

# Star BUSINESS



## Financial account deficit widens

Hints at a continuation of stress in forex regime

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

The deficit in Bangladesh's financial account widened substantially in the first eight months of the ongoing fiscal year, in an indication that the current stress in the foreign exchange regime will continue in the coming months.

Between July and February of 2022-23, the financial account of the balance of payments (BoP) registered a deficit of \$1.53 billion in contrast to a surplus of \$11.9 billion a year ago, data from the Bangladesh Bank showed.

Historically the financial account of Bangladesh has experienced a surplus almost every year.

For example, it was \$944 million in FY16, \$4.25 billion in FY17, \$9.01 billion in FY18, \$5.13 billion in FY19, \$7.54 billion in FY20, \$14.07 billion in FY21, and \$13.67 billion in FY22, according to the World Bank data.

Economists say although the deficits in both trade and the current account narrowed substantially in the first

**A financial account is a component of a country's BoP that covers claims or liabilities to non-residents concerning financial assets. Its components include foreign direct investment, medium and long-term loans, trade credit, net aid flows, portfolio investment and reserve assets**

seven months of FY23, the foreign exchange reserves will continue to face stress in the days ahead owing to the large deficit in the financial account.

The reserves stood at \$31.20 billion on April 3, down 29 per cent year-on-year.

A financial account is a component of a country's BoP that covers claims or liabilities to non-residents concerning financial assets. Its components include foreign direct investment, medium and long-term loans, trade credit, net aid flows, portfolio investment and reserve assets.

"The large deficit in the financial account means the country is facing a shortage of US dollars," said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh.

"Policy makers have failed to manage the macroeconomy efficiently. So, the deficit in the financial account widened alarmingly."

According to Mansur, the central bank has given the emphasis on reducing import payments to tackle the shortage of the US dollar and pulled off some successes to this end.

Thanks to the fall in imports, the country's trade deficit declined 38 per cent year-on-year to \$13.8 billion in July-February.

A pickup in remittance also lent a helping hand.

Last month, non-resident Bangladeshis sent home \$2.02 billion, an increase of 8.6 per cent from a year earlier. This took the receipts to \$16.03 billion so far in FY23, up 4.8 per cent year-on-year.

The deficit in the current account stood at \$4.38 billion between July and February, down 66 per cent from a year ago.

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People go through partially burnt saris in front of the capital's Bangabazar shopping complex yesterday for recycling portions in the manufacture of bags, curtains, table runners and placemats and even clothing for children. A massive fire ripped through the market on Tuesday morning, burning down nearly 3,000 shops full of clothes and ruining the livelihood of several thousand traders just weeks before Eid. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON



**Rokia Afzal Rahman**  
(1941-2023)

Chairman of RR Group & Arlinks Group of Companies  
Chairman of Mediaworld Ltd and MIDAS Financing Ltd  
Vice President of International Chamber of Commerce - ICC Bangladesh  
Director of MIDAS  
Director of Mediastar Ltd  
Independent Director of Bangladesh Lamps Ltd

### THE JOURNEY THRU THE BUSINESS WORLD

- First woman bank manager in Bangladesh
- Started her own agro-business in 1980 after leaving banking
- Established RR Cold Storage Ltd
- Facilitated loans to farmers by standing as guarantor
- Bought Imaan Cold Storage Ltd
- Founder president of Bangladesh Federation of Women Entrepreneurs
- Founder president of Women Entrepreneur
- Association of Bangladesh
- Former president of Bangladesh Employers Federation
- She was the first woman president of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry

### Other engagements

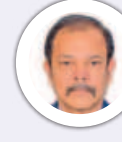
- Became adviser to the caretaker government in 2001
- Served as a board member of Bangladesh Bank
- Served on the board of Brac
- Former advisory board member of Asian University for Women, Ctg



"Rokia Afzal Rahman was a pioneering women entrepreneur. She was a source of inspiration and motivation for many."  
Md Jashim Uddin  
President of FBCCI



"There is no one other than she (Rokia) who has contribution to the development of women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh."  
ASM Mashi-Ur-Rahman  
Managing director of MIDAS



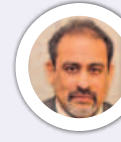
"Rokia Afzal Rahman was a visionary business leader. Her foresight was unparalleled."  
Md Saiful Islam  
President of MCCI



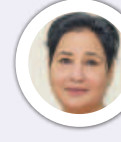
"She was a pioneer in women's entrepreneurship and she showed us the way."  
Monowara Hakim Ali  
President of Chittagong Women Chamber



"Humility is her other name. I write 'is' just because Rokia Apa will continue to live amongst all of us beyond today, just because of her compassion."  
Rubana Huq  
VC of Asian University for Women



"She was courageous and instilled courage into others. The country has lost a golden daughter."  
Abul Kasem Khan  
Former DCCI president



"Rokia Apa was a role model for me. She was a source of confidence."  
Parveen Mahmud  
Former president of ICAB



"She cared for us like a mother or elder sister."  
Fazlul Hoque  
Former BKMEA president

## An inspiration like none other

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

It is said that a successful South Asian entrepreneur is able to run business anywhere in the world as they have the skills to overcome multifaceted barriers in almost every step of the entrepreneurial journey.

For a female entrepreneur, the journey is even more difficult here.

But Rokia Afzal Rahman, one of the first renowned women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh, overcame all entrepreneurial and insurmountable barriers to emerge as a successful businessperson.

Becoming the first woman bank manager of the country and serving in the role for seven years, Rahman went on to explore almost the entire world of finance and business over many years.

