

DIGITAL AD

BTRC asks for spending details from telcos, ISPs

MAHMUDUL HASAN

The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) has directed mobile network operators and internet service providers (ISPs) in the country to provide information on their spending for digital advertisements on different social media platforms last year.

In a letter issued on Saturday, the BTRC said it noticed that network operators and ISPs are running numerous digital ads on social media platforms such as Google, WhatsApp, Yahoo, Amazon, YouTube, Facebook and Imo.

As such, they have been given 10 days to provide information on their expenditure in this regard between January and December of 2022.

Telecommunication value-added services operators, A2P SMS aggregators, vehicle tracking service operators and their associations were also asked to detail their spending on digital ads.

"It is a part of our study to learn how much revenue the government earns from those ads," said BTRC Chairman Shyam Sunder Sikder.

"Also, we will get an idea about their spending for digital ads," he told The Daily Star.

READ MORE ON B3



Syed M Tanvir, managing director of Chattogram-based Universal Jeans Ltd, receives the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Export Trophy (Gold), the top accolade handed to a manufacturer that meets all of the criteria of the National Export Trophy, from Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi at a ceremony at the InterContinental Dhaka yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Govt honours 71 exporters

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The government yesterday awarded the National Export Trophy to 71 companies in 28 categories in recognition of their extraordinary performance in export earnings in the fiscal year 2019-20.

The major categories are garment, jute, food processing, leather goods, ceramics, electronics, packaging, plastic goods, frozen foods and footwear.

Of the recipients, 28 companies received gold trophies, 25 silver and 17 bronze.

The remaining one, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Export Trophy (Gold), was awarded to Chattogram-based Universal Jeans Ltd for being competent in all criteria.

Tipu Munshi, commerce minister, Tapan Kanti Ghosh, senior commerce secretary, Md Jashim Uddin, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), and AHM Ahsan, vice chairman of the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB), handed over the trophies through a ceremony at InterContinental Dhaka.

Addressing on behalf of the winners, Syed M Tanvir, managing director of Universal Jeans Ltd, said it is possible to export \$100 billion worth of garment items in the next 10 years.

To do so, Bangladesh has to meet 20 per cent of the global demand for cotton-made apparel whereas currently it is 16 per cent, he said.



It will be possible to export goods worth \$300 billion by 2041 if some problems are solved now.

Md Jashim Uddin
President of FBCCI

Jatri raises \$5.25m

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Jatri, a transportation and mobility startup based in Bangladesh, has raised \$5.25 million in Series A funding round as it looks to expand its footprint to new cities.

A series A round is the name typically given to a company's first significant round of venture capital financing. A startup typically raises \$2 million to \$15 million through the process.

Jatri's round was led by SBK Tech, a Singapore-based venture capital fund, and was participated by notable global investors, including Alsa, Genting Ventures, DVC, and Doha Tech Angels.

In addition, existing investors such as Reflect Ventures, Brain-Too-Free Ventures, Tocumsef Capital, and Sabr Capital also made follow-on investments in the round, according to a press release.

"With the fresh fund, Jatri will expand its operation to new cities and augment its existing services."

Mass transit in Bangladesh has long been characterised by its unorganised, traditional,

READ MORE ON B3

Cosmetics makers irked as draft law framed without consultation

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Cosmetics and toiletries producers in Bangladesh have voiced their disappointment as the draft of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 2023 was prepared without holding consultation with stakeholders.

The cabinet approved the draft of the Act on February 6.

If the draft is passed by the parliament in its current form, cosmetics producers will have to take the licence from both the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI) and the Directorate General of Drug Administration (DGDA).

But this will make the business complex, said producers, adding that many other provisions of the Act would increase the cost of doing business as well.

"We want to do business within the regulatory framework. The government can frame a specific law for cosmetics after consultation with stakeholders," said Zaved Akhtar, managing director of Unilever Bangladesh Ltd.

Generally, drug and cosmetics producers are regulated by

separate regulators in most countries. But suddenly, the draft law indicates that cosmetics will be under two regulators, said Mehruz Zaman, managing director of Millat Chemical.

"The government approved the draft law but stakeholders from the cosmetics sector don't know that they have been included in the law."

A number of provisions of the draft law would hamper the expansion and investment of the industry and many producers may even go out of business, he said.

"Taking approvals from both regulators will increase the complexity for the industry."

Their observations came at a

seminar on "Proposed Drug and Cosmetics Act 2023: Bangladesh Perspective and Future Impact", organised by the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI).

Price approval, advertisement, licence and wholesale licence are not applicable for cosmetics globally. Cosmetics are regulated mostly under directives whereas drugs regulations are stringent, said Prof Md Nurnabi, chairman of the applied chemistry and chemical engineering department at the University of Dhaka.

"Cosmetics are different from drugs, so a completely separate regulatory framework and mechanism are required for

cosmetics and drugs," he said while presenting a paper.

Md Abdus Sattar, director-general of the BSTI, said there can be a separate law for the cosmetics segment.

He said the BSTI has fourth-generation technology in its laboratories across the country.

"We have a good reputation for providing standardisation service."

Some 80 per cent of the employees of the BSTI are technicians and most of them are efficient. "So, our service level is efficient and at par with the international level," Sattar said.

"But in order to raise the service quality to an acceptable level, an authority will need at least 10 years. The government can keep faith in the BSTI when it comes to regulating the cosmetics sector."

