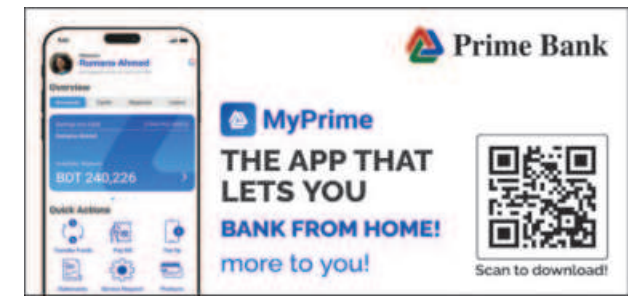


Star BUSINESS



Taka slips further as BB sells USD at Tk 102

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The taka has weakened further against the US dollar as the Bangladesh Bank is selling the American greenback to banks at Tk 102.

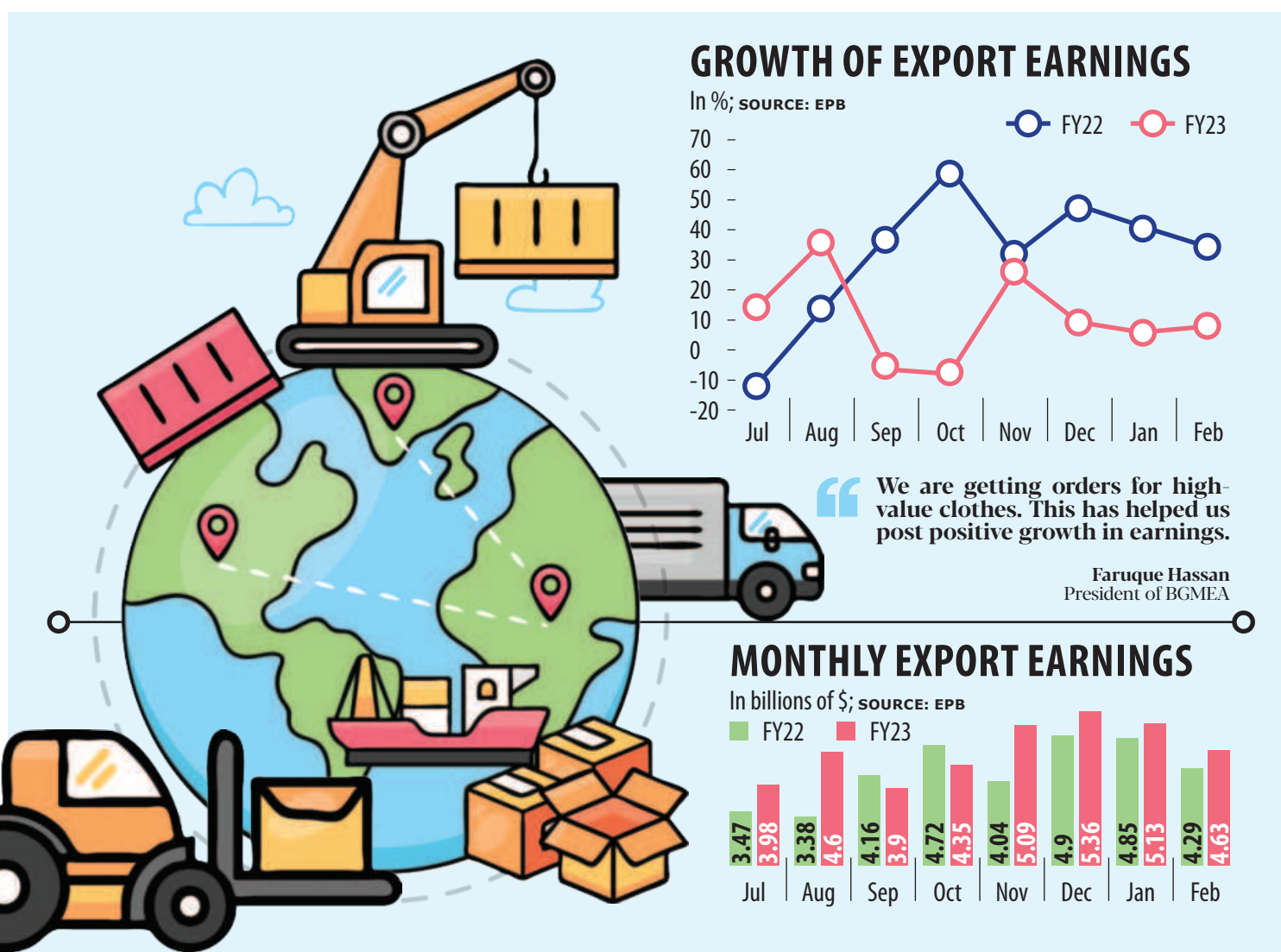
The move is aimed at adjusting the exchange rates gradually in line with the market demand and supply.

The latest depreciation comes a month after the central bank sold the greenback to banks at Tk 101. Since January, the BB depreciated the local currency by 2 per cent.

The BB is selling the US dollar to banks to help them meet their foreign currency requirements, particularly for import payments, amid the foreign exchange crisis that has been lingering for a year.

The central bank sold \$56 million to

READ MORE ON B3



Govt mulls reopening of STOL airports

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The government is mulling whether to resume operations at five Short Take-Off and Landing (STOL) airports to facilitate domestic travel considering the improved living standard of people in Bangladesh, according to Mahbub Ali, the state minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism.

