

ME conflict leading to fuel price concerns

India says

REUTERS

Many emerging market countries are concerned about the impact on fuel prices due to the recent crisis in the Middle East, India's finance minister said on Friday, detailing the discussions held by G20 finance leaders in Marrakech.

Referring to the Israel-Hamas conflict, Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said, "The recent crisis in the Middle East, and concerns about fuel back again, are worries which many countries do hold, and they have expressed as well."

The G20 finance leaders are meeting on the sidelines of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank annual meeting in Marrakech. India holds the rotating presidency of the G20, which expires in November.



People have turned to using their credit cards to purchase commodities at departmental stores in the country, with such purchases accounting for 49.99 percent of all transactions through credit cards in Bangladesh in August.

PHOTO: STAR/FILE

Use of credit cards in departmental stores on the rise

People borrowing more thru cards amid higher inflation

AKANDA MUHAMMAD JAHID

The use of credit cards in Bangladesh is increasing sharply, bolstered by growing spending on daily essentials at departmental stores amid higher inflation.

Spending through credit cards jumped to Tk 2,437 crore in August, up 4.09 percent from the previous month's Tk 2,341 crore, according to data from the Bangladesh Bank.

Cardholders spent Tk 1,218 crore — accounting for 49.99 percent of total transactions made through credit cards — to purchase commodities at departmental stores in the country, the central bank data showed.

In July, 50.11 percent or Tk 1,173 crore of total transactions were done through credit cards in departmental stores.

The increase in credit card spending in departmental stores and retail outlets indicates that consumers are spending more on daily necessities in the face of rising inflation.

In August, food inflation soared 278 basis points to 12.54 percent — the highest since October 2011, when it stood at 12.82 percent, according to data from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

As credit cards offer instant

cash facilities and interest-free repayment for up to 45 days, cardholders turn to them during times of crisis, such as when costs of food and non-food items are rising as well as to ensure other necessities, multiple credit card users said.

"Due to the high price of commodities, my salary often runs out before the end of the month. In such situations, if my family needed money for an emergency, I used to borrow money from my friends. But after taking the credit card, there is no need to borrow from anyone," said Md Al Amin, a jobholder.

Spending through credit cards jumped to Tk 2,437 crore in August, up 4.09 percent from the previous month's Tk 2,341 crore

Salauddin Ahamed, another credit card user, added: "I mostly use the credit card to purchase daily essentials from departmental stores since I get 45 days interest-free repayment facilities."

Md Mahiul Islam, head of retail banking at Brac Bank, said banks conduct campaigns



about the benefits of credit cards and ensure promotional offers for credit cardholders so they are more interested to purchase products from departmental stores through cards.

This is one of the reasons for the increase in credit card transactions in departmental stores, he said.

Another reason is that cardholders who are struggling to cope with higher prices may opt to buy daily necessities by availing the interest-free repayment facilities offered by their credit cards, he added.

In an analysis of the expenditure behaviour of credit cardholders, it was found that 12.34 percent of credit cards

were used to avail retail outlets services while 9.16 was spent on utilities and 5.95 percent on medicine. Meanwhile, 4.51 percent of transactions were on clothing, 3.44 percent on fund transfers, 3.37 percent on transportation, 2.18 percent on business services and 1.09 percent on professional and government services.

In terms of cross-border transactions, cardholders also mostly used their cards in departmental stores in August.

About 26.73 percent of transactions outside the country took place in departmental stores. The second highest, which accounted for 15.92 percent of total transactions, were in retail

outlets.

In the type-wise breakdown of credit card transactions in the country, about 72.66 percent of transactions were through Visa cards. About 17.08 percent of transactions were through MasterCard while about 10.03 percent of transactions were through Amex cards.

Bangladesh Bank data also showed that cardholders used their credit cards mostly in India, with about 17.62 percent of cross-border transactions taking place in the neighbouring country.

Of the remaining cross-border transactions, 16.32 percent were in the USA, 9.51 percent in Thailand, 7.69 percent in the UK, 7.61 percent in Singapore, 6.71 percent in Canada, 6.49 percent in the UAE, 5.40 percent in Malaysia, 2.89 percent in Saudi Arabia, 2.81 percent in the Netherlands, 2.73 percent in Ireland, 2.19 percent in Australia and 12.02 percent in other countries.

Meanwhile, foreign nationals in Bangladesh spent Tk 218 crore through credit cards in August, with US citizens accounting for 25.34 percent of transactions. British nationals made 12.39 percent of transactions while Indians were responsible for 10.92 percent and Singapore citizens for 3.74 percent.

Build your own brand

MAMUN RASHID

When we think of branding, it is often that a company, business, or institution comes into our mind. However, another especially important aspect that we often do not talk much about is personal branding. Just think of Lionel Messi. Do you only know him as a player in the Argentine football team? I do not think so. For too many, he is regarded as the best footballer in the world. He is a brand all by himself.

Let us look at some other examples. I am sure many of you have heard someone or the other say 'I want to be the next Ratan Tata or Steve Jobs.' These individuals have managed to build a personal brand so strong that they have become synonymous with intelligence, innovation, and success. They have built a legacy that goes well beyond just their corporate identity, and it also encompasses who they are and what kind of leaders/teachers/people they are.