Rahman started her own agribusiness in 1980 and diversified her business in many other sectors. For instance, she ventured into media, insurance, real estate and the power sector.

She not only played a pioneering role in paving the way for women entrepreneurs in businesses but was also a source of inspiration and motivation for many businesswomen.

Rahman played a mentorship role for hundreds of women entrepreneurs with financial support and suggestions.

In 1994, the Women Entrepreneurs Association (WEA) of Bangladesh was formed with 150 members and Rokia Afzal Rahman as founder president.

In 1996, Rahman formed the Women in Small Enterprises (WISE) to further promote women in forming small enterprises and industries.

The WEA and the WISE worked to bring about a change in the lives of women and bring empowerment through entrepreneurship development.

Rahman was also the founding president of the Bangladesh Federation of Women Entrepreneurs (BFWE), which was launched in 2006. The business community expressed sincere condolences on her passing.

Md Jashim Uddin, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), said Rokia Afzal Rahman was a pioneer and a source of inspiration and motivation for many.

"Her death is an irreparable damage for the country," he added. Rokia Afzal Rahman was a

visionary business leader with true humane qualities, said Md Saiful Islam, president of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI), one of the leading business chambers of the country.

In contrast, many people are now materialistic, he said.

Her foresightedness was unparalleled, Islam told The Daily Star over the phone while recalling memories with Rokia Afzal Rahman as a business leader. Rahman was also the president of the MCCI for two terms in 2013 and 2014.

"She embodied values and respect for people, which is rare nowadays," Islam also said.

Rahman played a very vital role in portraying the country's progress before the world during the celebration of the MCCI's 110th anniversary, when she was the MCCI president. The chief guest of the celebrations was former Indian president APJ Abdul Kalam.

"Courageous with motherly affection, Rokia apa was a role model for me," said Parveen Mahmud, past chairperson of the Micro Industries Development Assistance and Services (MIDAS). Rahman was a director of the MIDAS.

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## A torchbearer, a mentor

Say women entrepreneurs

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Women entrepreneurs yesterday fondly remembered the contribution of Rokia Afzal Rahman to entrepreneurship and the overall business sector, calling her a torchbearer and a mentor for countless businesswomen in Bangladesh.

Their heart-felt reactions came as the noted entrepreneur and business leader breathed her last at the Mount Elizabeth Novena Hospital in Singapore yesterday.

"We are really very sad about her demise. She was a pioneering woman entrepreneur in Bangladesh and she showed us the way," said Monowara Hakim Ali, president of the Chittagong Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Rokia Rahman was the president of the Bangladesh Federation of Women Entrepreneurs (BFWE). In fact, she was the founding president of the platform.

She was also the founding president of the Women Entrepreneurs Association, which was formed in 1994, and headed the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the oldest trade body in Bangladesh, for two terms in 2013 and 2014.

She was also the vice-president of the International Chamber of Commerce Bangladesh, the local chapter of the largest business organisation in the world.

Monowara, also a former first vice-president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, said Rokia Rahman loved women entrepreneurs very much and always suggested they work for people.

"She will continue living among us. She believed that the nation will advance thanks to the advancement of women."

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## Bangabazar fire also affects its suppliers

Many traders who sold products on credit are uncertain about payments

SUKANTA HALDER

The fire at Bangabazar on Tuesday morning not only affected shop owners at the apparel shopping complex in Dhaka's Gulistan, but also other players in the supply chain.

For example, many traders accepted deferred payments for supplying goods to retail outlets at the market, much of which was razed by the inferno that began at around 6:00am, leaving little chance to recover their dues.

Shariful Islam Sohel, who owns a clothing store at a wholesale hub in the capital's Sadarghat, said they mainly supply shirts to different retailers across the country.

At present, Sohel is owed a total of around Tk 2 crore by 15 shops in Bangabazar for the clothes purchased targeting upcoming Eid-ul-Fitr celebrations.

"I called one of these businessmen yesterday and found him deeply sobbing for his losses. How can I ask for my money back in such a situation?" he asked.

The wholesaler then said he usually sells his goods on deferred payments, meaning that the buyers would pay their due after reselling the items at their own stores.

"The business has been running like this

for about 10 years but never before have I been in such financial danger," he added.

Mohammad Masudur Rahman, the owner of a fabrics store in Islampur, the largest wholesale market for textiles, said he is owed around Tk 40 lakh by 12 traders whose shops were gutted by the fire.

**The massive fire at Bangabazar burned down at least 2,931 shops that were packed with clothes, ruining the livelihoods of thousands of traders just weeks before Eid-ul-Fitr**

Deferred payments are only accepted if the seller trusts the buyers. However, neither party can tell if disaster may strike, he added.

Rahman then said that roughly 40 per cent of the goods sold to shop owners are paid in cash while the remainder are on deferred payment.

The massive fire that tore through Bangabazar burned down at least 2,931 shops that were packed with clothes, ruining the livelihoods of thousands of traders just weeks before Eid-ul-Fitr.

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## Standard Bank director elected exec committee chairman

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Standard Bank has recently elected a director as the chairman of its executive committee.

The electee, Gulzar Ahmed, also owner of Apan Jewellers, was the vice chairman of the bank, said a press release.

Ahmed is the chairman of Unique Gold Private Ltd, senior vice-president and chairman of the banking and financial standing committee of Bangladesh Jeweller's Association (Bajus).

