent contributors to the economy.

Today, SRG has the largest fleet of deep-sea trawling with 23 fishing boats. And following in his footsteps, many entrepreneurs have signed up in the trade enabling the country to export sea fishes.

"His visionary leadership was instrumental in the success of the 35 companies under Rangs Group and Sea Resources Group," said Rangs Group on its Facebook page.

Anis A Khan, a former managing director of Mutual Trust Bank, describes Chowdhury as very professional.

"He always followed rules to run businesses. He had the respect for compliance and corporate governance. This has been reflected in the type of lender that Bank Asia is today."

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a bank, stood at 5.8 per cent at Bank Asia in September last year, way lower than the industry average of 9.4 per cent.

A pioneer in the banking industry, the lender introduced the country's first agent banking service in January 2014, giving the country's financial inclusion agenda a shot in the arm.

The alternative banking platform of Bank Asia has gained huge traction among the unbanked and

introduce the products if he had not motivated us," Ali said.

"His demise is a great loss for the country's business and financial sector. We all should follow in his footsteps."

"He was not only a visionary entrepreneur. He also executed big plans. He was a dreamer and a motivator. He could easily communicate his thoughts with his employees, helping them achieve business targets," Ali said.

Chowdhury was born on

BASIS EXPO FROM FEB 23

IT firms going all out to attract clients

Look to help lift exports to \$5b by 2025

MAHMUDUL HASAN

Local software and IT-enabled service companies will display their technological advancement and look to attract local and global clients at the BASIS SoftExpo 2023 as Bangladesh plans to raise IT exports to \$5 billion by 2025 and become a smart nation in two decades.

The four-day exhibition is going to kick off at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Exhibition Center at the capital's Purbachal on February 23 where 200 exhibitors will showcase their IT and ITES.

"This is going to be the largest tech fair in the history of Bangladesh. Local firms have made impressive strides in recent years and they are going to display their strength," says Russell T Ahmed, president of BASIS

"This is going to be the largest tech fair in the history of Bangladesh. Local firms have made impressive strides in recent years and they are going to display their strength," Russell T Ahmed, president of the Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS), told The Daily Star.

The exposition will have two large business lounges, a shuttle bus service for visitors, gaming zones and many other conveniences.

"We are going to hold the event as we want to keep contributing to the economy by earning more foreign currencies, expanding our footprint, and creating jobs," said Ahmed.

Domestic IT companies have played a pivotal role in turning the country into Digital Bangladesh.

"Now, we want to show that we will be at the forefront of the government's vision of achieving its Smart Bangladesh vision," said the BASIS chief.

He thinks as the world is heading towards the fourth industrial revolution, ICT will be the heart of technological expansion. And the expo will lead the economy to attain Bangladesh's IT export target of \$5 billion by 2025.

READ MORE ON B3

STOCKS		WEEK-ON-WEEK
DSEX	▼	
0.59%		
6,246.21		
CASPI	▼	
0.57%		
18,427.95		

COMMODITIES		AS OF FRIDAY
Gold	▲	
\$1,842.64		
(per ounce)		
Oil	▼	
\$76.43		
(per barrel)		

ASIAN MARKETS				FRIDAY CLOSINGS
MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI	
▼ 0.52%	▼ 0.66%	▲ 0.52%	▼ 0.77%	
61,002.57	27,513.13	3,328.37	3,224.02	

Russia, Ukraine now major sources of wheat for Bangladesh

Extension of Black Sea grain deal vital for smooth supply, say importers

SOHEL PARVEZ

Russia and Ukraine have become major sources of wheat for Bangladesh after India's ban of its shipment, thanks to a United Nations and Turkey brokered grain deal that allowed moving the cereal from Ukraine over the Black Sea.

Importers said they started importing wheat from both countries a couple of months after the deal in July last year which enabled them to offset a shortfall in imports resulting from India's ban in May last year.

The neighbouring country had become a major source of wheat for Bangladesh as businesses found imports cheaper and convenient due to the shorter shipment period, low freight cost and geographic proximity, said the US Department of Agriculture in a report on Bangladesh earlier.

The report said India accounted for 67 per cent of Bangladesh's total wheat import, followed by



Canada, Ukraine, Australia and Russia in marketing year 2021-22.

"Our imports from the Black Sea region came almost to a halt for several months after the war began," said Abul Bashar Chowdhury, chairman of BSM Group, a Chattogram-based commodity importer.

"Now, Ukraine and Russia

are gradually becoming a major source for low protein wheat," he said.

Bangladesh produces around 11 lakh tonnes of wheat against an annual requirement of 75 lakh tonnes, meaning the rest is imported.

In fiscal year 2021-22, the country imported 40.12 lakh

tonnes of wheat. And between July 1 and February 15 this fiscal year, the import amounted to 17.57 lakh tonnes in total, according to data by food ministry.