He made these comments at a seminar on "capacity building of international airports and opening of stalled domestic airports in Bangladesh" at a hotel in Dhaka yesterday.

The seminar, organised by Bangladesh Monitor to promote smart aviation in the country, was supported by Eastern Bank Ltd.

STOL airports are used by conventional fixed-wing aircraft that have short runway requirements for take-off and landing.

The five STOL airports in the country are situated in the Ishwardi, Thakurgaon, Lalmonirhat, Shamshearnagar and Cumilla regions.

READ MORE ON B3

Export brings \$4.63b in Feb, lowest in four months

SOHEL PARVEZ

Bangladesh's export earnings stood at \$4.63 billion in February, the lowest in four months, although overall receipts rose 7.81 per cent year-on-year led by apparel, leather and leather goods shipments, official figures showed yesterday.

Last month's receipts took the total proceeds from the shipment of goods to \$32.44 billion in the July-February period of the current financial year of 2022-23. The growth moderated to 9.56 per cent in the eight months to February, according to the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB).

The latest data comes at a time when apparel exporters are complaining about falling orders from global clothing retailers as high inflation erodes the purchasing capacity of consumers in Europe and the US, the two biggest export destinations for Bangladesh.

The impact of the weak global demand is already visible for other major sectors such as jute and jute goods, frozen fish and shrimp.

Garment exporters say the overall shipment in volume declined but receipts increased in value.

"We are getting orders for

high-value clothes. This has helped us post positive growth in earnings," said Faruque Hassan, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

"Once we were used to getting orders to make jackets worth \$15-\$20. Now we are receiving orders

to make jackets that are sold at \$100. This is a very positive development."

Earnings from apparel exports, which accounted for about 85 per cent of national shipments in July-February, rose 14.06 per cent year-on-year to \$31.36 billion.

Knitwear exports brought home \$17.06 billion, up 13.21 per cent compared to a year earlier. Woven shipment generated \$14.30 billion, a spike of 15.08 per cent, EPB data showed.

Bangladesh has performed well in new markets too, said the

BGMEA chief.

"But overall export declined in quantity. If we take into account the expansion of factories in the past two years, we will see that a number of them are running below capacity," said Hassan, also the managing director of Giant Textiles Ltd.

The war in Ukraine, geopolitical tension and high consumer prices have eroded the buying capacity of consumers in Europe and the US.

"For this, we are worried," he said.

"But the good news is a number of buyers has shown interest in placing higher orders. So, Bangladesh's share in the global apparel market will increase in 2023."

Leather and leather products exports rose 6 per cent to \$832 million in July-February. Other

major sectors – home textiles, jute and jute goods, frozen and live fish and agricultural products – suffered more than 20 per cent decline in earnings.

Frozen fish and shrimp exporters recorded a nearly 22 per cent slump in exports to \$318 million.

"The volume of exports has declined too. It has resulted in a stockpile as the shipment is not taking place as it should be," said Md Amin Ullah, president of the Bangladesh Frozen Foods Exporter Association.

"Exporters are selling products at reduced rates in order to bear operational expenses."

He, however, hoped for a rebound in export receipts from frozen fish and shrimp, grown mainly in the southwestern coastal region.

Amin said because of the falling imports, there will be a shortage of products in the western market.

"The demand will improve as people can't stop eating despite the war. So, prices will rise."

Helal Ahmed, chief operating officer of Janata Jute Mills and Sadat Jute Industries Ltd, also expects a revival in export earnings in the second half of 2023.

READ MORE ON B3

No limit on loans for power producers' fuel purchase

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh Bank yesterday allowed banks to keep private sector power producers out of the purview of the single borrower exposure limit when giving them loans for the import of raw materials, including fuel oil.

As per the single borrower exposure limit, banks are not allowed to give out loans that are more than 25 per cent of their capital to a single person, entity, or business group.

But the rule will not be applicable for independent power producers (IPPs) in running their plants as Bangladesh Bank will allow the companies to take loans from lenders beyond the limit, according to a central bank notice.

Banks will have to follow the new rule until December this year.

A central bank official, on condition of anonymity, said Bangladesh Independent Power Producers' Association (BIPPA) wrote a letter to the central bank governor on February 20 requesting him to arrange sufficient dollars for the power plants to import heavy fuel oil.

As per the letter, the IPPs together will require approximately \$250 million per month from March to June this year to import heavy fuel oil (HFO).

Given the ongoing international price of the HFO, including the cost of shipping and insurance, the IPPs will require \$1.05 billion in the four months.

Without this kind of support from Bangladesh Bank, the country will inevitably face widespread load shedding during this critical time of irrigation, Ramadan and summer, the BIPPA said in its letter.

The BB official said the central bank has addressed the BIPPA's demand by issuing the notice.

READ MORE ON B3

PARTEX Cables powering with safety

Made by Mollifer CDCC CCV Technology

High Voltage UG Cables SAFEST UNDERGROUND POWER DISTRIBUTION

STOCKS	
DSEX ▼	CASPI ▼
0.01% 6,213.74	0.29% 18,282.79

COMMODITIES	
Gold ▼	Oil ▲
\$1,832.83 (per ounce)	\$77.94 (per barrel)

ASIAN MARKETS			
MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI
▼ 0.84% 58,909.35	▼ 0.06% 27,498.87	▼ 0.62% 3,234.90	▼ 0.05% 3,310.65



A crowd of people are seeing the latest pharmaceutical equipment and technologies on display at the 14th Asia Pharma Expo 2023. Having kicked off at the International Convention City Bashundhara in Dhaka yesterday, the three-day event features 645 companies from 27 countries.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Pharmas saw small profits last year

Industry people say as expo begins in Dhaka

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Although the pharmaceutical industry in Bangladesh saw growth last year, there was a significant decline in profit margins due to rising raw material prices in the global market, according to industry people.