Unilever Bangladesh's Zaved Akhtar said fast-moving consumer goods are sold through 12 lakh shops across the country, so it would be a huge task to provide licences to them.

"On the other hand, FMCG is an innovative segment and a

READ MORE ON B3



The same can be possible if Bangladesh meets 12 per cent of the global demand for apparel made from man-made fibres instead of the existing 5 per cent, he said.

This is due to the fact that apparel made from man-made fibres fetch better prices than those made from cotton fibres, he said.

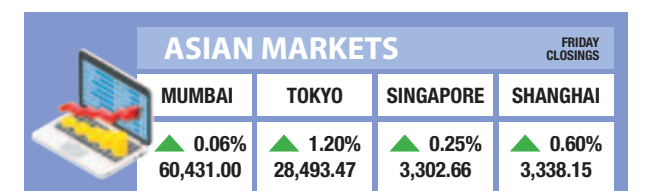
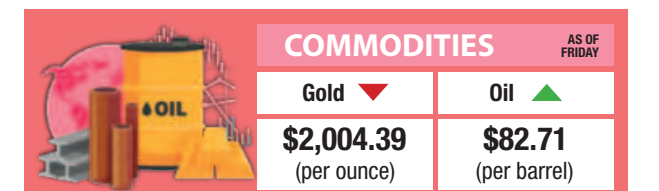
Meanwhile, local exporters will have to face the challenge of the erosion of preferential trade benefits for the country's United Nations status graduation from a least developed to a developing country in 2026, said Tanvir.

The government will have to ensure duty-free market access even in the post-least developed country (LDC) period signing free trade agreements (FTAs), he said.

He also suggested that the government simplify rules over payment of government-sponsored incentives on export receipts.

AK Azad, chairman and chief executive officer of Ha-Meem Group, the mother company of Rifat Garments Ltd, one of the award recipients, said he has been expanding his business despite some difficulties mainly to create employment.

READ MORE ON B3



Demand for air conditioners has gone up by 20 per cent to 25 per cent this year compared to that in the same season last year, according to market insiders, for the ongoing heatwave sweeping across the country. The photo was taken at a showroom on KDA Avenue in Khulna city yesterday.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

AC sales soar as mercury spikes

JAGARAN CHAKMA

Demand for air conditioners (ACs) has increased significantly as people rushed to retailers for respite from the ongoing heatwave sweeping across the country.

In one way, this also gave some relief to electronic home appliance retailers as sales had been dull.

According to Bangladesh Meteorological Department, Dhaka recorded a maximum temperature of 40.4 degrees Celsius on Saturday, the hottest day in 58 years.

The last time capital saw such temperatures was in 1965, when 42 degrees Celsius was recorded.

It felt even hotter for the low humidity in the air.

According to market insiders, the demand for ACs has increased by 20 per cent to 25 per cent this year compared to that in the same period of last year.

On the number of ACs being sold, reliable data is hard to come by.

Industry people estimate that at least 500,000 units meant for homes would be sold this year. It was around 400,000 last year.

On an average, Tk 5,000 crore worth of ACs are sold for residential and commercial purposes every year.

The months of April, May and June are the peak season for sales of ACs as

temperatures start to rise from March. Nearly 90 per cent of a year's sales come about during this period.

"During the last 10 days, the sales of ACs increased as a heatwave is sweeping across the country, including Dhaka," said Nurul Afser, deputy managing director of Electro Mart Limited (EML).

He said the sales this time increased by around 25 per cent year-on-year.

Industry people estimate that at least 500,000 units meant for homes would be sold this year. It was around 400,000 last year

He claimed that the EML held at least a 60 per cent market share when it came to locally manufactured ACs for providing "quality products at reasonable prices".

"We maintain 100 per cent compliance with our assurance of after-sales services to satisfy customers. Consumers accept GREE ACs due to their reasonable price and quality of service," he said.

According to Afser, every year they can manufacture over 300,000 units, both the ones with and without inverters.

READ MORE ON B3



Shoppers throng Zahur Hawkers Market in Chattogram city defying soaring temperatures in the afternoon to make purchases marking Eid-ul-Fitr. The crowds keep growing as day turns into night. The photo was taken a couple of days ago. PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

14 tanners lauded for improving health, safety standards

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Fourteen tanneries inside the Savar Tannery Industrial Estate have significantly improved their health and safety management systems, according to an assessment by SGS Bangladesh Limited, the Bangladesh Tanners Association (BTA) and Asia Foundation.

Eight of the companies were awarded crests for showing the most improvement while the rest were given certificates through an event held at The Daily Star Centre in Dhaka yesterday.

This assessment was conducted to improve the occupational health and safety standards at 15 of the 160 tanneries under the estate, according to the Asia Foundation.

The survey, styled "ISO 45001:2018 Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems", completed its one-year run-time in March earlier this year.

The goal of this assessment was to improve health and safety standards in the

workplace by eliminating or minimising risks in this regard.

The ISO 45001:2018 specifies requirements for health and safety management systems while also providing guidance on implement them, enabling organisations better prevent workplace injuries and illness.

The 14 tanners are: MS Salma Tannery, Anjuman Trading Corporation, MS RK Leather Complex, ABS Tannery, The Comilla Tannery, Samata Leather Complex, Marsons Tannery, Ayub Brothers Tannery, MS Saiful Islam Tannery, Aralat Leather Complex, MS Sadar Tannery, Khokon Tannery, Bengal Pelli Export Company and MS Salma Leather Corporation.