Russia, Ukraine and Canada were now major sources of the grain after the Black Sea deal, said Md Aminul Islam, managing director of Nabil Group, one of the largest importers of wheat.

Overall import from the three countries would be around 14 lakh tonnes so far this fiscal year, he said.

"Availability of wheat is not an issue now. There are supplies in the international market," he said.

"The problem is now opening of letters of credit for banks' lack of interest amid dollar shortage. Wheat imports will increase if this problem is over," Islam said.

The Black Sea Grain Initiative brokered by the United Nations and Turkey last July allowed grain to be exported from three Ukrainian ports, reports Reuters.

READ MORE ON B3



Our imports from the Black Sea region came almost to a halt for several months after the war began. Now, Ukraine and Russia are gradually becoming a major source for low protein wheat

Abul Bashar Chowdhury
Chairman of BSM Group

"Towa Personal Protective Device Bangladesh Ltd. achieved AEO Certificate and joined SEDEX"

Towa Personal Protective Device Bangladesh Ltd. is a 100% Japanese Export Oriented "A-Type" Industrial Hand Gloves Manufacturing Company located at Ishwardi EPZ, Pakshey, Pabna has been awarded the Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) certificate as first Japanese company in Bangladesh on January 26, 2023 by the Customs Valuation & Internal Audit Commissionerate under the National Board of Revenue (NBR).

One of the AEO qualifications is to be a compliant company with laws and regulations. Towa Personal Protective Device Bangladesh Ltd. joined SEDEX member last year. SEDEX is one of the platforms for evaluating the implementation of human rights due diligence, and based on the four pillars "Labor Standards", "Health and Safety", "Corporate Philosophy" and "Environment". Towa Personal Protective Device Bangladesh Ltd. will comply with laws and regulations, and also value stakeholders such as employees and customers etc., and Towa Personal Protective Device Bangladesh Ltd. would like to contribute to the future economic development of Bangladesh.

On behalf of the company,

Masayuki Kunimi
Managing Director

Towa Personal Protective Device Bangladesh Ltd.
Plot No. 46-50 and 53-57 (2nd Phase), IEPZ, Ishwardi, Pakshey, Pabna

MetLife honoured by Superbrands

STAR BUSINESS DESK

MetLife Bangladesh has been honoured by Superbrands Bangladesh in a life insurance category for 2023-24 for its "outstanding contribution to the life insurance sector in the country".

Superbrands Bangladesh, a representative of London-based Superbrands Worldwide, is a global arbiter for brands operating in 90 countries.

The insurer has a history of over 70 years. It provides life insurance services to over 10 lakh individuals and over 800 organisations in Bangladesh, said a press release.

"The award is the result of MetLife's efforts to keep people secure through world-class life insurance. This is also a very positive sign for the insurance sector of Bangladesh," said Ala Ahmad, chief executive officer of MetLife Bangladesh.



Abdul Khalil tends to his patch of hybrid zucchini of Thai origin in Sylhet's Bishwanath upazila. Investing around Tk 17,000 on 12 decimals of land, he expects to harvest around Tk 60,000 worth of the vegetable. Each kilogramme of zucchini is selling for Tk 50 to Tk 60 in local markets. The photo was taken at Boro Khurma of Alankari union recently.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

Why don't indexes go with the flow of bearish stocks?

AHSAN HABIB

If you follow the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE), you will find that most of the shares on the premier bourse of the country ended the day either unchanged or they witnessed a drop. As a result, the indexes were supposed to fall.

But in reality, the indices rose, and when they fell, they fell marginally. This has been the scenario for the last few months.

For instance, 122 stocks gave up, 145 remained unchanged and 41 advanced on the DSE on Thursday. Although only 13 per cent of the stocks listed on the exchange ended up in black, the benchmark DSEX Index still managed to close a single point higher.

Naturally, the question arises: why don't the indices of the market behave in line with the fluctuation of most of the securities?

Analysts squarely blame the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC) for the tricky floor price and the circuit breaker for the mismatch.

The floor price, the lowest price at

which a share can be traded, was brought back on July 29 in order to prevent a freefall of stocks amidst global economic uncertainties brought on by the global crisis induced by the Russia-Ukraine war.

The floor was the average of the closing prices on July 28 of 2022 and the preceding four days.

On December 21, the stock market regulator lifted the artificial support measure for 169 companies out of nearly 400 companies listed on the DSE. It, however, set a circuit breaker for them so they can't decline more than 1 per cent in a single day.

"As the BSEC is maintaining the floor price, stocks can't drop. Instead, they can only go up. The system is preventing the indexes from falling," said Abu Ahmed, an analyst.

The regulator has removed the floor price for some companies and they are allowed to fall only 1 per cent a day. But the market capitalisation of this group of issues is low, he said.