Besides, the devaluation of the taka against the US dollar also adversely impacted business.

"On the one hand, the price of raw materials is increasing fast due to supply chain disruptions. On the other, currency devaluation has pushed up costs," said Nazmul Hassan, president of the Bangladesh Association of Pharmaceutical Industries (BAPI).

For example, the price of raw materials that previously cost Tk 85 has jumped to Tk 110 amid the ongoing US dollar crisis, he added.

Hassan was speaking at the inaugural session of the three-day 14th Asia Pharma Expo 2023, organised by BAPI in collaboration with GPE EXPO Pvt Ltd at the International Convention City Bashundhara in Dhaka yesterday.

A total of 645 companies from 27 countries, including the US, China, England, Germany, Malaysia, India, Thailand, Italy, Japan, Switzerland, Taiwan and Ireland, are participating in the event.

READ MORE ON B3

Adani gets \$1.87b investment from US firm

REUTERS, Bengaluru

US boutique investment firm GQG Partners has bought shares worth \$1.87 billion in four Adani group companies, marking the first major investment in the Indian conglomerate since a short-seller's critical report sparked a stock rout.

The group's seven listed companies have lost some \$135 billion in market value since January 24, when Hindenburg Research accused it of improper use of offshore tax havens and stock manipulation—allegations the billionaire Gautam Adani-led group has denied but led it to call off a \$2.5 billion share sale.

US-based, Australia-listed GQG has, through block deals, bought shares worth 154.46 billion rupees in four Adani group companies, including the conglomerate's flagship firm Adani Enterprises, a regulatory filing showed.

READ MORE ON B3



Apparel items, such as hoodies and jackets, are seen on display at the winter edition of the Dhaka International Yarn and Fabric Show. The four-day event began at the International Convention City Bashundhara in Dhaka on March 1.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

All DSE indices fall for second day

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

All three indexes of the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) fell for the second consecutive day yesterday, albeit slightly, a day after the regulator brought back the floor price for 169 companies.

On Wednesday, the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC) reinstated the floor price for the listed firms, less than three months after they were lifted.

In July last year, the BSEC set the floor price of every stock to halt the free fall of the market amid global economic uncertainties. The floor price was the average of the closing prices on July 28 of the year and the preceding four days.

In December, the commission lifted the regulatory measure for 169 companies to see how the market responds. Many of the issues have fallen since then.

Most analysts and intermediaries have, however, been against the floor since it

prevents the market from operating on its own.

The DSEX, the benchmark index of the top bourse in Bangladesh, slipped 0.02 per cent, to close at 6,213 yesterday.

The DS30, the blue-chip index, edged down 0.09 per cent to 2,216 while the DSES, the shariah-compliant index, dropped 0.03 per cent to 1,357.

Turnover, a key indicator of the market, fell to Tk 427 crore, a decrease of 5.5 per cent from a day earlier. Of the securities, 72 advanced, 88 declined and 149 did not show any price movement.

Shares on the DSE edged flat after a bumpy ride as most investors followed a cautious stance amid the reintroduction of the floor price, said International Leasing Securities Ltd in its daily market analysis.

"The investors remained shaky and followed a wait-and-see approach due to a lack of clear direction of the market as most of the stocks got stuck on the floor prices that caused lower turnover."

Among the sectors, the IT sector rose 3.5 per cent and the life insurance sector was up 1.6 per cent. The general insurance sector fell 0.9 per cent.

Zeal Bangla Sugar Mills made the highest gain with an increase of 10 per cent. ADN Telecom, Shyampur Sugar Mills and Bangladesh General Insurance Company rose more than 9 per cent.

Hakkani Pulp & Paper Mills and Meghna Pet Industries were up more than 8 per cent.

International Leasing & Financial Services was the highest loser, shedding 9.6 per cent. Union Capital gave up 9.091 per cent.

Premier Leasing & Finance, Islami Commercial Insurance Company, and FAS Finance & Investment were also among the major losers. ADN Telecom was the most-traded stock with its issues worth Tk 35 crore transacting.

Genex Infosys, Sea Pearl Beach Resort & Spa, Delta Life Insurance Company, and

Aamra Networks registered significant turnover as well.

The Caspi, the all-share price index of the Chittagong Stock Exchange, lost 53 points, or 0.29 per cent, to close at 18,282.

Among the issues, 28 rose, 37 retreated and 43 did not see any price swing. Turnover dipped more than 50 per cent to Tk 8.15 crore.

In the week to Thursday, the DSEX added 8.6 points, the DS30 gained 1.4 points and the DSES lost 5 points, said International Leasing Securities Ltd. The average turnover surged 31.36 per cent to Tk 358 crore.

During the week, the IT sector slipped 7.2 per cent and the life insurance sector was down 3.6 per cent. The jute sector was down 2.9 per cent and the travel sector dipped 2.7 per cent.

Among the individual stocks, ADN Telecom rose 7.5 per cent last week, Sea Pearl advanced 6.5 per cent and Genex Infosys closed 6.3 per cent higher.

