

DCCI REVIEW



Stimulus & SURVIVAL of CMSMEs



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The stimulus and survival of CMSMEs

Cottage, micro, small and medium enterprises, or CMSMEs in short, which account for about 99 percent of all businesses in Bangladesh, have had a hard time since COVID-19 pandemic broke out as the year 2020 began. Export, import and manufacturing slumped as the outbreak of COVID-19, first detected in Wuhan, China in December 2019, soon turned into a pandemic. The detection of first cases in Bangladesh was announced on March 8, 2020. CMSME sales is reported to have declined by about two-thirds towards the end of 2020, with a likelihood of a further decline this year.

The proposition entails a hugely disastrous impact on the economy, both at the national and the individual level, in view of almost 99 per cent of about eight million businesses in Bangladesh, as a 2017 report says, having fallen into distress, failing to pay wages to workers and struggling to somehow sustain the impact of economic slowdown caused by the COVID-19 outbreak.

A sorry plight of CMSMEs like this has not only harmed a huge number of people individually as they together account for 35.5 to 50 percent of the total employment which, in turn, accounts for 80 per cent of the industrial employment, their contribution to the gross domestic product, which is said to be a quarter of it, industrial output estimated to be 90 percent, manufacturing value estimated to be 45 percent and export contribution said to be 75 per cent have also been greatly harmed.

It will also have other serious consequences on Bangladesh's national strategic plans to further development such as Vision 2021, initiated in 2008 through the Perspective Plan 2010–2021, and Vision 2041, which seeks to eliminate extreme poverty, reach the upper middle-income country status by 2030 and the high-income country status around 2041, Bangladesh's graduation from the least developed country to the status of a developing country, which is set to officially take place in 2026 at the request of the government although Bangladesh has met all the criteria early this year and its journey towards Sustainable Development Goals 2030.

The government announced stimulus packages in different categories for industries to recover from the economic crisis caused by the outbreak of the disease. There have been a package of Tk 300 billion for large-scale industries and services sector, a package of Tk 200 billion for cottage, micro, small and medium enterprises, a package of more than Tk 100 billion for export-oriented industries, a package of Tk 50 billion for farmers and a package of Tk 30 billion for people of low-income groups.

What remains to be a matter of concern is that there has been slow or poor disbursement to CMSMEs compared in percentage with disbursement to other segments. Only 60 per cent of the SMCME package has been disbursed until January 2021. Further damage to CMSMEs could be forthcoming if the government did not sort out issues of the poor or slow disbursement. Many CMSMEs are reportedly unable to meet bank requirements and about four-fifths of them are reported to be unwilling to go for a share of the package because of the lengthy process.

A survey of the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry earlier found that 59 percent of the CMSMEs found the disbursement process complex and 18 percent of them are unbanked while many say that the amount is insufficient. The government should take several steps to attend to the problems. While the government should ask the banks to expedite the fund disbursement and ease their access to the stimulus funds by easing the process in the short run, it should also try to bring all unbanked CMSME units into the banking channel, allow such units to pay value-added tax, other taxes and utility bills in installments and arrange for alternative financing sources other than banks in the long run.

The government will also need to ease and make less costly trade licensing and licence renewal so that it becomes easy for the government to bring all CMSMEs under a framework to make their access to financing easy. The government should also create a database of all CMSME units that run in the informal sector for a better management **r**

‘Guidelines needed in budget for economic recovery’

Stakeholders in DCCI pre-budget discussion urge balance between revenue target and facilitating businesses

The Dhaka Chamber of Commerce & Industry (DCCI) in association with Samakal and Channel 24 organized a pre-budget discussion for the 2021-22 financial year on April 10 virtually to outline the needs in the key macroeconomic avenues and roadmap of trade, industrial, investment recovery as well as turnaround of private sector from pandemic adversities. Dr. Mashiur Rahman, Adviser to the Prime Minister on Economic Affairs, and Chairperson, BRAC, Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman joined the discussion as special guests. DCCI President Rizwan Rahman chaired and moderated the discussion.

The discussion was divided into four sessions — Financial Sector, Industry and Trade, Taxation and VAT, and Infrastructure (energy, logistics and health).