The slow drop of the low paid-up capital-based stocks can't bring down the index significantly. So, when some companies go up, the indexes close in positive

territory, said Ahmed, a former professor of economics at the University of Dhaka.

Mohammad Musa, a professor of the business administration department at the United International University, also thinks that the floor price is the main factor.

"Institutional investors are not investing since they will face problems in offloading shares if the floor price remains in place," he said.

Earlier this month, Mohammad Rezaul Karim, a spokesperson of the BSEC, said until the market situation improved, the commission would not withdraw the floor price completely.

As the low paid-up and capital-based companies are only permitted to slip and that's also to a small extent, the index is not going down, said Prof Musa.

"But most of these stocks are only making the upward and downward swing because of speculation."

A top official of a brokerage firm says the present index does not depict the real sufferings of investors and the market intermediaries.

"Most of the investors' funds have been stuck since they have bought the shares at higher prices."

He said there is no floor price in any part of the world and the commission should not keep the market overvalued artificially. The broker thinks that since the economy is facing a challenging situation, the market is supposed to fall.

In fact, the economy has been under serious strain for the past several months, largely owing to the volatility in the foreign exchange market stemming from the decline of the country's forex reserves.

The reserves have dipped because of the higher import payments against lower incomes in the form of export earnings and remittance receipts.

"But there is nothing to be scared about even if the market falls. This is because if the market is allowed to take its due course, some investors will still come forward and invest, paving the way for the exchanges to bounce back."

ANALYSIS

Commercial Bank of Ceylon group MD visits Dhaka

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Sanath Manatunge, group managing director of the Commercial Bank of Ceylon, arrived in Dhaka on a visit on Friday.

He was scheduled to attend meetings with customers and diplomats in both Dhaka and Chattogram and preside over an annual staff conference of the bank, said a press release.



House Building Finance chair reappointed

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Bangladesh House Building Finance Corporation (BHBF) has reappointed the chairman of its board of directors.

The official, Prof Md Salim Uddin, is also the acting chairman of the executive committee of Islami Bank Bangladesh and vice-president of the Institute of Cost and Management Accountants of Bangladesh, said a press release.

He previously worked for Rupali Bank and Rupali Investment and was a lecturer of accounting at the University of Chittagong.

A fellow chartered accountant, fellow cost & management accountant and certified public finance accountant, Uddin obtained his honour's degree in commerce and master's in accounting from the University of Chittagong.



PRICES OF KEY ESSENTIALS IN DHAKA CITY			
	PRICE (FEB 18, 2023)	% CHANGES FROM A MONTH AGO	% CHANGE FROM A YEAR AGO
Fine rice (kg)	Tk 60-Tk 75	1.5 ↑	5.47 ↑
Coarse rice (kg)	Tk 48-Tk 52	2.04 ↑	5.26 ↑
Loose flour (kg)	Tk 58-Tk 60	-1.67 ↓	68.57 ↑
Lentil (kg)	Tk 95-Tk 100	-4.88 ↓	0
Soybean (litre)	Tk 168-Tk 172	0.59 ↑	6.25 ↑
Potato (kg)	Tk 20-Tk 25	0	28.57 ↑
Onion (kg)	Tk 30-Tk 35	-18.75 ↓	-23.53 ↓
Egg (4 pcs)	Tk 46-Tk 50	17.07 ↑	29.73 ↑

SOURCE: TCB



Mohammad Feroz Hossain, managing director of Exim Bank, inaugurated a branch on Jamal Khan Road in Chattogram yesterday. SM Abu Zaker, additional deputy managing director, presided over the programme, where Md Zoshim Uddin Bhuiyan, deputy managing director, Sheikh Moyeen Uddin, additional deputy managing director, and Abdul Qayyum Chowdhuri, president of the Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh's Chattogram unit, were present.

PHOTO: EXIM BANK



Ahsan-uz Zaman, managing director of Midland Bank, attended an annual managers' conference 2023 at its head office in Gulshan, Dhaka recently. Md Zahid Hossain, deputy managing director, and Md Rashed Akter, head of retail distribution division, were present.

PHOTO: MIDLAND BANK

US wholesale price inflation rebounds on goods prices

AFP, Washington

Wholesale prices in the United States picked up more than expected in January, according to Labor Department data released Thursday, bumped up by goods costs and fueled by higher gasoline prices.

This comes as policymakers look for signs that inflation is coming down in the long run, despite resilience in some sectors of the economy.

To rein in surging prices, the US central bank raised interest rates multiple times last year in hopes of cooling demand, with the interest-sensitive housing industry slumping.

Manufacturing activity in the highly industrialised Philadelphia area contracted for a sixth straight month in February, in separate report released Thursday, logging its lowest reading since May 2020 during the pandemic.