He is the first vice-president of the Bangladesh Jewellery Manufacturers and Exporters Association, member of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry and the Baitul Mukarram Market Babosaye Group, and chief adviser of Gulshan DNCC Market Committee.

## Exim Bank launches 'Exim Happiness'

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Exim Bank yesterday launched a product titled "Exim Happiness" aiming at more savings and profits.

Mohammad Feroz Hossain, managing director of Exim Bank, inaugurated the product at the bank's head office in Dhaka, said a press release.

"Exim Bank always gives utmost importance to the needs of the customers. As part of that, today (Wednesday) we have launched this product titled "Exim Happiness", said Hossain.

Among others, Md Humayun Kabir and Shah Md Abdul Bari, additional managing directors, Md Zoshim Uddin Bhuiyan and Maksuda Khanam, deputy managing directors, were present.



**A vendor goes round selling aluminium cookware, expertly piling them on top of two baskets and keeping them in place using nets to finally balance them on his shoulder. He purchases the cookware from wholesalers at Tk 500 to Tk 550 per kilogram for sale at a profit of around Tk 100. In this way he can earn around Tk 15,000 to Tk 20,000 a month. The photo was taken at Shorshi village in Barishal sadar upazila recently.**

PHOTO: TITU DAS

# Stocks turnover drops though key index rises

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Stocks edged up slightly yesterday while turnover dropped for a fall in investor participation.

The DSEX, the benchmark index of the premier bourse in Bangladesh, rose 1 point, or 0.02 per cent, to close the day at 6,211.

The DS30, the blue-chip index, dropped 0.04 per cent to 2,202 and the DSES, the Shariah-compliant index, increased 0.02 per cent to 1,346.

Market movement yesterday was driven by positive changes in the market cap of jute, travel and leisure and services and real estate scrips, said Sahnta Securities in its daily market review.

This was amidst negative changes in the market cap of life insurance, miscellaneous, and tannery industries' scrips, it said.

Of the securities to undergo trade, 52 advanced, 63 declined and 190 did not show any price movement.

Turnover, an important indicator of the market, fell 18 per cent to Tk 527 crore.

The Dhaka stock ended marginally

higher by snapping a two-day losing streak, said International Leasing Securities in its daily market review.

The market observed see-saw movements during the whole trading session as the investors were active from both sides of the trading fences, it said.

### Market movement yesterday was driven by positive changes in the market cap of jute, travel and leisure, services and real estate scrips

Unsure of the market's direction, apprehensive investors tended to remain on the sidelines and were reluctant to make fresh investments in the market, it said.

Among the sectors, jute rose 6 per cent, IT advanced 1.9 per cent and services rose 1.9 per cent whereas life insurance dropped 0.4 per cent and miscellaneous fell 0.3 per cent.

The investors' attention was mostly centred on IT, which accounted for 24 per cent of the day's turnover, followed by

food (12.9 per cent) and services (9.9 per cent) sectors.

Intech Ltd increased 9.84 per cent followed by Rahim Textile Mills Ltd (9.74 per cent), Sonali Aansh Industries Limited (8.04 per cent) and Gemini Sea Food Limited (7.5 per cent).

Samata Leather Complex Ltd topped the list of losers shedding more than 7.16 per cent. Union Capital Limited, Bangladesh Welding Electrodes Limited, GQ Ball Pen Industries Limited and Prime Islami Life Insurance Ltd suffered substantial losses as well.

Eastern Housing Limited was the most-traded stock on the day with shares worth Tk 44 crore undergoing transactions. Genex Infosys Limited, aamra networks limited, Unique Hotel and Resorts PLC and Bangladesh Shipping Corporation.

Stocks at Chittagong Stock Exchange also rose slightly.

The Caspi, the all-share price index of the port city bourse, went up 2 points to close at 18,308.

Of the issues, 31 rose, 33 retreated and 50 did not see any price movement. Turnover fell 4 per cent to Tk 7 crore.

## Ceramic assoc president, gen secy re-elected



Shirajul Islam Mollah

Irfan Uddin

STAR BUSINESS DESK

The Bangladesh Ceramic Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BCMEA) has re-elected its president and general secretary for a two-year term.

The president, Md Shirajul Islam Mollah, is the managing director of China-Bangla Ceramic Industries Ltd, while the general secretary, Irfan Uddin, director of FARR Ceramics Ltd.

Moydul Islam, vice chairman of Monno Ceramic Industries Ltd, was also re-elected senior vice-president while Md Mamunur Rashid, additional managing director of Monalisa Ceramic (BD) Ltd, elected senior vice-president.

Ruslan Nasir, deputy managing director of Mir Ceramic Ltd, Abdul Hakim Sumon, managing director of Excellent Tiles Industries Ltd, Tanvir Ahmed, managing director of Sheltech Ceramics Ltd, and Sifat E Arman, director of Bangladesh Hardland Ceramics Company Ltd, were elected vice-presidents.

Other elected directors for 2023-24 are SM Faruqi Hasan, chairman of Protik Fine Ceramics Ltd, Md Shamsul Huda, managing director of Great Wall Ceramic Industries Ltd, Farian Yousuf, managing director of Paragon Ceramic Industries Ltd, and Ayesha Sanaa Asif Tabani, director of Mirpur Ceramic Works Ltd.