DCCI President Rizwan Rahman in his welcome address said that the government would surely consider a business-friendly, revenue-friendly and industry-friendly budget this year. And the budget will have a clear indication for the economic recovery from the pandemic crisis. He also hoped that the next budget will have especial attention on taxation and VAT policy, infrastructure, industry and trade as well as the financial sector. He also said that if the government with the help of the private sector worked hand in hand, Bangladesh would be able to recover economically.

Dr. Mashiur Rahman, Adviser to the Prime Minister on Economic Affairs, said that the growth should be inclusive. Economy needs to be widened and all the resources should be utilized. For the government,

revenue target achievement without hampering economic activities is a priority. He also suggested that stakeholders should arrange budget discussions all the year round. Regarding tax regime, he said that it should be business-friendly. “We should focus on increased revenue collection for development as well as needs to facilitate and incentivize businesses. However, if revenue target is not achieved, development work will be halted down,” he added.

He also said that quality and safe investment will reduce default loans. A stable tax and duty regime for 7-10 years is a good move but all investors may not get this benefits as investments do not come at the same time. “Our tax-GDP ratio is comparatively low because our tax elasticity is low because of rebates at different levels. But, a social acceptance of tax, VAT,



DCCI in association with Samakal and Channel 24 organized a pre-budget discussion FY2021-22 on April 10. Dr. Mashiur Rahman, Adviser to the Prime Minister on Economic Affairs, and Chairperson, BRAC, Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman joined the event as special guests. DCCI President Rizwan Rahman chaired and moderated the discussion.

supplementary duty and customs duty rate need to be in place keeping to global standards.” He also said that frequent changes in tax rate may hamper business growth and he, therefore, suggested a gradual increase in tax mentioning within a minimum time frame.

Chairperson of BRAC Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman said that the second wave COVID-19 is going on and it may have a huge implication on the economy. The next budget should also have a plan of recovery as it was last year. Moreover, social protection should be a priority in the next budget, he added. Revenue collection and achieving the target are essential for a budget at the same time the government must consider incentives for the pandemic-hit businesses, specially CMSMEs.

The disbursement of loan under the stimulus package for CMSMEs should be faster and in that case, mobile financial services can be engaged for services delivery. For the growth trajectory, domestic market needs to be incentivized beside the export sector as the domestic economy will be a growth driver, Zillur Rahman said. “We need a transition from cheap labour economy to skilled labour economy and a game changing policy review needs to be famed,” he added. “We have to focus on the health sector and we need more skilled nurse. Urban poor are impacted heavily by the pandemic so budget needs an allocation as well as urban primary health care needs to be enhanced.”

Stakeholders from various sectors took part in the discussion. Senior Partner, KPMG, Adeeb Hossain Khan addressed the issue of withholding tax and high corporate tax rate. He also urged a result-oriented tax appeal system from the tribunal. Regarding the VAT law, he suggested

an import rebate system. Member, Customs Policy and ICT, NBR Syed Golam Kibria said that the customs revenue target is about Tk 1 lakh core. The budget will have a priority for the agriculture sector. “We will also work on the trade facilitation agreement compliance, and tariff rationalization,” he said. The NBR will examine the fiscal incentive on hybrid car import, he said. Duty cut on the import of fridges used for super shops will be considered.

Member, VAT, NBR Masud Sadik said, “Now, our online vat return increased. We are focusing on the automation of VAT return. We had only 48,000 offline VAT returns and in future, offline VAT return system may be stopped as online system ensures more transparency. Smartphone producers in Bangladesh enjoy only 0–5 percent tax.” He also said that two organizations in Bangladesh are now producing dredgers. In the new VAT law, price declaration is not mandatory; however, “we need to widen the vat net,” he added.

Member, Tax Policy, Md. Alamgir Hossain said, “We are still facing COVID-19 pandemic. We all are fighting against it despite the growth. The government’s expenditure comes from revenue. At the same time, the government always tries to facilitate businessmen. We need to strengthen our capital market and the bond market. We have different tax rates; so, the overall tax rate is 32.5 percent is not true as a whole. We are trying to reduce tax rate by widening tax net. It is more important to balance between achieving revenue target and ensuring business friendly environment.”

CEO, IPDC, Mominul Islam urged a long-term bond market. Non-banking institutions are facing challenges now. He suggested reduction in corporate taxes to 30 percent for

NBFIs. Moreover, he suggested a 5-10-year term of duty structure for non-bank institutions. He also said, “We have to ensure smart devices for all for a cashless society.”