Shimanto Bank gets new chairman

STAR BUSINESS DESK



Shimanto Bank has recently elected Major General AKM Nazmul Hasan as its chairman.

Hasan joined Border Guard Bangladesh as director general on January 29 this year, said a press release.

He served Bangladesh Ansar and VDP as director-general. He was the chairman of Ansar VDP Unnayan Bank.

Major General Nazmul joined Bangladesh Military Academy on July 15, 1986 and was commissioned on June 24, 1988 in the Corps of Infantry of the Bangladesh Army.

Nazmul served the School of Infantry and Tactics and Army Headquarters in different capacities.

He also worked for the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence and Chittagong Hill Tracts for Counter Insurgency Operation in 1992 and 1997 at Rangamati Region. He commanded two Infantry Battalions, One Military Police Unit, one Infantry Brigade and one Infantry Division.

Hasan completed United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in Bosnia Herzegovina and Sudan.

DBS Bank opens Dhaka office

STAR BUSINESS DESK

DBS Bank has inaugurated its Dhaka representative office, making Bangladesh its 19th market globally.

The inauguration was officiated at a city hotel in Dhaka yesterday. The event was attended by Lokman Hossain Miah, executive chairman of the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority, and Ahmed Jamal, a deputy governor of the Bangladesh Bank, said a press release.

Piyush Gupta, CEO of DBS, Tan Su Shan, head of institutional banking of DBS Group, and Tahsina Banu, chief representative of DBS Dhaka, were present.

DBS is a Singaporean multinational banking and financial services corporation.

PRICES OF KEY ESSENTIALS IN DHAKA CITY			
	PRICE (MAR 2, 2023)	% CHANGES FROM A MONTH AGO	% CHANGE FROM A YEAR AGO
Fine rice (kg)	Tk 60-Tk 75	0 ↑	2.27 ↑
Coarse rice (kg)	Tk 46-Tk 50	0	0
Loose flour (kg)	Tk 55-Tk 60	-2.54 ↓	64.29 ↑
Lentil (kg)	Tk 95-Tk 100	0	0
Soybean (litre)	Tk 168-Tk 172	0.59 ↑	-1.45 ↓
Potato (kg)	Tk 19-Tk 22	-25.45 ↓	20.59 ↑
Onion (kg)	Tk 25-Tk 35	-14.29 ↓	-36.84 ↓
Egg (4 pcs)	Tk 42-Tk 45	-3.33 ↓	14.47 ↑

SOURCE: TCB



BM Yousuf Ali, managing director of Popular Life Insurance Company, receives from Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina a memento of the government recognising its diligence in paying insurance claims at a ceremony organised by the Insurance Development and Regulatory Authority at Bangabandhu International Conference Center in Dhaka on Wednesday marking National Insurance Day 2023. PHOTO: POPULAR LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY

Popular Life recognised for diligence in paying insurance claims

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Popular Life Insurance Company has been presented a memento of the government recognising its diligence in paying insurance claims.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina handed over the memento to BM Yousuf Ali, managing director and CEO of the insurer, at a ceremony in Bangabandhu International Conference Center in Dhaka on Wednesday, said a press release.

The Insurance Development and Regulatory Authority (IDRA) organised the event marking National Insurance Day 2023.

Sheikh Mohammad Salim Ullah, secretary to Financial Institutions Division, Mohammad Jainul Bari, chairman of the IDRA, and Sheikh Kabir Hossain, president of Bangladesh Insurance Association, were present.



Md Mehmood Husain, managing director of National Bank, inaugurated a central processing department of the bank at Dilkusha, Dhaka on Wednesday. Syed Rois Uddin and Hossain Akhtar Chowdhury, deputy managing directors, Kazi Kamal Uddin Ahmed, senior executive vice-president, and Md Nazmul Ahsan, head of the department, were present. PHOTO: NATIONAL BANK



Jatiya Sangsad Deputy Speaker Md Shamsul Haque Tuku attended a programme organised by AB Bank at Shaheed Abdul Khaleque Stadium in Bera upazila of Pabna yesterday to distribute agricultural loans among 500 small farmers through smart cards. Tarique Afzal, managing director of the bank, SM Asif Shams Ranjan, mayor of Bera municipality, and Sonjib Kumar Gossami, upazila agriculture officer in Santhia, were present. PHOTO: AB BANK

Pakistan inflation jumps to 31.5%

AFP, Karachi

Inflation in crisis-racked Pakistan has jumped 31.5 percent according to state data published Wednesday, as Islamabad continues to stare down IMF negotiators withholding a crucial bailout.

Year-on-year inflation for February is the highest in decades, while transport and perishable food costs rose by around half as a cost-of-living crisis continues to bite. "The 30 percent figure is where families will have to make choices and sacrifices," analyst Torek Farhadi told AFP.

Years of financial mismanagement and political instability have pushed Pakistan's economy to the brink of collapse, exacerbated by a global energy crisis and devastating floods that submerged a third of the country in 2022.

LafargeHolcim declares its highest-ever dividend

FROM PAGE B4

by higher inflation and escalated prices of raw materials, driven by the Russia-Ukraine war.

LafargeHolcim's net sales increased 15 per cent to Tk 2,359 crore.

The company launched a new sustainable product "Supercrete Plus" last year, which ensured growth in its aggregated business, said Iqbal Chowdhury, chief executive officer of LafargeHolcim Bangladesh.