The eight companies that were specially recognised are: MS Salma Tannery, Anjuman Trading Corporation, MS RK Leather Complex, ABS Tannery, The Comilla Tannery, Samata Leather Complex, Marsons Tannery and Ayub Brothers Tannery.

Taherul Islam, programme manager

of the Asia Foundation, said they first checked for gaps in the health and safety management systems of these factories before working on how to improve them. "By the year's end, these companies showed good improvement, which is a pretty good thing," he added.

The goal of this assessment was to improve health and safety standards in the workplace by eliminating or minimising risks in this regard

Islam then said that he hopes these companies will continue maintaining higher health and safety standards in the years to come now that the project is over.

Sadat S Shibli, director of the Asia Foundation, said ensuring compliance with such measures is more important than ever these days.

"There is no way to improve the country's export earnings without

maintaining international standards in the leather sector," he added.

Islam went on to say that the leather sector is the higher export earner for Bangladesh after garments.

Rehena Akhter Ruma, head of projects and programmes at the BTA, said some of the tanneries surveyed did not know much about their compliance issues and ended up learning a lot through the project.

A lack of compliance in the country's leather sector has been preventing the expansion of its foothold in the international market even though the required raw materials are easily available.

As a result, exporters are getting 30 to 40 per cent lower prices for their products compared to those of competing nations.

Besides, fair prices cannot be ensured in local markets either as Bangladesh has not gained certification from the Leather Working Group, a global body for compliance and environmental certification in the leather and leather goods sector.

Navana Pharma posts 28% higher profit in Q3

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Navana Pharmaceuticals Limited's profit rose 28.25 per cent year-on-year to Tk 11.71 crore in the January-March quarter of the current financial year.

The pharmaceuticals manufacturer made a profit of Tk 9.13 crore in the third quarter of 2021-22.

Thus, the earnings per share were Tk 1.09 in January-March of FY23 against Tk 0.85 in the identical quarter of FY22, according to the unaudited financial statements.

The EPS increased due to a rise in gross profit and a decrease in corporate tax, said Navana Pharmaceuticals in a filing on the Dhaka Stock Exchange.

The profit rose to Tk 27.61 crore in the July-March of the current financial year, a rise of 7.55 per cent from Tk 25.67 crore recorded in the same nine-month period of FY22.

The EPS was Tk 2.57 in July-March of FY23. It was Tk 2.39 in the same period of FY22.

Shares of the company surged 9.94 per cent to Tk 73 on the DSE yesterday.

Peoples Insurance makes Tk 12cr profit in 2022

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Peoples Insurance Company Ltd made a Tk 12.06 crore profit in the financial year that ended on December 31.

This was up 1.17 per cent from the Tk 11.92 crore profit the insurer registered in 2021.

Peoples Insurance, thus, posted earnings per share of Tk 2.61 for 2022 against Tk 2.58 in 2021.

The net asset value per share rose to Tk 31.44 from Tk 30.08 while the net operating cash flow per share declined to Tk 3.49 from Tk 4.66 a year earlier.

The board of directors of Peoples Insurance has recommended a 10.50 per cent cash dividend for the last financial year.

Shares of the company closed unchanged at Tk 31.90 on the Dhaka Stock Exchange yesterday.

PRICES OF KEY ESSENTIALS IN DHAKA CITY			
	PRICE (APR 16, 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	2.08 ↑	5.38 ↑
Loose flour (kg)	Tk 55-Tk 60	-2.54 ↓	57.53 ↑
Lentil (kg)	Tk 95-Tk 100	0	0
Soybean (litre)	Tk 168-Tk 175	0.88 ↑	8.89 ↑
Potato (kg)	Tk 28-Tk 30	61.11 ↑	61.11 ↑
Onion (kg)	Tk 30-Tk 40	16.67 ↑	16.67 ↑
Egg (4 pcs)	Tk 42-Tk 45	2.35 ↑	29.85 ↑

SOURCE: TCB



Ahsan Khan Chowdhury, chairman and CEO of Pran-RFL Group, receives an award of the "National Export Trophy" on behalf of Pran Dairy Ltd from Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi at an award-giving ceremony held at the InterContinental hotel in Dhaka yesterday. PHOTO: PRAN-RFL GROUP

Pran-RFL wins 5 nat'l export trophies

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Five companies of Pran-RFL Group have won national export trophies for their outstanding contribution to exports for fiscal year 2019-20.

Of the trophies, Pran bagged three in the agro-processing sector. Pran Dairy Ltd, Pran Agro Ltd and Habiganj Agro Ltd obtained gold, silver and bronze trophies respectively, Pran-RFL Group said in a press release.

Durable Plastic Ltd and Banga Plastic International Ltd of RFL Group claimed silver and bronze trophies respectively in the plastic goods sector.

Ahsan Khan Chowdhury, chairman and CEO of Pran-RFL Group, received the gold trophy on behalf of Pran Dairy from Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi at an award-giving ceremony held at the InterContinental hotel in Dhaka yesterday.