Now, let's think about Bill Gates. Innovator, philanthropist, genius, extremely rich; these are some words that we associate with his name. But how many of us have thought 'divorced'? Some people may debate that his personal brand has taken a hit after his divorce. Others may not really care about Bill Gates' personal life and place more focus on his business and philanthropic efforts.

Similarly in the case of Barack Obama, many people might say that his highly visible image of being a happily married family-oriented person is what played a great role behind him gaining the favour of millions of people. Others may place greater emphasis on his political views and actions.

Personal branding is an intentional and strategic practice in which you define and express your own value proposition. Whether we realize it or not, our actions, words, and even online presence shape our personal brand.

Your professional and personal success, to a great extent depends on persuading others to recognise your value and your personal brand directly contributes to your legacy and your reputation. You can transform yourself from being indistinguishable to unforgettable. Your brand can control how people perceive you and building your own narrative is important to reconcile any difference between what you want people to think and what they actually believe.

The first step in building your personal brand is defining your end goal. Understand what difference you want to make and what values you want to embody. Think about what makes you unique, as it's the uniqueness that endures.

You also need to communicate your brand consistently. Building a personal brand is like creating a reputation. Be consistent in your actions, communication, and values as authenticity shines through consistency.

Building a personal brand requires you to network with purpose, and I believe that your network is directly connected to your branding net worth. Connect, collaborate and learn from others and offer value in return. I am a big believer in building bilateral relationships. Your personal interactions with the people around you have a significant impact on how people perceive you, how people talk about you in your absence and how they remember you. The people around you should feel empowered, and their confidence should be nurtured from coexisting with you.

Remember, building your brand is a journey, not a destination. Use tools like LinkedIn to help you get your brand message across and create brand recognition. You should learn to capture the attention of your audience in a way that will engage them and make them think of you in your absence. However, you must also make sure not to contribute to information overload. Your personal brand is your legacy. It's what people will remember you for long after you're gone.

The writer is an economic analyst.



India's forex reserves drop to 5-month low

REUTERS, Mumbai

India's foreign exchange reserves declined for a fifth straight week and stood at \$584.74 billion as of October 6, the lowest in more than five months, data from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) showed on Friday.

That was a decrease of \$2.17 billion from the previous week. Reserves had fallen by a total of nearly \$12 billion in the prior four weeks.

The central bank intervenes in the spot and forwards markets to prevent runaway moves in the rupee.

The RBI's stranglehold on the rupee via its persistent forex market intervention has kept volatility in the Indian unit low over the last few sessions.

Apart from the central bank move, changes in foreign currency assets — expressed in dollar terms — also include the effects of appreciation or depreciation of other currencies held in the RBI's reserves.

Foreign exchange reserves include India's Reserve Tranche position in the International Monetary Fund.

For the week the forex reserves data pertains, the rupee had fallen 0.1 percent against the dollar and traded in the 83.1650-83.2650 range.

The rupee ended at 83.2625 on Friday, down for a third consecutive week.

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Asian economies under cosh: IMF

China's weak recovery, property crisis may spill over onto the region

REUTERS, Marrakech, Morocco

China's weak recovery and the risk of a more protracted property crisis could further dent Asia's economic prospects, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said on Friday, warning of a cloudier outlook for the once fast-growing region.

China's post-lockdown economic boost lost momentum earlier than expected, the IMF said.

Meanwhile the strength of the US economy has offered less support to Asia than in the past because it has been focused on the service sector, which does not fuel demand for exports, the Fund said in a blog on the region's outlook.

"In the near term, the sharp adjustment in China's heavily indebted property sector and the resulting slowdown in economic activity will likely spill over to the region, particularly to commodity exporters with close trade links to China," it said.

"On the downside, a more protracted real estate crisis and limited policy response in China would deepen the regional slowdown."

In its World Economic Outlook released during the annual IMF meetings in Marrakech this week, the

IMF cut next year's growth estimate for Asia to 4.2 percent from 4.4 percent projected in April, and down from 4.6 percent forecast for this year.

"Any time China slows, it has a bearing on the global economy, notably ...Asia," Krishna Srinivasan, director of the IMF's Asia and Pacific Department,

told a briefing in Marrakech on Friday.

While Asia is seeing inflation moderate sooner than other parts of the world, central banks there should not rush into cutting interest rates as core inflation remains "a bit sticky", Srinivasan said.

"Central banks should stay the course," he said, adding the conflict in the Middle East could be among factors that could push up inflation.

On Japan, the IMF blog said tweaks that its central bank made to its bond yield control policy led to broad market "spillovers" due to the larger presence of Japanese investors in the global bond market.

Such repercussions "could become larger in the event of a more substantial normalization of monetary policy."

The Bank of Japan (BOJ) had maintained a cap on the country's 10-year bond yield at around zero, to support a fragile economy.

As central banks across the globe tightened monetary policy to combat soaring inflation and rising global commodity prices pushed up domestic inflation, the BOJ last year began to progressively ease the yield cap, in moves widely seen by markets as steps toward phasing out its massive stimulus.



A worker walks past a housing complex under construction by Chinese property developer Evergrande in Wuhan. Sharp adjustment in China's heavily indebted property sector and the resulting slowdown in economic activity will likely spill over to the region, the IMF said.

PHOTO: AFP