The company also widened its digital footprint and gained traction in new business channels, which helped book the profits, he

said.

LafargeHolcim continued advancing as a leader in sustainability with a waste management initiative towards the goal of becoming a carbon-neutral company by 2050, Chowdhury said.

The cement maker looks forward to continuing introducing new innovative and sustainable building material solutions for the Bangladesh market in 2023, he said.

"This will further differentiate us in the market."

Shares of LafargeHolcim Bangladesh were unchanged at Tk 64.8 on the Dhaka Stock Exchange yesterday.



Potential travellers are seen collecting brochures from a stall of the Bangladesh Travel and Tourism Fair-2023 at the Bangabandhu International Conference Center in Dhaka yesterday. Travel agents and tour operators from various countries are participating in the fair, which aims to boost the tourism industry. PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Tourism to help build Smart Bangladesh

Says state minister as fair kicks off

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The tourism industry will play a supporting role in building "Smart Bangladesh", according to Mahbub Ali, the state minister for civil aviation and tourism.

He made this comment while addressing the opening ceremony of the Bangladesh Travel and Tourism Fair-2023, organised by the Tour Operators Association of Bangladesh at the Bangabandhu International Conference Center in Dhaka yesterday.

The three day fair will remain open for visitors from 10:00am to 8:00pm each day while the entrance fee is Tk 30. However, students will be allowed to enter free of charge.

The three-day fair will remain open for visitors from 10:00am to 8:00pm each day while the entry fee is Tk 30. However, students will be allowed to enter free of charge

Tourism related associations and organisations from various countries, including tour operators and travel agents from India, Nepal, the Maldives, Sri Lanka, the UAE, Vietnam, Japan and Turkey, are participating in the event through 146 stalls and 14 pavilions.

In his speech, Ali said effective development of tourism will play an important role in building a developing Bangladesh by 2024, and a developed and Smart Bangladesh by 2041.

"The present government is working on the expansion of this industry on a priority basis after realising the importance of tourism," he added.

Ali then said a masterplan for ensuring sustainable development of the tourism industry is being formulated.

"This will ensure planned and coordinated development of tourism," the state minister added.

Olympic Industries to buy land for expansion

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Biscuits and bakery products manufacturer Olympic Industries has decided to buy a piece of land measuring 86 decimals keeping its future expansion in mind.

The listed company would purchase the land at a total cost of Tk 2.75 crore located at Lolati of Sonargaon upazila in Narayanganj -- just behind the biscuit and confectionery unit of the company.

The company will have to spend Tk 28.89 lakh also as registration charges and other miscellaneous expenses, including fees for obtaining the certified copy of purchase deed. A mid-level official of the company, preferring anonymity, said the company will buy the land mainly for future expansion, not for keeping it idle.

However, the company does not still have any concrete plan for expansion, he added.

Stocks of Olympic Industries dropped 1.87 per cent to Tk 147 yesterday.

Oil prices down 1.5% on recession jitters

REUTERS, New York

Oil prices steadied on Friday, but fell for the week on a stronger US dollar and fears that an economic slowdown would weaken crude demand.

Brent crude futures settled at \$96.72 a barrel, gaining 13 cents. US West Texas Intermediate crude ended 27 cents higher at \$90.77. Both benchmarks fell about 1.5 per cent on the week.

Oil briefly jumped in volatile trade on comments by Richmond Federal Reserve President Thomas Barkin who said the drive to raise rates also needs to be balanced with the impact rate hikes are having on the economy. But crude pared gains as investor concerns about upcoming rate hikes settled back in. Strength in the US dollar hit a five-week high, which also capped crude's gains as it makes oil more expensive for buyers in other currencies.

"Although the oil complex has been able to shrug off a strong dollar on any given session, extended strong dollar trends will pose a major headwind against sustainable oil price gains," Jim Ritterbusch, of oil trading advisory firm Ritterbusch and Associates, said in a note.

INDIAN LINE OF CREDIT

Govt plans to buy 100 electric double-deckers

JAGARAN CHAKMA

The government is planning to procure 100 electric air conditioned double-decker buses for Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) under an Indian line of credit.

The Road Transport and Highways Division (RTHD) sent a letter to Economic Relations Division (ERD) last month informing of the intent.

The letter said a detailed project report has been prepared following discussions with the High Commission of India in Dhaka.

The report puts the cost at an estimated Tk 1,153.83 crore and the purchase to be made by June 2024.

Of the amount, Tk 854.69 crore will come from the Indian line of credit and the rest from the government exchequer.

The letter said associated proposals were also being prepared which would be

sent to the Planning Commission and the ERD within a short period of time.

Manindra Kishore Majumder, joint secretary to the RTHD, confirmed to The Daily Star of having sent the letter to the ERD. "From our side, we are keen to complete all the processes," he said.

A senior ERD official, requesting anonymity, acknowledged that the ERD had received the letter.

The associated proposals will be needed to start negotiations with the Indian authorities and finalising the negotiations will require approval of the Executive Committee of National Economic Council, he said.

Overall, it is a matter of procurement and usually only Indian companies can take part in biddings concerning any Indian line of credit, he said.

Therefore, it should not take much time, unlike physical infrastructure and public works related projects, said the official.

The detailed project report said the buses would ensure reliable and comfortable intracity public transport, replace old buses, usher in the latest technological advancements, reduce traffic and air pollution and create jobs.