But the producer price index, a measure of wholesale inflation, bounced 0.7 per cent in January from December, at a quicker pace than analysts predicted.

On an annual basis, PPI rose 6.0 per cent last month, down from December's reading.

A rise in prices for goods led the January advance, said the Labor Department, adding that a significant factor was gasoline prices. Energy prices also contributed to elevated consumer inflation in January.

"While producer prices are off their peaks, inflation is elevated and the monthly change in prices showed a move in the wrong direction last month," said Rubceela Farooqi, chief US economist at High Frequency Economics.

How sanctions complicated

FROM PAGE B4

A retail worker, who asked not to be identified, said the memory of the mad scramble for cash made her to this day make sure she had ample cash handy.

"I spent hours in my car driving between banks where people were withdrawing not just dollars, but also roubles," she said.

The suspension of Russian operations by Visa and Mastercard also meant their cards issued there stopped working abroad, sparking a rush to Russia's alternative, Mir cards.

Danil Usikov, a 45-year-old entrepreneur, who is based in Belarus and was there when Russian cards stopped working, said he had enough cash not to panic.

"But the problem had to be solved and I flew to Moscow, opened a Mir card, returned to Belarus and then was able to pay for everything."

Yet Mir, which means "world" or "peace" in Russian, is facing headwinds abroad, with some "friendly" countries - those that have not sanctioned Russia - such as Turkey restricting access.

Former journalist Andrey said China's UnionPay was his lifeline.

"I quickly opened three UnionPay cards at different Russian banks," Andrey, who now works outside Russia, said. "Moreover, I went to Kazakhstan to get a MasterCard

there, which proved to be invaluable in the past year."

Many Russians who have moved abroad, worried about reprisals for their political views or fearing being called up to fight in the conflict, also had to figure out how to get money out of Russia.

While some banks can still access SWIFT and process cross-border transfers, commissions and fees have gone up, driving people to alternatives, such as cryptocurrencies.

For example, users of Binance, the world's largest crypto exchange, can transfer roubles via the "stablecoin" Tether pegged to the US dollar.

Other ways of extracting cash from Russia are more adventurous.

One financial services professional, who left Moscow soon after the conflict began and requested anonymity, asked a friend to withdraw millions of roubles from his Russian accounts and meet a man in Moscow.

The transaction, based entirely on trust, was completed three hours later when a woman arrived at his hotel room in Dubai with around \$50,000 in a paper KFC bag.

Thousands of Russians who have flocked to Dubai found that that even though it is a "friendly" destination, opening a bank account there was anything but straightforward, especially without an Emirati ID.

IMF, Ukraine reach deal

FROM PAGE B4

He added that authorities are "making progress in reforms to strengthen governance, anti-corruption and rule of law, and lay the foundations for post-war growth." But the agenda of reforms remains significant.

Ukraine's economy contracted by 30 per cent last year, less severely than anticipated, but recovery and reconstruction has been estimated at hundreds of billions of dollars.

"The public sector will play an important role in the reconstruction

process," said Gray.

He added that measures to raise the "efficiency and transparency of public finances and governance will be critical." Russia's invasion of Ukraine around a year ago has displaced millions of people, and global food and energy prices surged on the fallout from the war.

Apart from the IMF's work with Ukraine, the World Bank has also mobilised over \$18 billion in emergency financing for the country, with more than \$16 billion since disbursed through projects.



Business organisations have to renew many certificates every year, which is problematic for them, say business leaders.

PHOTO: STAR/FILE

Too many licences, too many renewals

Lament businesses at MCCI luncheon

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The necessity of obtaining the many licences and certificates for a business and frequent renewals are badly hurting the local entrepreneurs and investors, businesses said yesterday.

The business organisations have to renew many certificates every year, which is particularly problematic for small-scale industrial units, said Md Saiful Islam, president of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce & Industry, Dhaka (MCCI).

These registrations should have a validity period of at least five years, he said.

The state of a business organisation can be inspected every year. Registration can be cancelled if there is any problem. But registrations should have long term

validity, he added.

Islam was speaking at a "First Quarterly Luncheon Meeting" organised by the chamber at Police Plaza Concord in Dhaka.

Even though Bangladesh Investment Development Authority launched a one-stop service to facilitate investors, many obstacles arise at various departments when services are sought on the ground, said Uzma Chowdhury, a director of Pran-RFL Group.

"If these could have been properly delivered, we would not have to visit many offices," she added.

"According to a companies act, we can do all kinds of work under a company but in reality, we have to individually register for each with different departments," she said.

"If we could get permission to do

multiple businesses under one company, we would be able to produce many products with a single machine. So, it would be easier to do business without such additional registrations," she added.

The implementation of decisions taken at the government level is very slow on the ground in many cases, said Nihad Kabir, former president of the MCCI.

