

Govt launches food systems dashboard

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The government yesterday launched the Bangladesh Food Systems Dashboard, a repository enriched with accurate information of all food-related indicators, in order to ensure robust and data-driven management of food.

The objective of the dashboard is to digitise all food systems data so that policymakers can make decisions using those data to ensure food and nutrition security, Food Secretary Ismiel Hossain said while inaugurating the dashboard.

The Food Planning and Monitoring Unit of the food ministry, the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) worked together for the development of the dashboard, the food ministry said in a press release.

GAIN supported the process in partnership with the Columbia Climate

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School, and Food and Agriculture Organisation in collaboration with the Prime Minister's Office, planning and agriculture ministries, International Fund for Agricultural Development, other development partners and academia.

The food secretary also said this will be helpful to ensure availability and accessibility of safe and nutritious food for all Bangladeshis.

Data is critical in making decisions for policy and different elements of food systems, said Rudaba Khondker, country director of GAIN in Bangladesh.

The food systems dashboard is an efficient tool for demonstrating the progress of Bangladesh towards sustainable, equitable and resilient food systems transformation, she added.

The dashboard has the potential to generate positive change in the food systems landscape and advance Bangladesh's national pathway for food systems transformation as well as the sustainable development goals by enabling data-driven decision-making, as per the press release.



The harmful radiation emanating from mobile phone towers in Bangladesh is considerably lower than the standard levels set by international bodies, found BTRC surveys last year. The photo was taken from Barishal city on Saturday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

BTRC to purchase equipment to measure mobile tower radiation

MAHMUDUL HASAN

The telecom regulator will spend Tk 12 crore to purchase equipment for measuring the levels of radiation emanating from mobile phone towers as it seeks to bolster its capacity to carry out such activities nationwide.

As such, Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) has already approved an open tender (international) to this end, according to an official document.

The equipment will measure the towers' electromagnetic field (EMF), a type of non-ionising electromagnetic radiation that does not have enough energy to damage DNA and cannot directly cause cancer.

The EMF carries wireless communication signals for connectivity.

The move follows a previous directive of the High Court requiring the BTRC to examine the possible harmful effects of the EMF on the human body and nature. After that, the BTRC purchased two sets of EMF radiation measurement equipment in November.

But although the existing equipment sets are still effective and being used to conduct surveys, they are inadequate for examining all the towers across the country as per the HC's order, the document shows.

So, the commission will now purchase four sets of broadband EMF radiation measurement systems with the required number of shaped probes to cover a frequency range of 5MHz to 50GHz.

Additionally, the BTRC will procure two sets of broadband EMF area monitoring devices (basic unit) with necessary flat probes to cover a frequency range of 5MHz to 40GHz.

One central controlling system for the area monitoring system, with software, will also be purchased.

The harmful radiation emanating from

mobile phone towers in Bangladesh is considerably lower than the safety levels set by international bodies, found BTRC surveys throughout last year.

Besides, there is no harm to the environment, said the surveys carried out in nine cities.

The regulator found that the radiation is 20 to 30 times lower than the international standard across 99 spots in Dhaka, Mymensingh, Jamalpur, Sylhet, Moulvibazar, Rangpur, Gaibandha, Khulna and Jashore.

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For instance, 0.01453 milliwatts per square meter (mW/m^2) was recorded when measurements were taken at the Khulna district administration office from August 22 to August 25.

The permissible threshold for exposure to EMF is $2.106 mW/m^2$, according to guidelines set by the International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation Protection, International Telecommunication Union and World Health Organization.

Therefore, the current level of radiation poses no threat to either public health or the environment, the BTRC said in its survey reports released at different times.

Cellular phones communicate with nearby cell towers mainly through radiofrequency waves, a form of energy in the electromagnetic spectrum between FM radio waves and microwaves, according to the American Cancer Society.

Like FM radio waves, microwaves, visible light and heat, they are forms of non-ionizing radiation.

This means they do not directly damage DNA, which is how stronger (ionizing) types of radiation such as x-rays, gamma rays, and ultraviolet rays are thought to be able to cause cancer, it said in its website.

One of the few known effects of radio waves on the human body is a very small rise in temperature of up to 0.2 degrees Celsius. But research is continuing to make sure that there are no potential long-term effects.

Earlier, Satya Prasad Majumder, vice-chancellor of the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, told The Daily Star that the degree of radiation a tower emits would not cause any problem.

"You can't read without light and similarly too much light would harm the eye. A minimum level of radiation is given off the antenna and is designed taking all safety concerns into account so that people can talk on phones without facing any problem from that," he said.

"People who are concerned about it don't know anything about it. They got panicked when the world introduced 1G or 2G and are still in panic but the world is poised to introduce 6G. If they were right, technology would not have advanced," Majumder added.

According to telecom industry people, baseless fears surrounding the health risks associated with radio waves emitted by phone masts have emerged as a significant obstacle to the advancement of superior telecom services, hindering the efforts of telecom and tower service providers.

For example, building owners, particularly in Dhaka and other metropolitan areas, are reluctant to lease out their rooftops to telecom service providers in fear of radiation.

Chinese firms win bids to explore Iraq oil and gas fields

REUTERS, Baghdad

Chinese companies won bids to explore five Iraqi oil and gas fields on Saturday in a licensing round for hydrocarbon exploration that was primarily aimed at ramping up gas production for domestic use.

An Iraqi Kurdish company also took two of the 29 projects up for grabs in the three-day licensing round across central, southern and western Iraq, which for the first time includes an offshore exploration block in the country's Arab Gulf waters.