Inspector General of Police, Bangladesh Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun, chairman of Community Bank Bangladesh, presided over the bank's annual general meeting at the police headquarters in Dhaka yesterday. On the same day, the bank held its first extra-ordinary general meeting, where the shareholders approved renaming the bank as Community Bank Bangladesh PLC, subject to the regulatory approval. Md Kamrul Ahsan, additional inspector general (AIG-admin) of Bangladesh Police, M Khurshid Hossain, director general of Rapid Action Battalion, Md Monirul Islam, AIG (special branch) of Bangladesh Police, SM Ruhul Amin, AIG (ATU), Md Mazharul Islam, AIG (L&AA), Md Atiqul Islam, AIG (crime & operations), Hasan UI Haider, AIG (APBn), Abu Hasan Muhammad Tarique, AIG (finance), Md Shahabuddin Khan, AIG (highway police), Md Mahabubor Rahman, AIG (industrial police), Habibur Rahman, AIG (tourist police), and Masihul Huq Chowdhury, managing director of the bank, were present. PHOTO: COMMUNITY BANK

Oilseed cultivation spreading

FROM PAGE B4

However, edible oil prices recently spiked in the international market due to dry weather in Argentina and Brazil, two of the biggest exporting countries, making the key cooking ingredient costlier for local consumers.

Meanwhile, the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war has raised concerns of potential disruptions to the supply chain, leading to stockpiling at home and abroad.

With this backdrop, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has called upon the country to achieve self-sufficiency.

"So, we are working in Tangail under the direction of the agriculture minister to increase the cultivation of healthy oil type sunflowers and mustard," Hasan said.

Md Babul Mia, assistant

agricultural officer of Amtali upazila in Barguna, said each acre of land yields up to eight maunds (one maund equals roughly 37 kilogrammes) of sunflower.

Around 4,000 grams of edible oil can be extracted from each kilogramme of the crop, which is relatively cheap to cultivate, he added.

Mohammad Nazrul Islam, deputy director of the Patuakhali DAE, said farmers are becoming more interested in growing oilseeds thanks to increased demand in the local markets.

"Even various processing companies are contacting us. We connect them with farmers so that they can easily sell their produce and make profit," he added.

Islam went on to say that the government has taken up a roughly Tk 3,000 crore project to increase

oilseed cultivation in coastal areas.

Under the project, sunflower seeding machines, crushing machines and irrigation equipment will be provided so that farmers are more motivated to produce oilseeds.

Work on the project is expected to start this year, he said.

Shamima Akter, agriculture officer of Gopalpur upazila in Tangail, said they are providing the necessary support to farmers for increasing oilseed cultivation.

Mushfiqur Rahman, a farmer in Garabari village of the adjacent Bhuapur upazila, said he cultivated sunflowers on 10 decimals of land this year.

"Seeing my good yields, other farmers in the area have expressed interest in growing the crop," he added.



AKM Ekramul Hossain Swapan, executive director of Bangladesh Thalassaemia Hospital, and Samia Chowdhury, chief executive officer of MTB Foundation, exchanged signed documents of an agreement for a project titled "Providing Healthcare Support to Thalassaemia Patients of Bangladesh Thalassaemia Hospital" at Mutual Trust Bank's head office in Gulshan recently. Syed Mahabubur Rahman, managing director of the bank, Chowdhury Akhtar Asif, additional managing director, and Rais Uddin Ahmad, deputy managing director, and MA Matin, president of Bangladesh Thalassaemia Samity, and Md Mujibur Rahman, deputy general manager of the hospital, were present. PHOTO: MUTUAL TRUST BANK



Smartphone penetration in Bangladesh is over 50 per cent among mobile phone users, according to the telecom regulator, which collects data from the operators. PHOTO: STAR/FILE

4G smartphone production down 61% in Q1

Import costs rise for taka's depreciation

MAHMUDUL HASAN

Production of 4G smartphones has plummeted by over 61 per cent year-on-year in the first quarter of this year, as import costs have increased for the taka's depreciation against the dollar.

Also, a shortage of the greenback has made it difficult to open letters of credit, while high inflation has worsened the purchasing capacity of many smartphone aficionados.

During the January to March period, local manufacturers made 14.23 lakh 4G smartphones, according to the latest data of Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC).

Around 36.39 lakh were made in the same period a year ago.

The smartphone market in Bangladesh witnessed a double-digit decline for the first time in seven years in 2022, according to the latest Market Monitor report by Counterpoint Research.

Meanwhile the feature phone market had grown slightly.

In its report, the global market research company said Bangladesh's smartphone shipments declined 23 per cent year-on-year in 2022.

The bad days are not going away anytime soon, which should ring an alarm for the manufacturers, said industry

operators.

About 3.91 lakh 4G handsets were manufactured in January and 4.62 lakh in February.

However, the figures rebounded slightly in March, with plants producing 5.7 lakh units of 4G smartphones.

The industry is hurt mainly due to high inflation and the unprecedented dollar price hike.

On top of that, the National Board of Revenue slapped a 5 per cent value-added tax at each of the sales stages, exacerbating the woes of the manufacturers and consumers.

Besides, consumers have tightened their belts amid skyrocketing price hikes of most essentials.

"If we compare the sales of devices from Q1 to Q4 of 2022, the decline is 30 per cent in the final quarter of the year," said Rizwanul Haque, vice president of the Mobile Phone Industry Owners' Association of Bangladesh.

"The costly dollar price and difficulty in opening letters of credit are also hampering our growth," he added.

He said the manufacturers had a 10-year plan when making investments and stalling of natural growth causes concern for entrepreneurs.

In Bangladesh, local handset production has taken impressive strides

in recent years, aided by the government's huge tax benefits unveiled in fiscal year 2017-18.

Since then, 15 plants have been set up, creating jobs for around 17,000 people. Another four plants are in the pipeline.

During the January to March period, local manufacturers made 14.23 lakh 4G smartphones, according to the latest data of Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission

But now they are battling the drop in sales in the local market.