PRICES OF KEY ESSENTIALS IN DHAKA CITY			
	PRICE (APR 5, 2023)	% CHANGES FROM A MONTH AGO	% CHANGE FROM A YEAR AGO
Fine rice (kg)	Tk 60-Tk 75	0	3.85 ↑
Coarse rice (kg)	Tk 46-Tk 50	0	3.23 ↑
Loose flour (kg)	Tk 55-Tk 58	-4.24 ↓	59.15 ↑
Lentil (kg)	Tk 95-Tk 100	0	-4.88 ↓
Soybean (litre)	Tk 168-Tk 175	0.88 ↑	10.65 ↑
Potato (kg)	Tk 22-Tk 25	23.68 ↑	23.68 ↑
Onion (kg)	Tk 35-Tk 45	14.29 ↑	23.8 ↑
Egg (4 pcs)	Tk 42-Tk 45	0	27.94 ↑

SOURCE: TCB



**Adil Chowdhury, president and managing director of Bank Asia, and Mainuddin Hassan Chowdhury, country director-Bangladesh of Merchante Asia Sdn Bhd, cut a ribbon to inaugurate a remittance promotional campaign at Bank Asia Tower in Karwan Bazar of Dhaka yesterday.**

PHOTO: BANK ASIA

## Bank Asia-Merchantrade Asia Sdn Bhd campaign focuses on remittance

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Bank Asia Limited and Merchante Asia Sdn Bhd yesterday jointly launched a campaign under which the latter's customers will get an exclusive gift while withdrawing cash remittance from Bank Asia branches.

Adil Chowdhury, president and managing director of Bank Asia, and Mainuddin Hassan Chowdhury, Bangladesh country director of Merchante Asia Sdn Bhd, inaugurated the campaign at Bank Asia Tower in Dhaka, said a press release.

Shafiuzzaman and ANM Mahfuz, additional managing directors, Md Sazzad Hossain, SM Iqbal Hossain and Alamgir Hossain, deputy managing directors, and Golam Gaffar Imtiaz Chowdhury, head of foreign remittance department of the bank, were present.



**Emranul Huq, managing director of Dhaka Bank, Yasir Azman, chief executive officer of Grameenphone, and Syed Mohammad Kamal, country manager of Mastercard Bangladesh, attended a launching ceremony of co-branded credit cards jointly organised by Dhaka Bank and Grameenphone at Sheraton Dhaka in Banani yesterday.**

PHOTO: DHAKA BANK

## Opec+ in driver's seat

FROM PAGE B4

"Opec wants and needs a higher price, and they are back in the driver's seat to obtaining their wishes."

US shale oil drillers over the last two decades helped to turn the United States into the world's largest producer. But the gains in output are slowing and executives warn of future declines.

US oil and gas activity stalled in the first quarter, according to a survey, with some respondents citing higher costs and interest rates. Opec has this year been lowering its US shale oil output forecast, having also done so in 2022.

An Opec+ source, asked if Opec+ is in the driver's seat when it comes to the oil market now, said: "We are not in the passenger seat".

Opec+ does not have a target for oil prices. The Saudi Arabian energy ministry said the voluntary output cut from the kingdom, the kingpin of Opec+, was a precautionary measure aimed at supporting oil market stability.

Opec sources have cited a lack

of sufficient investment to increase supply as likely to support prices this year.

Investment is rebounding after taking a hit during the pandemic. According to the International Energy Forum (IEF), oil and gas upstream capital spending rose 39 per cent in 2022 to \$499 billion, the highest level since 2014 and the largest ever year-on-year gain.

But, the IEF said, annual upstream investment will need to increase to \$640 billion in 2030 to ensure adequate supplies.

Opec is pumping almost 1 million bpd less than its current output target, according to its own figures and other estimates, with notable shortfalls in Nigeria and Angola from which Western oil companies have moved away in recent years.

While non-Opec producers are still expected to pump more in 2023, the forecast of a supply increase of 1.44 million bpd falls short of expected world demand growth of 2.32 million bpd, according to Opec forecasts.

## Dhaka Bank, GP launch co-branded credit cards

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Dhaka Bank Limited yesterday launched co-branded credit cards with Grameenphone for GP Star customers at a programme at Sheraton Dhaka in Banani.

Zunaid Ahmed Palak, state minister for ICT Division, virtually joined the programme to inaugurate the product, said a press release.

Emranul Huq, managing director of Dhaka Bank, Yasir Azman, chief executive officer of Grameenphone, and Syed Mohammad Kamal, country manager of Mastercard Bangladesh, were present.

"Through this launch, we are going to provide our customers with an

even richer and more distinguished experience with our credit card offerings," the Dhaka Bank managing director said.

The Grameenphone CEO stressed the need for meeting customers' diversified needs in line with digitalisation of Bangladesh.

"This kind of partnership plays a significant role in improving customer experience standards and in bringing in newer facilities for them. GP Star is the largest and most loved loyalty platform in Bangladesh," said Azman.

Among others, Md Mostaque Ahmed and Akhlaqur Rahman, deputy managing directors of the bank, and HM Mostafizur Rahaman, executive vice-president, were also present.

## India's power output surges

FROM PAGE B4

India's power output surged 11.2 per cent, the quickest growth in over three decades, thanks to a 12.4 per cent surge in electricity production from coal, the analysis showed, offsetting a 28.7 per cent decline in generation from cleaner gas-fired plants as a global spike in LNG prices deterred usage.

In the new fiscal year that began April 1, Indian power plants are expected to burn about 8 per cent more coal. The rapid acceleration in India's coal-fired output to address a spike in power demand underscores challenges faced by the world's third largest greenhouse gas-emitter in weaning its economy off carbon, as it attempts to ensure energy security to around 1.4 billion Indians.