Electric vehicles produce no emission, require little maintenance and are economical and environmentally friendly, it said.

Diesel and CNG-run buses will be phased out globally by 2030 and after 2035, automobile manufacturers will no longer manufacture diesel engine vehicles, it said.

The report urged taking necessary steps for setting up associated infrastructure such as electric charging stations, suitable workshops and washing facilities and for creating skilled manpower such as technicians and drivers.

At present, the BRTC has 1,350 buses operational, of which the economic life of 800 is up to 2025, it said.

No limit on loans

FROM PAGE B1

The IPPs will first take loans in the form of the local currency, after which they will convert those to dollars to import fuel oil from abroad, he said.

For this reason, the central bank relaxed the single borrower exposure limit to facilitate the IPPs.

Among the IPPs, Orion Power will require \$197.10 million, Summit Power \$159.86 million, Doreen Power \$102.80 million, Confidence Power \$97.50 million, Acorn Power \$73.59 million and Baraka Power \$68.32 million.

The letter also mentioned the names of some other IPPs that would require a hefty amount of dollars in the four months to June this year.

Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh, said the country's financial sector was now facing a dollar shortage.

The demand for US dollars placed by the IPPs has indicated that the stress will continue to prevail in the coming days, he said.

Global rating agency Moody's downgraded its outlook of Bangladesh's banking system from stable to negative on March 1, which may exacerbate the ongoing problem, he said.

Banks in Bangladesh may face difficulties in mobilising foreign loans in the form of supplier's and buyer's credit from abroad due to the downgrading of the rating for the banking sector, Mansur said.

Govt mulls reopening

FROM PAGE B1

Regular operations were once conducted at the five STOL airports but due to various problems and a shortage of passengers, flights were gradually suspended over the years.

The state minister said Bangladesh's aviation sector has been changing gradually through consistent development.

The current growth of the country's aviation sector is already the highest in the region but is expected to triple in the next 15 years.

"The country's socioeconomic status will be developed, and huge employment will be generated if we can tap this potential," he added.

Air Vice Marshal M Mafidur Rahman, chairman of the Civil

Aviation Authority of Bangladesh, said they are planning to take measures to reopen the country's STOL airports as the people's economic status has improved.

He also highlighted the government's ongoing activities to upgrade the country's different airports and runways to make Bangladesh a regional aviation hub.

Mafizur Rahman, managing director of Novoair, stressed the need for having a parallel runway at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport to tap the potential of the additional passenger handling capacity offered by the third terminal.

Kazi Wahidul Alam, an expert on aviation, conducted the seminar.

Adani gets \$1.87b investment

FROM PAGE B1

It also bought shares in Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone, Adani Green Energy and Adani Transmission.

"We believe that the long-term growth prospects for these companies are substantial," said Rajiv Jain, GQC's chairman and chief

investment officer.

The investment comes as Adani has sought to calm investors, including by holding a fixed-income roadshow in Singapore and Hong Kong. The group, sources have said, has told creditors it has secured a \$3 billion loan from a sovereign wealth fund.

Pharmas saw small profits last year

FROM PAGE B1

The president of BAPI went on to say that one solution for local pharmaceutical companies would be to raise their product prices or request global suppliers to provide raw materials and equipment at lower rates.

He then said that just when the pharmaceutical industry had started recovering from the economic



downturn caused by Covid-19, the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war contributed to the hike in raw material prices.

Meanwhile, the rising US dollar price, cost of electricity and fuel have also contributed to higher production costs.

Asked about the recent price hike

of certain medication, he said the increase is not much considering the current cost of production.

But despite these tough times, the industry grew by more than 12 per cent last year, Hassan added.

Major General Mohammad Yousuf, director general of the Directorate General of Drug Administration, said the pharma sector is one of the fastest growing industrial sectors of

the country. "Our manufacturers are now exporting world-class medicine to around 157 countries at very affordable prices," he added.

Yousuf then pointed out that many of the export destinations, such as the US, EU, UK, Australia and Japan, have very strict regulatory measures

when it comes to medical imports, indicating the quality of locally made products.

Currently, around 200 companies in the country are producing medication following WHO and CGMP guidelines.

Yousuf went on to say that the API Industrial Park in Gazaria upazila of Munshiganj was a major milestone for the local pharmaceutical sector in its bid to boost large-scale production and export.

At present, Bangladesh annually imports more than \$1 billion worth of active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs).

However, this will reduce significantly once full-scale operations begin at the API Industrial Park, he added.

Participants of exhibition are displaying the newest pharmaceutical processing and packaging equipment, biotech lab equipment, API manufacturing processes and machinery, medical formulations and contract manufacturing mercenaries.

Through the expo, domestic and foreign businesspeople will get to know the details of various modern technology, equipment and raw materials related to the pharmaceutical industry, said SM Shafiquzzaman, secretary general of BAPI.

Paresh Jhurmarvala, founder and CEO of GPE EXPO, and Abdul Mukhtar, chairman and managing director, also spoke at the event.

Taka slips further

FROM PAGE B1

\$108 million to banks at the new rate in the last two days, said a senior BB official, seeking anonymity.

"We are adjusting the exchange rate gradually."

In the interbank market, the greenback was traded up to Tk 105.42 on average on February 22, up 22.5 per cent from Tk 86 a year ago. The

taka has lost the value because of the US dollar shortages.