According to experts, the penetration of 4G technology, which enables access to faster internet, in a developing country can have a significant impact on its economic growth and social development.

In not only enables faster access to information and online services but also facilitates innovation and entrepreneurship.

"Because of low 4G, a lot of services like video and other digital services don't

have enough users," said AKM Fahim Mashroor, chief executive officer of bdjobs.com.

"For services like online learning and different types of freelancing jobs and e-commerce, 4G compatible handsets that enable using high speed internet is a must," he added.

Only 30.9 per cent of individuals own a smartphone and 39 per cent use the internet in Bangladesh, showed a preliminary report of "Survey on ICT Use and Access by Individuals and Households 2022" published by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics in late December last year.

It depicted a grim scenario when it comes to digital inclusion, contradicting the claims of government officials, who often paint a rosy picture of the country's digital advancement and connectivity.

Government officials often say there are more than 13 crore internet users in Bangladesh.

However, smartphone penetration is over 50 per cent among mobile phone users, according to the BTRC, which collects data from the mobile operators.

"There is no benefit if you produce cutting-edge technology devices but people can't afford it," said Telecom Minister Mustafa Jabbar recently.

"So, now we have to ensure devices at affordable prices," he added.

DR Congo offers contract farming to Bangladeshis

STAR BUSINESS DESK

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), a country in central Africa, has enabled a lot of opportunities for Bangladeshi businesses and foundations in contract farming.

Tenday Luaba, representative of the ministry of foreign affairs of the DRC, conveyed the information in a letter handed over to Ziauddin Adil and Nazir Alam, honorary consuls of the DRC in Bangladesh, said a press release.

The ministry of agriculture of Bangladesh in a related letter stated that Bangladeshi businesses that are interested in contract farming in the DRC will receive a variety of support.

These include assistance with land selection, hiring Bangladeshi labourers, transferring technical services and agricultural supplies, managing the distribution network, and receiving various incentives.

Besides, organic production of agricultural products will create demand for export to Bangladesh and European markets.

Moreover, Bangladeshi foundations will be able to offer microcredit services there in farming and agriculture sectors.

Those who will send processed food from Bangladesh to the DRC can also undertake manufacturing and marketing of these products there if they want.

The consuls posted in Bangladesh will offer guidance and support to sales in schools, hospitals, nursing homes, government organisations and others in the DRC.

The DRC's consulate office in Bangladesh believes that this new project would strengthen the socio-economic ties between Bangladesh and the DRC.

IMF sees high rates, oil price worries in Middle East

REUTERS, Washington

Banks in the Middle East and Central Asia have very limited exposure to last month's banking turmoil in the United States and Europe, but financial pressures are adding to strains caused by high interest rates, volatile oil prices and years of double-digit inflation, a top IMF official said on Saturday.

Jihad Azour, director of the International Monetary Fund's Middle East and Central Asia department, said the banking sector strains came on top of tighter monetary policies that raised rates and reduced accessibility to finance.

Azour said there was an increasing gulf between countries that had good credit and were able to access the markets, including Morocco, Jordan and oil exporters, and others who were struggling.

"We are worried because the matrix of risks keeps growing high interest rates, volatility in oil prices, geopolitical tensions, and it's the third year in the row where you have double-digit inflation," he said.

Stability in the financial sector was not the primary concern, he said, trumped for now by worries about high debt levels, the risk of social unrest and the ability to maintain tight policies because of pressures on the social front.



Aziz Arman, middle, chief executive officer of Jatri, is seen with fellow co-founders Zia Uddin and Khandoker Taswar Zahin. PHOTO: JATRI

Jatri raises \$5.25m

FROM PAGE B1

and inefficient nature, with buses serving as the primary mode of transportation for most of the population.

Commuters regularly face challenges such as overcrowded buses, inconsistent fares, and premium charges by conductors, while bus operators and owners grapple with pilferage caused by a lack of visibility and cash book-based record-keeping.

Jatri is tackling the pain points faced by commuters, operators, and regulators in the public transportation sector with its full-stack services that aim to digitalise and modernise the industry.

The tech-enabled service offers operators and bus owners a centralised dashboard that syncs with every vehicle on the network, digitalises data, streamlines operations, and allows for better allocation of resources.

Commuters benefit from standardised prices, transparency, convenience, and a broader range of transportation options.

In the press release, Sonia Bashir Kabir, managing partner of SBK Tech and lead investor, said, "We are committed to investing in startups like Jatri that directly impact the lives

of ordinary citizens."

"Mass mobility is a multibillion market opportunity that was inefficient, opaque, and largely unbankable. This is an industry ripe for digital transformation and will lead to a cashless, Smart Bangladesh."

"Jatri's unique value proposition has efficiently demonstrated that technology can solve problems of the masses at scale."

In November last year, the Dhaka Road Transport Owners' Association announced Jatri as the exclusive e-ticketing partner, starting with 5,650 buses operating in the capital city.

Since then, the company has processed more than 100 million ticket sales.

Jatri's digital platform, which replaces manual and error-prone paper-based reporting, has resulted in an increase in daily sales by 15-25 per cent per bus, previously lost to theft and leakage.

"Jatri's large and growing network of bus partners is proof of the dire need for digital transformation of Bangladesh's mass transportation industry," said Aziz Arman, CEO of Jatri.

"This fresh round of funding will allow us to continue to build momentum to create the 2.0 version of the mass public transport system."