Total power supplied during the last fiscal year was 1509.15 billion kWh, 8.4 per cent higher than a year earlier but still 6.69 billion units short of demand, the widest deficit in six years.

Electricity generated from coal rose to 1,162.91 billion kWh, the data showed, with its share in overall output rising to 73.1 per cent - the highest level since the year ending March 2019.

India's Central Electricity authority estimates that 1 million kWh of power produced from coal generates 975 tonnes of carbon dioxide, while the same amount of power generated from gas produces 475 tonnes. A plant fired by lignite, known as brown coal, emits 1,280 tonnes to produce equivalent power.

Increased fossil fuel burning for power in the world's fifth largest economy drove up CO2 emissions during the year by nearly a sixth, to 1.15 billion tonnes, Reuters calculations based on government data and emissions estimates show.

That is 3.4 per cent of the International Energy Agency's estimate of annual global emissions of 33.8 billion tonnes in 2022.





Almost all chairs with umbrellas sit empty on the Kuakata sea beach in Patuakhali as the number of tourists has fallen drastically since the middle of March mainly because of Ramadan. The photo was taken on Tuesday. PHOTO: SOHRAB HOSSAIN

# Kuakata sees drastic fall in tourists for Ramadan

Hotels, motels offer up to 50% discount

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

The number of tourists flocking to Kuakata Beach has fallen drastically since the middle of March, forcing hotel and motel owners to offer up to 50 per cent discounts on rents in a desperate bid to attract holidaymakers and cut losses.

Motaleb Sharif, general secretary of the Kuakata Hotel-Motel Owners Association, said the dearth of tourists started to become noticeable a week before the start of Ramadan on March 24.

"Now there are no tourists," Sharif, owner of Kuakata Guest House, a 39-room property, says. "No tourists are coming to my hotel for the past one week."

"There are 130 good quality hotels and motels in Kuakata and the situation is the same for all of them."

Patuakhali's Kuakata Beach is located on the southernmost tip of Bangladesh and about 5,000 people rely on the local tourism sector.

Their income has fallen sharply for a month as the number of tourists visiting the tourist destination has plunged.

Industry people say the tourist number usually witnesses a drop in the fasting month. But the decline is sharper this year.

Abdus Shakur, manager of Khan Palace, says there are 50 rooms in the hotel.

"Of them, only two rooms are occupied currently whereas the remaining 48 rooms are empty. As a result, we are failing to generate revenues even to pay salaries to the staff."

"The dearth of tourists may continue till the Eid festival."

Khan Palace is offering 50 per cent discounts on rents to draw tourists. "Still, we are not being able to attract them," Shakur said.

Kuakata Sikder Resort is also offering a 50 per cent discount on room rents.

Its accountant Shahin Alam says there has been the presence of no tourists in the

hotel for the past few days.

"The number of tourists has decreased alarmingly even before the month of Ramadan. Every year, the number of tourists usually remains low during Ramadan. But this year the situation is very bad."

Operators who rent out beach chairs with umbrellas as well as photographers were found lazing around on the beach. There are 200 beach chair operators and 35 beach-based photographers there.

Noor Hossain operates 40 beach chairs with umbrellas in Kuakata.

He said: "Since there have been few tourists on the beach even before Ramadan, it has now become difficult for his family to make ends meet."

Almas Ahmed, a photographer, says photographers like him make a living by taking pictures of tourists.

"But there has been almost no income for almost a month amid a lower turnout of tourists."

Apart from the Ramadan effect, higher inflation, which has significantly eroded the purchasing power of people, has also contributed to the fall in the number of tourists.

Inflation in Bangladesh has been at an elevated level since July last year. It jumped to a seven-month high of 9.33 per cent in March as food prices rose and the adjustment of oil, gas, and electricity prices took hold.

Vendors who sell fried fish on the beach are also in trouble due to a lack of tourists. One of them, Bellal Hossain, says tourists usually come and eat fried fish from the evening to midnight.

"This brings me some money to take care of the family. But there have been no tourists on the beach for the last one month."

Hossain, however, hopes that tourists will throng the beach during the Eid-ul-Fitr festival, which will be celebrated later this month.

## Bangladesh immigrant day and trade fair in New York in Sept

STAR BUSINESS DESK

The sixth Bangladeshi Immigrant Day and Trade Fair-2023 is going to be held in the US on September 22-23 with the theme "Exploring opportunities towards Smart Economy".

Muktdhara New York and USA-Bangladesh Business Links, in association with the Greater New York Chamber of Commerce, are going to organise the two-day event at the Marriott Marquis hotel in New York, said a press release.

The Ministry of Commerce and Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) of Bangladesh approved the event and enlisted it in its calendar. Apart from that, the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) has agreed to support the event.

The EPB is working to increase the number of participants in the trade show so that the volume of exports to the US increases further.

## India's services growth loses some steam in March

REUTERS, Bengaluru

Growth in India's dominant services industry eased last month from February's 12-year high due to a softer expansion in demand, according to a private survey, which also showed input cost inflation falling to its lowest since September 2020.

The S&P Global India services Purchasing Managers' Index (INPMIS-EI) fell to 57.8 last month from 59.4 in February, lower than a Reuters poll forecast of 58.3.

But it stayed above the 50-mark separating growth from contraction for a 20th consecutive month.

STOCKS	
DSEX ▲	CASPI ▲
0.02%	0.01%
6,211.02	18,308.28

COMMODITIES	
Gold ▲	Oil ▼
\$2,022.56	\$80.47
(per ounce)	(per barrel)

ASIAN MARKETS			
MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI
▲ 0.99%	▲ 0.68%	▲ 0.23%	▲ 0.49%
59,689.31	27,813.26	3,318.87	3,312.56

## Bangabazar fire

FROM PAGE B1

The fire had spread rapidly through the crammed market while the ensuing plumes of black smoke blanketed nearby neighbourhoods.