She recommended that a Private Sector Development Policy Coordination Committee of the Prime Minister's Office be more active.

Besides, it is necessary to give new government officials a good idea about public-private partnerships in their basic training while activities of a National Skills Development Authority should also be increased, she said.

Humayun Rashid, managing director & CEO of Energypac, said he had to

obtain 28 types of certificates from 28 government agencies for investing in the LPG sector.

"It is very challenging. This process needs to be simplified," he said.

Joining the event as chief guest, Mohammad Tofazzel Hossain Miah, principal secretary to the prime minister, said the country has already made a lot of progress in the infrastructure sector.

However, the scope of business financing should be increased. Besides, to adapt to the changing world, necessary policy changes and reforms should be brought about, he said.

Apart from this, more focus should be given on laws pertaining to intellectual property while the government institutions need to be strengthened to implement the government's decisions, he added.

Sustainable, innovative business key to future growth

Experts say at Bangladesh Business Innovation Summit

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

While companies must be innovative in order to thrive amid the fourth industrial revolution, they should initially start with small investments to build a sustainable business model, speakers said at a daylong summit held yesterday.

"Innovation comes from the ability to be nimble. But for an innovative business model, the company should start with a small amount of investment to ensure its sustainability," said Sabbir Hasan Nasir, executive director of ACI Logistics Limited (Shwapno).

Innovation usually requires fresh investment. So, if the investment is a huge amount that exceeds \$1 million, it becomes difficult to handle the business at first, he added.

Citing how Shwapno began its journey to become one of the most popular super shops in Bangladesh in much the same way, Nasir said businesses should go for broader moves only after receiving a good return from the initial investment.

Nasir made these remarks while speaking at a panel discussion on "CEO's Perspective: Creating and Fostering an Innovative Culture" at the Le Méridien hotel in Dhaka. The event was organised on the sidelines of the Bangladesh Business Innovation Summit 2023.

The summit is an initiative of the Bangladesh Innovation Conclave organised by the Bangladesh Brand Forum in association with The Daily Star and Aspire to Innovate (a2i).

"As a CEO, one needs to understand the structure of a company and the overall marketplace. For innovation, the company needs to concentrate on increasing its production capacity," said Asif Iqbal, group chief executive officer of Hamid Group.

"Innovation has to be focused on the overall organisational perspective. Broader innovation can only be fruitful by bringing technological advancement," he added.

Khondoker Tasfin Alam, chief operating officer of Daraz Bangladesh, moderated the discussion, while Asif Ashraf, managing director of Urmi group, and Syed Mahbubur Rahman, managing director of Mutual Trust Bank, were present.

"Innovation drives every field of our economic and social lives. So, we have to develop an innovative mindset in every sector of the country to keep finding new areas for nurturing innovation," said Shariful Islam, founder of the Bangladesh Innovation Conclave. "It is a long process and so, we are here to commit for the long run."

Md Alamgir Kabir, chairman of GPH Ispat Limited, said innovation is the key for sustaining and developing industries as well as the nation. "Now is the time to reflect on our progress and strategies that will shape our future," he added.

The summit was followed by the Bangladesh Business Innovation Award 2023, which recognised 49 individuals, startups and established companies for their breakthrough creations and ideas.

Russia, Ukraine now major sources

FROM PAGE B1

The agreement was extended by a further 120 days in November and is up for renewal again in March, it says.

However, it takes longer now for importing wheat from Ukraine because of several checks on the way, said Taslim Shahriar, senior assistant general manager of the Meghna Group of Industries.

"It will be great if the war ends," he said.

He said the situation in the Ukraine-Russia region was important for Bangladesh as the region was a key source of wheat.

So, further extensions of the Black Sea grain deal are vital for a smooth supply of wheat to Bangladesh, Taslim added.

Negotiations will start in a week on extending a United Nations backed initiative that has enabled Ukraine to export grain from ports blockaded by Russia after its invasion, said Reuters on Friday quoting a senior Ukrainian official as saying.

The Black Sea Grain Initiative



created a protected sea transit corridor and was designed to alleviate global food shortages, with Ukraine's customers including some of the world's poorest countries, said Reuters. Developing nations such as Somalia and Eritrea also rely heavily on imports of wheat from Russia, it

said.

"Renewal of the deal is important for us. Otherwise, it will be a problem for us too," said Islam of Nabil Group which imported nearly 350,000 tonnes of wheat so far this year.

The company imported 18 lakh tonnes of the grain in 2022, he added.

A Rouf Chowdhury: a dreamer and a trailblazer

FROM PAGE B1

He said Chowdhury was among the early entrepreneurs in Bangladesh.

"He emerged as a business icon in the last couple of decades by playing a pivotal role in helping the country's businesses. He later widened his footprint in news media and financial services."