Govt honours 71 exporters

FROM PAGE B1

Every year some 30 lakh fresh graduates exit universities. Of them, some 1.20 lakh can manage jobs in government, semi-government or autonomous bodies, he said.

Some 10 lakh young people go abroad every year and most of the rest enter the private sector, he said.

Azad also said with the downward economic trend globally, some garment factories were receiving 10 per cent to 20 per cent lesser work orders nowadays compared to the same period in the previous year for the Russia-Ukraine war.

Apart from the LDC graduation challenges, local apparel exporters will have to ensure that 25 per cent of their products are made from recycled yarn and reduce water consumption in washing and dyeing by 40 per cent after 2026, he said.

But in Bangladesh the current policy

does not support import of discarded old clothing for making the recycled yarn and local suppliers cannot provide adequate supplies of such clothes, he added.

Although the rate of energy prices has been doubled, local industrialists are still suffering from a shortage of gas in industries, said Azad.

It will be possible to export goods worth \$300 billion by 2041 if some problems are solved now, said Jashim Uddin.

For example, not being provided adequate gas pressure in supply lines even after paying double the price is turning suicidal for industries, he said.

He suggested that the government arrange an inter-ministerial meeting soon to resolve the challenges in the utility services to industries.

The FBCCI chief also demanded that the government reduce source tax to 0.50 per cent from the existing 1 per

cent as the current rate has an impact on 20 per cent of the profitability.

A lot of industries are shifting from China and Bangladesh needs to utilise this opportunity, he said.

"It is the duty of all to increase the export earnings of the country. We are honoured...our next target is to increase the volume of export. Bangladesh is a country of huge potentials," said Ahsan Khan Chowdhury, chairman and CEO, Pran-RFL Group.

"There are huge opportunities in different sectors. The sectors will help us to increase the country's export. As a business conglomerate, Pran-RFL has around 145,000 employees. We want to move the country forward increasing our export earnings," he said.

Ghosh assured that the government would ensure preferential market access to local exporters even if it means signing the FTAs with major trading partners.

BTRC asks

FROM PAGE B1

Md Nasim Parvez, director general (system and services) of the BTRC, said payments for these digital ads are made using foreign currency.

"So, we want to look into the operators' spending patterns by comparing last year's spending with that of previous ones," he added.

The BTRC even provided a sample spreadsheet, indicating how operators can list their payment details for digital advertising, including the amount paid, what currency was used and how the money was transferred.

In addition, there is space for mentioning the description or type of advertisement that aired.

Global tech giants operating in Bangladesh came under the tax net last fiscal year as the government made it mandatory for them to submit returns even if they lack a physical presence in the country.

In 2021, Google, Facebook, Amazon, and Microsoft had received value-added tax registration, enabling the National Board of Revenue to ensure compliance in this regard.

AC sales soar

FROM PAGE B1

Thanks to technological upgrades and their low power consumption, the ACs with inverters account for 65 per cent of sales whereas it was the opposite just three years ago, he said.

He believes in the future non-inverter ACs would be forced out of the market as demand for those was going down continuously.

"The sales of air conditioners have increased significantly since mid-March due to a spike in temperatures," said Ritesh Ranjan, head of business at Transcom Digital.

However, demand for other electronic home appliances was low owing to high inflation, he said.

Transcom Digital retails ACs of different brands such as Samsung, Hitachi, Whirlpool, Transtec, and Daikin.

According to Ranjan, 1.5-tonne inverter ACs account for around 60 per cent of the demand for residential use.

Like Transcom, the sales of ACs of VISION Electronics, a concern of Pran-RFL Group, have increased in line with the arrival of the heatwave.

Kamruzzaman Kamal, director

for marketing at Pran-RFL Group, said the market has been rapidly increasing in terms of the growth of ACs demand in the recent years.

As the temperature is increasing, the air conditioning market is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of around 25 per cent between 2023 and 2027, he said.

"We are expecting 30 per cent higher sales this year compared to the previous year. Currently we are offering a 10 per cent discount on online purchases," he informed.

According to him, VISION Electronics has a yearly capacity to produce some 50,000 units of ACs.

Md Manzurul Karim, general manager of Esquire Electronics, the sole distributor of products of Japanese electronic brands General and Sharp, said the sales of ACs have been impressive as temperatures have increased rapidly.

The sales of ACs will slightly make up for the dull market of other home appliances, he said.

He said the technology used in ACs has improved a lot and consumption of power by inverter ACs has gone down by almost 60 per cent.

Cosmetics makers

FROM PAGE B1

huge number of products hit the markets every month. So, securing approval from both the BSTI and the DGDA will be a difficult task as well."

FBCCI President Md Jashim Uddin said both drugs and cosmetics sectors need separate laws since their manufacturing process is different.

"If they are treated under the same law, cosmetics producers will face difficulties. During the formulation of the draft law, the government should have consulted at least with the FBCCI."

Health and Family Welfare Minister Zahid Maleque said the government sometimes receives allegations that cosmetics products contain harmful ingredients.

Good companies are not producing cosmetics that have harmful ingredients. Rather, bad companies make inferior products, he said.

"So, the government has felt the necessity to take some initiatives and the cosmetics sector is being brought under rules and regulations. Some problems may arise while formulating laws and they will be resolved through talks. There is nothing to be worried about."

Maleque said he would ask the parliamentary standing committee to consult with stakeholders in its next meeting before submitting the draft law to the parliament.