The flames were eventually brought under control by afternoon, but piles of clothing were seen still smouldering at around 8:30pm later that day, according to the Department of Fire Service and Civil Defence.

Owned by the Dhaka South City Corporation, the 21,250 square feet shopping complex consists of Bangabazar Market, Gulistan Market, Mohanagar Market, and Adarsha Market.

Ishtiaq Ahmed, another apparel supplier from Islampur, said they supply products to more than 500 traders of different markets at Bangabazar.

"But huge funds have become stuck because of the fire incident," added Ahmed, who said it is difficult

to tally his total losses.

The wholesaler then said it is not possible to make 100 per cent of their transactions cash based considering the nature of their business.

"This is just now the entire supply chain goes," he added.

Ahmed went on to say the entire supply chain has been affected by the fire.

"We cannot even pay the textile mills from which we bought products," he said.

Other than Islampur, shop owners at Bangabazar also source their goods from Sadarghat, Keraniganj, Gazipur and other parts of the country.

Considering the situation, Nesar Uddin Mollah, general secretary of the Islampur Cloth Merchants Association, said those who trade with shop owners at Bangabazar are also in danger.

"As we are all in danger, we should stand by each other in this situation," he added.

## An inspiration like none other

FROM PAGE B1

"In fact, Rokia apa insisted that I be the then convener of this new platform (when it was formed)," Mahmud added.

Abul Kasem Khan, former president of the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said she was courageous and infused courage into others. Her trademark was her ever-smiling face, he said.

"We will miss her presence and the country has lost a golden daughter," said Khan.

Masud Rahman, president of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce in Bangladesh, said she was a pioneer in women entrepreneurship in the country.

"Definitely she inspired a lot of women entrepreneurs. I learnt from her how to think positive," Rahman told The Daily Star over phone.

"She was so caring like a mother or elder sister," said Fazlul Hoque, former president of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and

Exporters Association.

"I was very much moved hearing the news of her death. It shocked me as she was like a mother to me," he said.

"She was such a caring person, as if she was my family member and always used to inquire about our wellbeing," said Hoque, also a board member of the International Chamber of Commerce - Bangladesh (ICC-B).

"We used to share a lot of thoughts during our board meeting of the ICC-B as she was a vice-president at the time of her death," Hoque said.

AK Azad, vice-president of the ICC-B and former president of the FBCCI, said Rahman was an honest entrepreneur.

"Of course, she had motherly, humane qualities. She never hurt anybody. She was very much an entrepreneur. She had an immense contribution to society," she said.

Rahman also served on the board of BRAC and was chairperson of Banche Shekha, Jashore, which works for the underprivileged and

extremely financially insolvent.

She was also the chairperson of Mini Marts, which are marketing outlets owned and managed by a group of businesswomen to sell a diversified group of items, for the first five years since its inception in 1992.

The retail chain was established to eliminate middlemen with whom women doing business had to share a percentage of their profits.

ASM Mashi-Ur Rahman, managing director of the MIDAS, said the financial organisation was established to finance the missing middle - those who do not get loans from banks and microfinance institutions.

Rokia Afzal Rahman introduced collateral free loans for women entrepreneurs when banks shied away from financing women entrepreneurs, he said.

"There is no one other than Rokia who has contributed so much for the development of women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh," he said.

## Dollar mired near two-month low

REUTERS, London

The dollar wallowed near two-month lows on Wednesday after weak data supported the view that the Federal Reserve may not need to raise rates much further, while the New Zealand dollar hit two-month highs after a larger than expected rate hike.

With the all-important US monthly employment report just two days away, activity across the market was a little more subdued than it has been in recent weeks.

The Reserve Bank of New Zealand unexpectedly raised interest rates by 50 basis points (bps) to a more than 14-year high of 5.25 per cent. In a Reuters poll, 22 of 24 economists had forecast just a 25 bps hike.

The kiwi rallied by as much as 1.1 per cent to a two-month high of \$0.6383 after the decision, before retreating. It was last up 0.1 per cent at \$0.6316.

## Financial account deficit

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"But the two positive developments have failed to offset the negative impacts emanating from the deficit in the financial account," Mansur said.

He says many foreign lenders are now showing reluctance to give out loans to local businesses, putting an adverse impact on the financial account.

For instance, trade credit, a major part of the financial account, registered a deficit of \$3 billion in July-February compared to a surplus of \$969 million a year ago, BB data showed.

"Many foreign lenders think that local businesses may face problems to repay loans," said Mansur.

He urged the central bank to withdraw the lending rate cap of 9 per cent so both local and foreign businesses keep funds in the banks

of Bangladesh.

The fluctuation in the exchange rate between the taka and the dollar has given a negative signal to businesses when it comes to mobilising funds from external sources.

The taka has lost its value by about 30 per cent against the American greenback in the past one year owing to the fast-depletion of the reserves amid escalated import bills.

Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office, called for a withdrawal of multiple exchange rates.

"Otherwise, the ongoing stress in the foreign exchange market can't be tackled. The multiple exchange rates have created a negative impact on the remittance inflow as well," he said.

## A torchbearer, a mentor

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Monowara also shared her memories with the former adviser of the caretaker government.

"She always advised me to maintain a low profile. She advised us to be confident and to continue. We learnt a lot from her."