Banks also hiked the rate on Wednesday to purchase US dollars from exporters by Tk 1 to Tk 104, a move that is expected to give a boost to the competitiveness of exports in the international market.

Like many other countries, the taka has been under pressure against

the dollar over the last one year owing to higher import payments than overall receipts from export and remittance.

As a result, the country's foreign exchange reserves have fallen. The reserves stood at \$45.99 billion on March 1 last year but it declined to \$32.30 billion on the same day this year.

Export brings \$4.63b in February

FROM PAGE B1

Exports from jute and jute goods, one of the few sectors for which raw materials are locally available, plunged 24 per cent to \$610 million in the eight months ending in February, according to the EPB.

The sector suffered drops in shipment for the shrinking demand for jute yarn among carpet makers, the main user of jute yarn. The use of alternative yarn following a spiral in prices of jute in Bangladesh has also affected the export performance.

Ahmed said reduced prices of jute would lead to increased use of jute yarn. "So, the situation is expected to improve."

A sharp depreciation of the taka against the US dollar has made exports from Bangladesh attractive in the global markets. The local currency has lost its value by about 25 per cent against the American greenback in the past one year.

"Besides, orders for garments from major markets will shift away from China. So, there is an opportunity to elevate garment shipments," said Mustafizur Rahman, a distinguished fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

He said the prices of cotton, yarn and other items have increased and the latest export earnings figure reflects the price effect of the garment items shipped.

"The growth is price-driven to some extent as the prices of raw materials have increased. Until now, the demand side remains depressed."

The trade expert called for an increased focus on regional markets as demand is growing there.

"At the same time, productivity would have to be raised and the cost of doing business would have to be brought down."



While young entrepreneurs with advanced education were seldom seen engaging in cattle farming such as this, they are now increasingly turning to the business as it promises good profits. This indicates that the social stigma surrounding the profession could now be waning.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Educated youths becoming successful livestock entrepreneurs

MD ASADUZ ZAMAN

It was once seen that only low-income and uneducated groups of people were involved with agro-farming in Bangladesh but now, the situation has changed radically.

A number of highly educated and even foreign degree holding entrepreneurs are taking up careers in the sector, and profiting as a result.

Although agro-farming has become challenging in modern times due to higher input costs, the sector still shows promise for young businesspeople.

Wasif Ahmed Salam, who completed his BBA degree from the City University of London, has been running his own farm, called Asian Agro, since November 2016.

Most people that have an English medium background usually seek high-paying jobs while many foreign degree holders end up settling abroad.

However, the 23-year-old Salam opted to follow his passion and start a farm in Chattogram with just two cows he bought with saved pocket money.

Having initially managed the property with the help of just one employee, Salam improved his rearing techniques by watching YouTube videos on the topic.

He then sold off his cows with a good profit in just a single year.

Now, Salam's farm has 130 cows, of which 80 are kept for

dairy. In addition, the number of cattle, their specific weight and other technical data are tabulated digitally.

"While my parents motivated me, others boldly demotivated me and even went so far as to call me 'cowman' for entering the farming sector," said Salam.

"But when my farm finally became a success, they started to welcome me," he added.

Salam then said that during his time as a student, being able to gain field-level experience provided him with practical knowledge on farming.

Similarly, Touhid Parvez Biplob took charge of his family's flour mill in Bogura after returning with a master's degree in international business from the Auckland Institute of Studies in New Zealand.

He also built a small shed on the property to rear six cows and bulls due to his childhood fascination with cattle farming.

Biplob later opted to go commercial with the business in 2017 and now has 190 bulls and dairy cows and other cattle at his ranch, called the Bogra Bhandar Agro Farm, in Kahaloo upazila.

He also started a value-added product business, called Methai Mela, that uses milk from his farm to make sweets.

"I used to sell milk for Tk 40-50 per litre, but that was not profitable for me. So, I planned to launch a new venture of value-added products," Biplob said.



He went on to say it was at first difficult to convince his family that cattle farming holds more potential than other careers despite his educational background.

"But their minds changed gradually after seeing my success," he said.

However, Biplob would not encourage anyone to take up the business unless they have passion for it.

"They should work for at least three weeks at other farms before starting their own venture," he added.

Biplob also advised that young entrepreneurs looking to learn more about the cattle business should hold off on making any sizeable commitments from the get-go.

Instead, they should gather knowledge and expertise, Biplob

said at a two-day livestock exhibition in Dhaka's Agargaon last week.

More than 250 entrepreneurs from all over the country had brought their cattle to the fair that featured various species, such as cows, buffaloes, goats, sheep, ostriches, pigeons, dogs, cats, horses, rabbits and poultry.

Asked about the recent challenges of cattle farming considering the higher cost of labour and feed, Biplob said that it would not have been possible to sustain the business amid the current situation if not for the sales of his value-added products.

After completing his graduation from the state-run Ashek Mahmud College Hamid Sarker founded Swadesh Agro in Jamalpur. Along with rearing

cattle, he caters value-added products, namely sweets.

Imran Hossain, president of the Bangladesh Dairy Farmers Association, said that the trend of youths returning to the farming sector is a good sign.

"We presented successful entrepreneurs at the exhibition so that others were excited to see them," he added.

Md Reajul Huq, director of admin at the Department of Livestock Services (DLS), said the country is moving towards the scientific commercialisation of livestock farming.

"To sustain the business in the modern age, educated youths are participating more and this is a good sign," he added.