A Rouf Chowdhury was a founding director of The Daily Star, the country's largest-circulated English language newspaper.

He received numerous awards, including the lifetime achievement award from the UK Bangladesh Catalysts of Commerce & Industry.

Mir Nasir Hossain, a former president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, says Chowdhury was one of the pioneer entrepreneurs in many businesses in the country.

"Chowdhury is a symbol of a successful businessperson."

Hossain recalled that he had a great relationship with the Rangs Group's founder and was fortunate to observe him very closely.

"His strong leadership has helped

Bank Asia become one of the best banks. He also nurtured his next generation to run his businesses efficiently."

Rouf Chowdhury was the president of the Bangladesh Marine Fisheries Association (BMFA) for eight consecutive years since 2003 and resolved various issues confronted by the sector by engaging with policymakers.

"He was a great entrepreneur and legendary business personality," said BMFA President Nurul Qayyum Khan.

Sk Abid Husain, secretary of the association, also recalled Chowdhury's huge contribution to the business of deep-sea fishing.

"I learned a lot from him. If anyone made a mistake, he would talk in a way that the person would not get hurt."

Md Jashim Uddin, president of the FBCCI, expressed his condolences over the death of Chowdhury.

Hafizur Rahman Khan, chairman of Runner Group, an automobile marketer and bike manufacturer, said Chowdhury began business and

succeeded although his family did not have a business.

"It is his creation. Whatever he started, he succeeded. He inspired many like me to enter into business."

He said the founder chairman of Rangs Group always gave honest suggestions whenever someone sought advice.

Md Saiful Islam, president of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, called Chowdhury a great entrepreneur with a vision and a mission.

"He could reach his goal much earlier. He created jobs, loved the country and diversified the business. He was the architect of a silent revolution in deep-sea fishing by introducing modern fishing."

The business leader thinks Chowdhury gave more to the country than what he had received from it.

"He listened to patriotic songs even two days before his demise," said Islam, citing Chowdhury's family members.

"He loved people, the country and work. As a whole, he was a complete human being."

IT firms going all out to attract clients

FROM PAGE B1

Policy-makers, national and international speakers, IT experts and businessmen are scheduled to attend the event. Steps have been taken to involve 50 universities in the show, according to the organisers.

Around 80 foreign delegates and businesses will participate in the business-to-business matchmaking. Local firms are now busy with their last-minute preparation for the country's top software expo as they eye to impress both local and global clients.

"We will showcase our new products and services, including artificial intelligence capability, predictive modelling software and emerging technologies," said M Manjur Mahmud, president of DataSoft Systems.

The IT firm has already exported software products to 31 countries and has offices in four countries. It

employs 450 people.

"We are taking this expo very seriously as we want to show who the real software players are in Bangladesh and how much we have progressed," said Mahmud.



Raisul Kabir, chief executive officer of Brain Station 23, a software exporter, said it was planning to exhibit its capability in office management software.

The fair is expected to focus on creating more collaborative relationships at national and international levels, inviting trade

delegations from other countries to help them experience the immense potential of the ICT industry in the country.

There will be an IT job fair and career camp, B2B matchmaking, outsourcing conference, startup conference, developers conference and ministerial conference at the four-day event.

Nearly a dozen seminars and dialogues will be held where policymakers, ICT business leaders, national and international speakers, influencers, and motivators will hold discussions under one roof.

These sessions will focus on issues such as awareness and capacity-building programmes, e-commerce, cyber security, the strength of the local ICT industry, a professional framework for human resources development, the scope for industry-academia collaboration, 4IR, and digital marketing.

Interest rate hike won't bring

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a three-day Bangladesh Business Summit 2023 from March 11.

Marking the country's 50th anniversary of independence, the event is scheduled to share business environment improvements, investment successes and good practices and gain insights of global investors' priorities for the development of policies.

The objectives include securing concrete investment proposals, developing a solid investment pipeline for important sectors and facilitating effective networking, dialogue and partnership opportunities among national and international investors, policymakers and stakeholders.

Bangladesh has been growing rapidly over a decade and is one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, said Jashim.

Currently, it is the 41st largest economy and will be the 25th largest economy by 2035. In just about 13 years, the nation has grown from being a \$50 billion economy to a \$460 billion one, he said.

Bangladesh has laid out a vision to become an "upper middle-income country" within the next decade and a "developed country" by 2041. Bangladesh now seeks to expand its formal sector by enhancing its trade and investment, he said.

While established sectors such as

garments continue to fuel prosperity, several sectors boast high potential to be new growth drivers and are complemented by government efforts to further strengthen their investment climates and sector competitiveness, added Jashim.

On the country's current economic situation, he said Bangladesh was now facing some problems which were global in nature and finding a solution required everyone to work together, he said.