Rubana Huq, vice-chancellor of the Asian University for Women, said, "Humility is her other name. I write 'is' just because Rokia apa will continue to live amongst all of us beyond today, just because of her compassion."

"She is a friend and a mentor and will always continue to be one."

Huq, also a former president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, described Rokia Rahman's contribution to the SME sector of Bangladesh as

outstanding.

"Her encouragement to young female entrepreneurs is exemplary. A woman of courage, vision and optimism, Rokia apa, will always be in our hearts," Huq said.

Sadequa Hassan Sejuti, secretary general of the BFWE, said, "Following her demise, Bangladesh has lost an idol. We lost a legend."

She said Rokia Rahman was very humble.

"She worked for every human being. She helped everyone who came to her and sought help. Her humbleness was unique. And, despite being so successful, the way she mingled with people was unbelievable," said Sejuti, also the managing director of Amar Desh Amar Gram, an initiative that works to create computer and web access for lowest-income groups.

"She was visionary."

She said Rokia Rahman was very supportive of other businesswomen and personally helped them in marketing and branding.

"I learned from her every day while working with her at the BFWE."

Sharing memories, Sejuti said, "In my personal life, she was like a mother to me. She was my guardian and idol. Every woman who had worked with her will say the same."

Humaira Chowdhury, an executive committee member of the BFWE, said Rokia Rahman proved that women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh can establish businesses, run them and become successful.

She said Midas mini-mart was established under her leadership and women entrepreneurs could market their products and even

export because of the stores.

"She led and helped develop leadership. She was a woman with a big heart. Women entrepreneurs like me have been able to advance because of leaders like her," said Humaira, also the managing director of Frontier Technology.

Sharnalata Roy, a woman entrepreneur in Sylhet, said she received guidance from the noted entrepreneur from the beginning of her journey as a businesswoman.

Rokia Rahman also contributed to the progress of women entrepreneurs in the northern region, recalled Anowara Ferdousi Poly, president of the Rangpur Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

"There was no business chamber for women entrepreneurs in the northern part of the country and she guided us," she said.





Low-income groups in Bangladesh are facing the threat of deepening impoverishment as the growth in wage rates is still far below inflation levels in the country.

PHOTO: STAR/FILE

# Wage growth below inflation for 14th month

MD ASADUZ ZAMAN

Although wage growth in Bangladesh has been slowly climbing since July last year, it has still remained below inflation for the 14th month consecutively, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS).

This trend indicates a worsening poverty situation as many people are being compelled to cut consumption amid falling real income and the rising cost of living.

In March this year, wages of low and unskilled workers grew 7.18 per cent, which was 2.15 percentage points below the inflation rate of 9.33 per cent that month, shows the Wage Rate Index (WRI) of the BBS.

In February, wages of workers across 44 occupations in agriculture, industry and services grew 7.11 per cent against a consumer price hike of 8.78 per cent.

But on Tuesday, Planning Minister MA Mannan officially announced that inflation and wage rates were up by 55 and seven basis points respectively.

"The rise in the wage rate might give a little relief to

people from the inflation," he said.

However, Hossain Zillur Rahman, executive chairman of the Power and Participation Research Centre, said the clearly marginal increase in real wages will not give any relief to poor or low-income people.

"Many people are having to adjust their household expenses at the cost of nutrition, health

and education as inflation is higher than their income growth," he added.

Professor Selim Raihan, executive director of the South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (Sanem), said peoples' real income has been falling consistently as wage growth remains below inflation.

"This means the real income of people

is being eroded, especially for those who have no other source of income and only depend on their wages," he added.

Raihan then said if a commodity cost about Tk 100 a year ago, then that same item would cost Tk 150 or Tk 160 at present.

As growth in the wage rate has remained below inflation for a long stretch, it has led to the erosion of real income among lower-income groups.

"So, the slight increase in wage growth does not give any happiness as it is still below the inflation rate," the executive director of Sanem added.

Sanem recently conducted a survey on lower-income groups with a sample of 1,600 households across eight divisions, where they found more than 96 per cent of the people reduced their meat consumption in the last six months.

"In our survey, we found that the income of households remained unchanged from September to February but the food expenditure increased drastically," Raihan said.

Raihan, also a professor of economics at the University

of Dhaka, went on to say the country should emphasise on policy making to address vulnerable people who depend on their wages.

Under this circumstance, the government should expand the coverage and allocations of social protection schemes to prevent people from falling into deeper impoverishment.

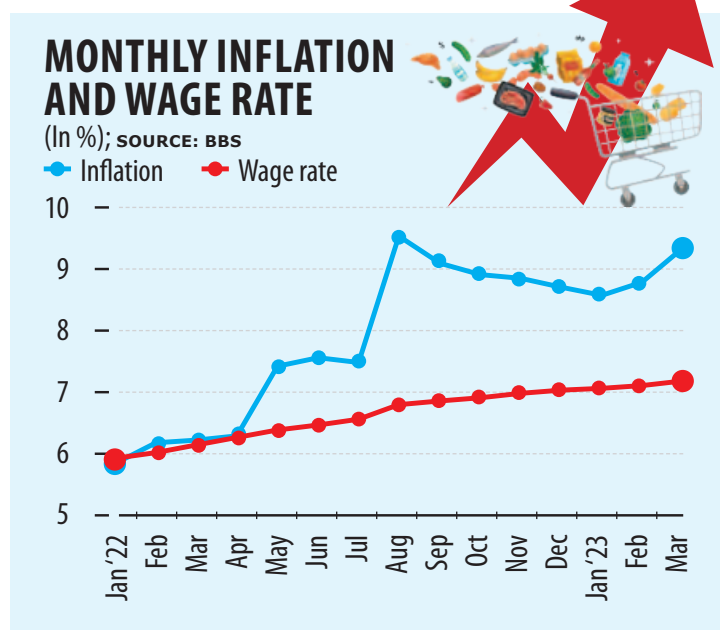
For example, coverage of the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh and Open Market Sales programmes are still low.