Iraq aims to lure billions of dollars of investments to develop its oil and gas sector as it looks to ramp up local petrochemicals production and end imports of gas from neighbouring Iran that are currently key to producing power.

More than 20 companies pre-qualified for the licensing round, including European, Chinese, Arab and Iraqi groups. There were notably no US oil majors involved, even after Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia met with representatives of US oil firms during an official visit to the United States last month.

Five bids were won on Saturday by Chinese companies. Zhongman Petroleum and Natural Gas Group took the northern extension of the Eastern Baghdad field, in Baghdad, and the Middle Euphrates field that straddles the southern Najaf and Karbala provinces, the oil ministry said.

China's United Energy Group Ltd won a bid to develop the Al Faw field in southern Basra, while ZhenHua won a bid to develop Iraq's Qurnain field in the Iraqi Saudi border region and Geo-Jade won a bid to develop Iraq's Zubatia field in the Wasit.

REUTERS, Washington

US consumer sentiment sagged to a six-month low in May as households worried about the higher cost of living and unemployment, but economists cautioned against drawing conclusions on the implications for the economic outlook.

The larger than expected drop in sentiment reported by the University of Michigan on Friday was across all age, income and education groups as well as political party affiliation.

"Consumer confidence is volatile on a month-to-month basis and has not been an important driver of consumer spending in recent years," said Michael Pearce, deputy chief US economist at Oxford Economics.

The resilience of consumer spending is dependent on the strong state of household balance sheets and the robust labour market. Only if the latter begins to falter would we expect to see more meaningful signs of economic weakness emerge."

The University of Michigan's preliminary reading on the overall index of consumer sentiment came in at 67.4 this month, the lowest level since last November, compared to a final reading

of 77.2 in April. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast a preliminary reading of 76.0.

They estimated that the University of Michigan's ongoing transition to web-

based interviews from telephone surveys had knocked about 2 points off the headline index this month.

Economic growth slowed in the first

quarter and employers hired the fewest number of workers in six months in April, recent data showed. University of Michigan Surveys of Consumers Director Joanne Hsu said consumers "expressed worries that inflation, unemployment and interest rates may all be moving in an unfavourable direction in the year ahead."

With gasoline prices pretty much stable in recent weeks and stock market prices mostly trending higher, economists were at a loss to explain the rest of the drop in sentiment.

"It is hard to explain given that ... there is little evidence of any major downturn in the labour market. Households could also still be reacting to the earlier sell-off in equities around mid-April," said Paul Ashworth, chief North America economist at Capital Economics.

"It could also be due to other non-economic factors like the upcoming election, the brief Israel-Iran conflict or the spread of pro-Palestinian protests across college campuses. It might simply be noise rather than signal."

The mood was downbeat among Democrats, independents and Republicans.

Stocks on Wall Street were mixed. The dollar rose against a basket of currencies. US Treasury prices fell.



People shop in the food section of a retail store in Rosemead, California. Consumer confidence in the US is volatile on a month-to-month basis and has not been an important driver of consumer spending in recent years, said an economist.

Gold prices rise again

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Jewellers have hiked gold prices by Tk 1,831 per bhorti (11.664 grammes) to Tk 117,281.

One gramme of 22-carat gold will be priced at Tk 10,055, effective from yesterday as per a statement of Bangladesh Jewellers Samity (Bajus). The committee on pricing and price monitoring of Bajus took the decision to raise the prices in a meeting yesterday, citing an increase in pure gold prices in the local market.

Gold prices have been rising for more than a year influenced by hikes in the international market and volatility in its supply in the domestic market.

On March 19, Bajus cut gold prices to Tk 111,158 from Tk 112,907 per bhorti.

Although Bangladeshi does not import a substantial quantity of gold, its prices are almost linked with international trends.

Figures are hard to come by and the annual demand for gold in Bangladesh is believed to be anywhere from 20 tonnes to 40 tonnes.

SBAC Bank's profit up 41% in first quarter

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SBAC Bank PLC's profit surged 41 percent year-on-year to Tk 19.78 crore in the first quarter of 2024.

The profit was Tk 14.01 crore in the identical period of 2023.

The commercial private lender's consolidated earnings per share (EPS) were Tk 0.24 in January-March, up from Tk 0.17 a year prior, according to a filing on the Dhaka Stock Exchange.

SBAC attributed the increase in the EPS to an increase in net interest income, whereas its provision requirement declined.

While the profit went up, the bank's net operating cash flow per share dived to Tk 1.72 in negative from Tk 0.43 in the negative, according to the unaudited financial statements.

The bank said the NOCFPS decreased due to rising outflows of loans, deposits and a decrease in net proceedings from trading securities.

SBAC Bank began its journey in 2013 and currently provides both conventional and Shariah-compliant banking services. It was listed on the DSE in 2021.

The bank has a network of 89 branches, 31 sub-branches, 63 ATMs, 10 Islamic banking windows, and 33 agent outlets. Shares of the bank were unchanged at Tk 7.7 yesterday.

Renata ships first drug registered in Australia

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Renata has shipped a consignment of Levonorgestrel 1.5 mg, which is the first product registered by the Bangladeshi pharmaceutical company in Australia.

The distribution and commercialisation of Levonorgestrel, known by its brand name of Novella 1, will be done in Australia through Renata's partner Nova Pharmaceuticals Australasia Pty Ltd, according to a statement issued by Renata PLC yesterday.

Levonorgestrel is approved by World Health Organization, amongst other regulatory authority bodies such as the US FDA and Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA), as a first line oral emergency contraceptive pill.

Being a potent product, it is manufactured and supplied from Renata's TGA approved potent product facility, the statement read.