The BSTI has 14 technical committees for the cosmetics segment and it follows five guidelines that are accepted in many countries, said Md Arafat Hossain Sarker, assistant director of the BSTI.

Because of the draft law, cosmetics producers will come under two regulators for the same tasks, he added.

Naser Ezaz Bijoy, president of the Foreign Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and MA Momen, vice-president of the FBCCI, also spoke.

According to research organisations LightCastle Partners and Allied Market Research, an estimated \$1.23 billion worth of skincare and personal care products were sold in Bangladesh in 2020 and the amount is expected to hit \$2.12 billion by 2027.

Bangladesh imports cosmetics worth around Tk 10,000 crore every year, said importers.

Bata Shoe returns to profit

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bata Shoe Company (Bangladesh) Limited clocked a Tk 41.01 crore profit for the year that ended on December 31.

It suffered a loss of Tk 6.85 crore in 2021.

Thus, the multinational company reported earnings per share of Tk 29.98 for 2022. It was a negative Tk 5.01 in 2021.

The net asset value per share slipped to Tk 252.16 from Tk 252.33 while the net operating cash flow per share rose to Tk 107.84 from Tk 91.70 during the period.

Bata Shoe's board of directors has recommended a 105 per cent final cash dividend for 2022, taking the total cash dividend for the year to 365 per cent.



Sunflowers are a popular oilseed crop among farmers for providing good yields at comparatively lower costs. Considering the growing international prices of edible oil, the government aims to ramp up domestic production in a bid to make Bangladesh self-sufficient in this regard.

PHOTO: SOHRAB HOSSAIN

Oilseed cultivation spreading quickly

Farmers look to profit from growing edible oil prices

SOHRAB HOSSAIN and MIRZA SHAKIL

Farmers across two coastal districts of Bangladesh, namely Patuakhali and Barguna, as well as Tangail are increasingly growing oilseed crops in a bid to profit from the ever-higher prices of edible oil.

Some 5,035 hectares of land in Barguna were used to grow oilseeds this year, up 65 per cent from 3,043 hectares in 2022, according to the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE).

Of the total acreage, sunflowers were grown on around 4,000 hectares while peanuts took up 890 hectares, mustard 168 hectares, sesame 46 hectares and soybean 3 hectares, said Badrul Alam, additional deputy director of the Barguna DAE.

In Patuakhali, oilseeds were planted on 7,811 hectares this year, up 19 per cent from

“Many farmers are becoming interested in oilseed cultivation to take advantage of the demand for edible oil.”

Md Nazrul Islam
Deputy director of Patuakhali DAE

6,891 hectares the year before.

Of the land brought under cultivation, 6,252 hectares were for ground nuts, 1,078 hectares for sunflowers, 352 hectares for mustard, 116 hectares for sesame and 13.50 hectares for soybean, said Md Nazrul Islam, deputy director of the Patuakhali DAE.

“Many farmers are becoming interested in

oilseed cultivation to take advantage of the demand for edible oil,” he added.

Elsewhere in Tangail, oilseed cultivation has grown by about 6 per cent year-on-year to 242 hectares.

Local farmers mainly planted sunflowers across 12 upazilas of the district under government incentive programme and got good yields at a low cost thanks to favourable weather.

Mahmudul Hasan, additional deputy director of the Tangail DAE, said they provided farmers with sunflower seeds and fertiliser for free under the incentive programme.

“Following a yield of 435 tonnes last year, we expect to harvest 442 tonnes of sunflower seeds this year,” he added.

At present, about 90 per cent of the edible oil consumed in Bangladesh has to be imported as local production is scant at best.

READ MORE ON B2

ICB Islamic Bank suffers losses in Jan-Mar quarter

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

ICB Islamic Bank Limited posted a Tk 10.64 crore loss in the first quarter of 2023.

The loss stood at Tk 8.64 crore in the identical quarter of 2022.

Thus, the bank reported earnings per share of Tk 0.16 negative for the January-March quarter against Tk 0.13, also in negative, for the same three-month period of 2022, according to the un-audited financial statements.

The net operating cash flow per share improved to Tk 0.27 in January-March against a negative Tk 0.29 in the same quarter a year ago.



Employees work at an assembly line of a Wuling Motors factory in Qingdao, China's eastern Shandong province, on March 1. China's economy grew by just 3 per cent last year, one of its weakest performances in decades. PHOTO: AFP

Malaysia plans to set up 2nd 5G network next year

REUTERS

Malaysia plans to introduce a second 5G network from next year, four sources told Reuters, in the latest policy shake-up aimed at dismantling monopolies and promoting competition by Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's six-month-old administration.

Malaysia's 5G roll-out by state agency Digital Nasional Berhad (DNB) has seen repeated delays since its launch in December 2021 because of industry concerns over pricing and transparency, as well as worries that a single government-run network would result in a nationalised monopoly.

Since taking office in November last year, Anwar has ordered reviews of billions of dollars in government projects as he looks to strengthen governance and minimise wasteful spending.

China's economy set to rebound

Hopes grow as zero-Covid era fades

AFP, Beijing

China is expected to announce an economic rebound on Tuesday, when Beijing releases its first quarterly GDP figures since abolishing growth-sapping Covid restrictions late last year.

The Asian giant's virus containment policy — an unrelenting regime of strict quarantines, mass testing and travel curbs — strongly constrained normal economic activity before it was abruptly ditched in December.

The disclosures on Tuesday will give the first snapshot since 2019 of a Chinese economy unencumbered by public health restrictions, with analysts polled by AFP expecting an average of 3.8 per cent year-on-year growth in the period from January through March.

