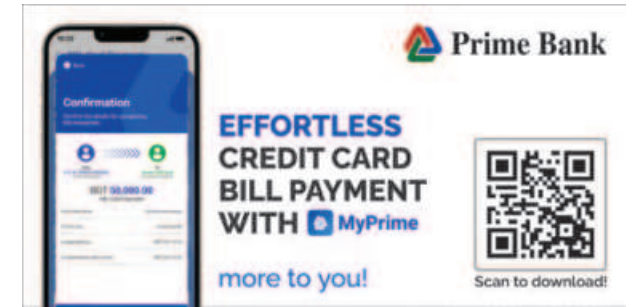


Star BUSINESS



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

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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.

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

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

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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