Work is underway to develop the country's power and gas supplies alongside infrastructure and foreign companies working in Bangladesh are increasingly investing here on attaining success, Jashim said.



Cylinders mounted on three-wheelers wait to be filled with compressed natural gas in a refuelling station in Board Bazar area of Gazipur to provide supplies of the fuel to factories in the area. Sources say businesses resorted to this method due to the insufficient pressure in supply lines. The photo was taken last week. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Chemical, combustible exports halted once again

Sole authorised depot fails to meet safety standards

MOHAMMAD SUMAN

The export of chemical and combustible products from Bangladesh has been halted once again as the only depot designated by the Chattogram customs authority to handle dangerous goods has failed to maintain the minimum safety standards.

Following a major fire at the BM Container Depot in Sitakunda last June, Chittagong Container Transportation Company Limited (CCTCL) was given the sole responsibility for handling dangerous cargo at its depot inside the Chattogram port area.

However, the depot is yet to meet the minimum requirements for ensuring safe transport of dangerous cargo, said Nurul Basir, deputy commissioner of the Chattogram Custom House.

As a result, such goods have not been allowed to enter since last Wednesday while the products that are already available will be shipped by Monday, according to depot and customs officials.

In a report to the customs commissioner on February 12, Basir said the CCTCL has not complied with the International Maritime Dangerous Goods (IMDG) Act, Dangerous Cargo Act-1953 or Bangladesh's Inland Container Depot (ICD) Policy.

As per the laws provided by these three guidelines, chemical and combustible products such as hydrogen peroxide, caustic soda and liquid chlorine must be handled with specific equipment and kept in separate sheds.

But after the accident at the BM Container Depot on June 4, when 51 people were killed and more than 200 were injured, it came to light that all 16 private ICDS in the country were flouting the rules.

Likewise, the CCTCL depot kept dangerous cargo among normal import-export items and did not even secure a license from the fire service for handling such products, the report said.

In addition, there were no resources available to extinguish a fire should one occur while all types of good were being transported by workers instead of the required equipment.

There are many residential buildings and sensitive government establishments, including the port jetty, a hospital and school and college, adjacent to the CCTCL depot.

"So, it is dangerous to handle chemical and combustible products without the proper safety measures in place," Basir said.

Samuda Chemical, a subsidiary of Chattogram's TK Group, is one of the country's biggest exporters of hydrogen peroxide.

Bikash Kanti Das, head of business at Samuda Chemical, told The Daily Star that about 6,000 tonnes of the chemical is exported from Bangladesh each month.

"Our factory was forced to shut down for a long time after the BM depot incident, but we eventually resumed production when the CCTCL was authorised to handle dangerous goods," he said.

However, no chemical products have been allowed to enter the depot since

Wednesday. So, we will contact port officials on Sunday [today] to ask about what happens next," Das added.

He went on to say that production at their factory has already stopped again after it was announced that operations at the CCTCL depot have been halted.

Following a major fire at the BM Container Depot in Sitakunda last June, Chittagong Container Transportation Company Limited (CCTCL) was given the sole responsibility for handling dangerous cargo at its depot inside Chattogram port

"We made a commitment to many buyers to deliver their products on time," he said, adding that they now fear competing countries might take over the market if exports are discontinued for long.

Port and customs officials say shipments of chemical and combustible goods were halted for almost two months after the BM depot incident as shipping companies and foreign buyers had become wary about taking such products from Bangladesh given the poor safety conditions.

The CCTCL was then given the responsibility for handling dangerous goods upon request from various businesspeople.

At the time, authorities had verbally informed the CCTCL to build a security shed and maintain other safety measures as per the law.

Md Abu Bakar Siddique, managing director of the CCTCL, said they came forward to handle such products at a time when no other depot had shown interest.

"All government agencies had allowed the handling of dangerous products at our depot but now, they have asked us to stop. So, we have stopped as per the customs direction," he added.

Asked why they failed to meet the safety standards, Siddique said no depot could fulfil the requirements set by the IMDG and Dangerous Cargo Act.

"Still, we are trying to meet the requirements but are being delayed by some family issues as I myself am ill. However, we hope to resume operations soon," he added.

Alak Kumar Hazra, a deputy commissioner of Chattogram customs, said a six-member investigation committee has been formed to verify the report on the CCTCL depot.

"The required action will be taken after receiving the investigation report," Hazra added.

About \$364 million worth of chemical products were exported from Bangladesh in fiscal 2021-22.

Shipments have since declined as \$181 million worth of chemical products were sent abroad in the July-January period of the ongoing fiscal, down by some 19 per cent compared to \$224 million during the same time last year.

Harnessing the power of collective genius

MAMUN RASHID

Earlier this month, I attended a graduation ceremony at Middlebury College at Vermont, USA. In her speech, the president of the college repeatedly mentioned the phrase "collective genius", which has stuck with me since.