As a result, people have to stand in queues all day to get just a small amount of the basic commodities they need, he said.

With this backdrop, Raihan suggested that coverage should be increased as soon as possible.

The BBS collects data to measure the movement of nominal and real wages of low paid skilled and unskilled labour in different segments through the WRI.

The March WRI data shows that workers in industry, construction and production, were the victims of high inflation as their income growth fell compared to the previous month.



## Opec+ in driver's seat as oil supply growth lags demand

REUTERS, London

The surprise oil output cuts announced on Sunday by Opec+ members illustrate their greater power over the market, given limited supply growth by other producers such as US shale firms and still-growing demand despite the energy transition.

Oil has jumped to \$85 a barrel since members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies including Russia announced production cuts of about 1.16 million barrels per day (bpd), adding to curbs already in place.



While Opec or Opec+ decisions to cut output in the past have drawn warnings that higher prices and lower Opec+ output would encourage US shale producers to pump more, officials have not voiced such concerns recently.

Goldman Sachs said it sees "elevated Opec pricing power - the ability to raise prices without significantly hurting its demand - as the key economic driver", and estimates the production cut will raise Opec+ revenues.

"One thing is for certain, Opec is in control and driving price and US shale is no longer viewed as the marginal producer," said James Mick, senior portfolio manager at Tortoise Capital Advisors.

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A view of an under-construction coal jetty of a power plant on the coastline near India's southern tip in Udangudi of Tamil Nadu. Intense summer heatwaves, a colder-than-usual winter in northern India and an economic recovery led to a jump in electricity demand, forcing India to crank up output from coal plants and solar farms as it scrambled to avoid power cuts.

PHOTO: REUTERS/FILE

## CEOs' time and their open-door policies

ARJIT CHAKRABORTI

CEOs are increasingly pressed for time, both for managing everyday business as well steering their companies towards a better future. This poses challenges in terms of how well they can manage their time with the right priorities and focus.

Worldwide, the organisational culture of open workplaces has evolved in the last two decades. CEOs of many large companies, along with their deputies and other senior executives, have also embraced the open workplace and open-door policies. Now, accessing a CEO for a business discussion is not that difficult for another executive such as a CFO, CPO or CIO.

However, such easy accessibility has also reduced the time available for CEOs to focus on and think about strategic issues in their firms.

In PwC's 26th Annual Global CEO Survey: Bangladesh perspective, one of the key factors for survey and analysis was the CEOs' time. CEOs from Bangladesh said they spent 24 per cent of their time on strategizing for the future of their business, 22 per cent on driving business

performance on a day-to-day basis, and 20 per cent on mentoring or developing their human capital.

This aligns with the global survey responses, where CEOs indicated they spent most of their time in driving business performance (25 per cent). Moreover, they spent lesser time (22 per cent) in strategizing for the future and even lesser time (18 per cent) on mentoring and developing their human capital.

Comparatively, this shows that Bangladeshi CEOs have been doing a better job in terms of allocating their time towards strategic thinking. However, the survey also revealed an interesting finding on the empowerment of various executives.

Asked whether their business leaders make important and functional decisions by themselves, 77 per cent of Bangladeshi CEOs responded that such decision making happens rarely. Business executives reporting to CEOs regularly consult them before making any important functional decision.

**Some CEOs indicated that they had already empowered their second line to make day-to-day business decisions so that they could spend more time on customer engagements and strategy formulation**

While open door policies have made it easier for business executives to get access to their CEOs and consult them for business matters, it also highlights the need to empower the second line of leaders to enable faster decision making. To begin with, this would require more mentoring and coaching time by the CEOs. However, once CEOs are able to accomplish this, they will be able to free up more time to engage in matters that are necessary for the future of the organisation.

The good news is that such changes have already started happening. While conducting the CEO survey, PwC also interviewed a few CEOs from Bangladesh to understand their perspective in detail. Some of these CEOs indicated that they had already empowered their second line to make day-to-day business decisions so that they could spend more time on customer engagements and strategy formulation.

Therefore, though it is crucial for CEOs today to maintain an open-door policy in their workplaces to remain easily accessible to their people. They also must set aside some time to strategize for the future. Appropriate delegation to the second line of leaders will enable CEOs to achieve the same.

The writer is a partner with PwC. The views expressed here are his own.

## India's power output surges

REUTERS, Singapore

India's power generation grew at the fastest pace in over three decades in the just-ended fiscal year, a Reuters analysis of government data showed, fuelling a sharp surge in emissions as output from both coal-fired and renewable plants hit records.

Intense summer heatwaves, a colder-than-usual winter in northern India and an economic recovery led to a jump in electricity demand, forcing India to crank up output from coal plants and solar farms as it scrambled to avoid power cuts.

Power generation rose 11.5 per cent to 1,591.11 billion kilowatt-hours (kWh), or units, in the fiscal year ended March 2023, an analysis of daily load data from regulator Grid-India showed, the sharpest increase since year ended March 1990.

Output from plants running on fossil fuels

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