But the world's number two economy remains beset by a series of other crises, from a debt-laden property sector to flagging consumer confidence, global inflation and the threat of recession elsewhere.

“The recovery is real, but still in its early stage,” said Larry Hu, chief China economist at the investment bank Macquarie.

Any rebound “will be gradual, largely due to the weak confidence”

of consumers, which in turn makes companies “reluctant” to hire more staff, he said.

China's economy grew by just three percent in the whole of last year, one of its weakest performances in decades.

It posted a 4.8 per cent expansion in the first quarter of 2022, though growth pulled back to just 2.9 per cent in the final three months of the year.

A creeping crisis in the property sector — which together with construction accounts for around a quarter of China's GDP — continues to “pose challenges to economic growth”, said Rabobank analyst Teeuw Mevissen.

Real estate was a key driver of China's recovery from the initial wave of the pandemic in 2020, when Beijing managed to stop the coronavirus from spreading widely.

But weak demand has since plagued a sector already afflicted by falling home prices and crippling debts that have left some developers struggling to survive.

The situation appears to have eased slightly in recent weeks as official support helped prices stabilise in March, according to figures released on Saturday by the National Bureau of Statistics.

FACTORY FAIR PRICE SHOP CHANGING LIVES



Shilpi Akter, a determined RMG worker at Multifabs Limited, has been through a lot in her life. She migrated from her village to Dhaka with her husband with a view of a better livelihood. She lives with her husband, daughter, younger sister and an elderly father.

Shilpi has been working at Multifabs Limited for the last two years. Shilpi has to contribute to her family significantly, especially she has to take care of her elderly sick father. Her father regularly needs medical support and is on medication. Things were not so pleasant for Shilpi lately. In this recent economic crisis and rising inflation, Shilpi faced difficulties in meeting her family's daily needs. Then she came to know about the Multifabs Limited's fair shop. Even today, when the inflation is at an all-time high, the Fair Shop offers necessary groceries at a 15% discount throughout the

year and a 25% discount during the holy month of Ramadan and Eid ul Fitr. Shilpi does her monthly groceries shopping from fair shop regularly. That helps her to save a significant amount that she can use

factories in Bangladesh, has been providing discounted monthly groceries through their Fair Shop for more than six years. The Fair Shop offers necessary groceries at a 15%



for other purposes for her family. “I am incredibly grateful for the support I received from the Multifabs, especially from the fair shop. It has made a huge difference in my life and the lives of my family. With this assistance, we are now able to access essential resources that were previously out of reach” said Shilpi Akter. Multifabs Limited, one of the leading RMG

discount throughout the year and a 25% discount during the holy month of Ramadan and Eid ul Fitr.

This initiative is a part of Multifabs Limited's commitment to providing its employees with necessary benefits and improving their quality of life. By offering discounted groceries through the Fair Shop, the company is not only making it

easier for employees to purchase essential items, but also ensuring that they can save money and improve their financial well-being.

The Fair Shop is located on the premises of Multifabs Limited and is open to all employees. It offers a range of necessary groceries, including rice, lentils, oil, sugar, and other household items. With the 15% discount available throughout the year and the 25% discount during



Ramadan and Eid ul Fitr, employees can save a significant amount of money on their monthly groceries.

For the year of 2022, Multifabs Limited has provided subsidies of BDT 62,90,060 and till the March of 2023 the company has provided subsidies of BDT 3285308. Total beneficiaries are 6000 employees.

Multifabs Limited is committed to providing a supportive and fulfilling work environment for its employees. The company believes that happy and healthy employees are the foundation of a successful business, and it strives to provide necessary benefits to support their well being.

Pubali Bank posts Tk 564cr profit in 2022

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Pubali Bank Limited posted a Tk 564.53 crore profit in the financial year that ended on December 31, up nearly 30 per cent from a year earlier.

The private commercial bank made a profit of Tk 434.97 crore in 2021.

Thus, Pubali Bank reported consolidated earnings per share of Tk 5.49 for 2022, an increase from Tk 4.23 in the previous financial year.

The consolidated net asset value per share improved to Tk 41.96 from Tk 38.98 while the consolidated net operating cash flow per share slipped to negative territory at Tk 3.36 from a positive Tk 3.28.

The board of directors of the company has recommended a 12.50 per cent cash dividend for 2022, according to a filing on the Dhaka Stock Exchange. Shares of Pubali Bank fell 1.13 per cent to Tk 26.30 on the premier bourse of Bangladesh yesterday.

National Tea gets nod to raise paid-up capital

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

National Tea Company Ltd has received the regulatory nod to raise its paid-up capital by Tk 23.4 crore.

Currently, the paid-up capital of the company is Tk 6.6 crore. Paid-up capital is the amount of money a company has received from shareholders in exchange for shares of stock.

The Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission has accorded the approval to raise the paid-up capital through the issuance of 2.34 crore ordinary shares of Tk 10 each, said National Tea in a filing on the Dhaka Stock Exchange.

The share would be offered at an issue price of Tk 119.53 each, including a premium of Tk 109.53.

The purpose of the issuance of placement shares is to support the business growth (field and factory development), finance the working capital need, and repay bank loans, the filing said.

The ratio of placement share, the record date for entitlement of placement share, and the period of the subscription will be notified soon, it said.

Shares of National Tea rose 7.50 per cent to Tk 645.10 on the DSE yesterday.