Huq then said farming processes have been changing for years and it is now time for adopting good agricultural practices.

So, this sector is totally fit for educated youths, he added.

The country currently has 87,486 commercial poultry farms and 72,176 dairy and cattle fattening farms, according to the DLS.

However, there are some 2.78 lakh non-registered dairy and cattle fattening farms and 8.68 lakh poultry farms across the country.

Huq went on to say that the government is trying to attract and train up more educated entrepreneurs for the farming sector.

Future of payments: physical to digital currency

MAHTAB UDDIN AHMED

Many of you have probably heard the "Bitcoin Pizza Story" where this man buys a pizza with 10,000 Bitcoins as the value of Bitcoin at the time was only a few cents. But not too long later, he came to realise how he had spent what would have been millions on a single pizza as the value of Bitcoin skyrocketed.

This story is a popular reference to Bitcoin's early days when people were unaware of the potential value of digital currency. However, a reverse story would be true for those who bought Bitcoin a few years back.

With the advent of Bitcoin, the future of physical currency is increasingly waning. Digital payment systems such as credit cards, mobile payment apps and digital currencies are clear evidence of how people are moving away from using physical currency. In fact, the Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the shift towards digital payments as more people are opting for contactless transactions to avoid the spread of the virus.

The future of payment will most likely be characterised by increased digitalisation and greater consumer convenience. Mobile payments have proven to be very popular in developing countries like Bangladesh.

The current penetration level reached above 60 per cent among the adult population. The growing trend of using mobile devices for payments is likely to continue. This includes mobile wallets and payment apps that allow consumers the convenience of making purchases and transferring money using their smartphones.

The other technology driving digital payment is contactless payments. The pandemic has accelerated the adoption of contactless payments such as payments made through NFC (near-field communication) technology. This trend will likely continue as consumers become more accustomed to the convenience and safety of contactless payments.

Cryptocurrency payments are debated and accepted by many as a digital payment mode. It is becoming more mainstream with companies like Tesla and PayPal accepting Bitcoin and other digital currencies. As the technology behind cryptocurrencies improves and becomes more widely adopted, cryptocurrency payments will likely become more common.

Biometric authentication methods such as fingerprint and facial recognition are probably widely used for payments, making transactions more secure and convenient.

Overall, the future of payments will likely be characterised by increased convenience, security, and digitalisation, focusing on making payments as seamless and frictionless as possible for consumers.

The future of digital currency, also known as cryptocurrency, is likely to be shaped by several key trends: regulation; improved security measures to prevent hacking and fraud and improving the technology behind blockchain, the underlying technology that powers cryptocurrencies; and wider adoption of cryptocurrencies are becoming more mainstream, with growing numbers of retailers and businesses accepting Bitcoin and other digital currencies as payments. This trend is likely to continue as people become more familiar with cryptocurrencies and their potential benefits.

As far as Bangladesh is concerned, we have stagnated for the last decade with mobile financial services, a half-cooked digital currency. We have heard of Bangladesh Bank working on digital bank and digital currency, but the progress is yet to be seen.

When we all know that digital currency is inevitable, it is better to be prepared for it. In our context, the most critical success factor for digital currency is significantly expanding the merchant network. If planned and executed well under the close supervision of the central bank, digital currency may act as a crucial factor in building our innovative economy.

The author is a telecom and management expert



Global farm, cereal prices stable: WB

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The agricultural, cereal, and export price indices remained stable in the two weeks to February 23, said the World Bank.

The agricultural and export price indices closed 1 per cent higher, and the cereal price index closed at the same level.

Maize, wheat, and rice prices all closed within 1 per cent of their levels two weeks ago, said the multilateral lender's food security update.

On a year-on-year basis, maize and rice prices were 9 per cent and 16 per cent higher, respectively, and wheat prices were 3 per cent lower.

Maize and rice prices were up 4 per cent and 18 per cent, respectively, and wheat prices were down 5 per cent.

Maize and wheat prices, however, were 32 per cent and 15 per cent higher than in January 2021, and rice prices were 1 per cent lower.

The most recent Food Price Monitoring and Analysis Bulletin released by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) revealed mixed trends for international cereal prices in January 2023.

World wheat prices fell in January for a third consecutive month, international coarse grain prices remained mostly unchanged, and international rice prices rose at an accelerated pace in January 2023.

"Overall, FAO's analysis indicates that high prices have persisted for the past three months despite some evidence of easing from 2022 peaks in certain countries, with rice price hikes mostly responsible for sustained high cereal prices," said the bulletin.



In this photo taken in the last week of January, men and women are working at Boro paddy fields in Phulchari upazila of Gaibandha. Agricultural and cereal prices were mostly stable in the global market in the two weeks to February 23, according to the World Bank.

PHOTO: MOSTAFA SHABUI

LafargeHolcim declares its highest-ever dividend

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

LafargeHolcim Bangladesh Ltd has declared a 48 per cent cash dividend for its shareholders for 2022, the highest ever.

The board of directors of the local operations of the multinational cement manufacturer recommended a 15 per cent cash dividend for the October-December period of the financial year, according to a press release.

It provided a 25 per cent cash dividend in 2021 and 10 per cent in the previous seven years each.

The record dividend came after LafargeHolcim's net profit rose 14 per cent year-on-year to Tk 445 crore last year although 2022 was tough for the whole cement industry in Bangladesh owing to the business slowdown

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