As I understood, the greatest achievements of our time were not born out of a single individual's work, but rather from the collective effort of a group. From the first moon landing to the development of the internet, it was the result of the collective genius of people working together towards a common goal.

Collective genius refers to the idea that a group of individuals, working together in a collaborative and synergistic manner, can achieve a level of creativity and problem-solving greater than what any individual could accomplish on their own. The power of collective genius lies in the ability to tap into diverse perspectives, knowledge, and skills of a group, resulting in outcomes that are greater than the sum of its parts.

By working with a group of people with diverse perspectives and backgrounds, individuals can tap into new ideas and approaches that they may not have otherwise thought of on their own, thereby leading to greater creativity and innovation. They can also receive feedback on their work, allowing them to improve their skills and knowledge. By working with others toward a common goal, individuals can feel more motivated and engaged in their work. Participating in a collective genius initiative can also help individuals expand their professional network and make new connections that can benefit them in the future.

Organisations can benefit from collective genius initiatives through the generation of new ideas, products, and services. Leveraging the collective intelligence of a group can help organisations solve problems more effectively and efficiently, leading to more creative solutions and faster and more effective decision-making.

Additionally, by providing employees with the opportunity to participate in collective genius initiatives, organisations can increase their engagement and motivation, as well as their sense of ownership and commitment to the organisation.

Leaders also play a key role in fostering a culture of collective genius within their organisation. By encouraging diversity while hiring, as well as by creating opportunities for employees to work together in cross-functional teams can help harness the power of collective genius. Promoting and encouraging open communication can create opportunities for employees to share ideas and feedback. Leaders can incentivise collaboration and innovation by recognising and rewarding employees who contribute to collective genius initiatives. Creating a safe environment for employees to take risks, providing resources and support for innovative projects, and celebrating the successes and failures that come with experimentation, can help develop a collaborative culture bringing forth the benefits of collective genius.

Technology can also help to facilitate and enhance the strength of collective genius in several ways. Tools such as video conferencing, instant messaging, and virtual whiteboards can help team members communicate and work together more effectively. Crowdsourcing platforms can be used to gather ideas, feedback, and insights from a broader audience. Artificial intelligence can augment human intelligence and provide new perspectives and insights. Machine learning algorithms can help identify patterns and make predictions based on data analysis. Virtual reality can simulate real-world scenarios and create immersive experiences that enable teams to test and refine ideas in a safe and controlled environment. Today's world presents us with challenges that are more complex than ever before, hence making the power of collective genius more crucial than ever. None of us alone is as strong as all of us together.

The write is an economic analyst.



How sanctions complicated regular banking for Russians

REUTERS, Moscow

Financial sanctions against Russia have strangled its banks' profits and wrecked many lenders' international operations, but one year after Moscow sent its troops into Ukraine how much do they matter for average Russians?

For the majority, who bank in roubles with huge retail lenders, such as Sberbank, the answer is: not much.

"Nothing has changed for me at all," said Vyacheslav Fatikhovich, a taxi driver in the Urals city of Yekaterinburg. "The only thing is that customers are paying less by card and more often in cash," he said.

Russia's monetary authorities managed to stave off a full scale run on its banks with capital controls, and the rouble supply has remained plentiful with long lines at ATMs during an early spring dash for cash now a thing of the past.

However, for those who travel abroad, want to move money there or hold foreign currencies or securities, life has become more complicated after Russia's major banks got effectively booted from the SWIFT global payments network.

Those with foreign currency accounts were allowed to withdraw just \$10,000 if the money arrived in their account before the curbs were imposed on March 9. Those who deposited hard currencies after the cutoff can only withdraw roubles.

It is anyone's guess how much hard currency got stuck outside of the banking system as some rushed to dump roubles and took out their hard currency deposits, fearing looming curbs would cut them off altogether.

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People stand in line to use an ATM in Saint Petersburg, Russia on February 27, 2022. Russia's monetary authorities managed to stave off a full-scale run on its banks with capital controls, and the rouble supply has remained plentiful with long lines at ATMs during an early spring dash for cash now a thing of the past. PHOTO: REUTERS/FILE

IMF, Ukraine reach deal for full-fledged loan

AFP, Washington

The IMF said Friday it has reached a staff-level agreement with Ukrainian authorities that opens doors to a full-fledged loan, which would also support the country's bid to join the European Union.

Ukraine was seen to have "strong" performance under a four-month program with the International Monetary Fund, meeting its targets and benchmarks, said Gavin Gray, who led the IMF mission.

The government submitted a package of draft tax laws to Parliament aimed at lifting revenues, and is taking steps to address arrears, among other efforts.

"A fully-fledged IMF program would be supportive of the Ukrainian government's efforts toward EU accession," Gray said in a statement.

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