CEO, Standard Chartered Bangladesh, Naser Ezaz Bijoy strongly urged an easy access to finance for the SMEs. Incentives should be given for export diversification. He also urged a reduction in tax rate for NRB bond.

Rahel Ahmed, CEO, Nagad suggested the incentivization of mobile financial services. There should be a micro merchant policy in the next budget. “We have to increase smart phone penetration in the country.”

Asif Ibrahim, Chairman, Chattogram Stock Exchange Ltd. said that corporate tax for listed and non-listed companies need to be slashed. “We want to incentivize SMEs to come into the stock market as well as we want foreign companies to come in the stock market.”

Kazi Inam Ahmed, President, Bangladesh Supermarket Association, said, “We have 300 super shops but there are 1,500 super markets in Sri Lanka. We have to pay extra VAT of 5 percent which needs to be reviewed.” VAT rate needs to be made stable. For super shops, he claimed a duty cut while importing capital machineries. Md. Fazlul Haque, former president, BKMEA, said that there are a good number of leading green factories in Bangladesh.

ETP should be a must for any industry for environmental safety. But the government may consider duty-free access to the ETP machinery importers. Moreover green factories should get incentives. The budget should have a allocation for the creation of skilled work force. He also urged that the CMSMEs should get priority in terms of getting loan from the stimulus.

Md. Jashim Uddin, Vice Chairman, Bengal Group of Industries, said that the next budget should give incentives to the industry sector for employment generation. Moreover all the problems of tax, VAT, AIT, supplementary duty and customs duty need to be resolved. Besides, he urged the deduction of corporate tax for export-oriented industries. He also urged strengthening the backward linkage industry. For the safety of local industries he suggested anti-dumping and countervailing duty, if needed.

Dr. Md. Masudur Rahman, Chairman, SME Foundation, said that SME contribution to the economy is about 25 percent. Sixty-eight percent of the stimulus which is Tk. 13,600 crore has been disbursed to CMSMEs only. But all the SMEs did not get the benefits. SMEs create 80-85 percent employment. Because of the pandemic, wages for SME workers came down 10 percent. The light engineering sector is a promising sector that has a market of Tk. 70,000 core but corporate tax for accessories industries is 32.5 percent which needs to be reduced. Jute producers get incentives while exporting but

jute goods exporters do not get the same incentives, he said. He urged backward and forward linkage readiness.


Md. Faizur Rahman, CEO and MD, United Hospital Ltd. Said, "We have lack of confident in the health sector. "Our local expertise did well in the pandemic time but what we need is good infrastructure. We need macro level planning in the health sector and consider it to be a priority sector like IT or RMG sector. We need 2.5 lakh doctors and 5 lakh nurses. Public-private partnership should be incentivized in the health sector," he added. "We should have a vaccine manufacturer of our own." He recommended the creation of a fund to implement mega health projects. He underscored the importance of backward linkage industry for the health sector and tax rebate.

ASM Mainuddin Monem, President, Private Economic Zones Association of Bangladesh, said that infrastructure development is going on and it will take time. It is a long-time investment. When all projects will be finished. people will get the benefits. For the economic zones, "we need off-site

infrastructure like power, energy, gas, road connectivity including all utility services. Twenty-one districts will be connected by the Padma bridge," he added.

BUET Professor and Energy expert Dr. Mohammad Tamim said that energy linkage is needed for 100 economic zones. For a rapid growth, renewable energy cannot do it alone. Price predictability is a must for businessmen, he said. He also urged outlining a future demand forecasting. He suggested consideration about tax and VAT on LNG price in the next budget.

Abul Kasem Khan, Chairperson, BUILD, said, "If we can create employment generation, additional tax rebate can be offered." He suggested looking into the matter of reducing effective tax rate that is sometimes 45-50 percent.

Acting Editor, Daily Samakal, Mustafiz Shafi in his concluding remarks said that newspaper industry has to pay 37.5 percent corporate tax. The industry also pays 5 percent in importing newspaper. He wanted a duty cut and reduction in corporate tax 

Better ranking needs reforms in judicial system: Salman F Rahman

DCCI holds webinar on 'Country Competitiveness of Bangladesh: Key Reforms in Doing Business'

The Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry organized a webinar, "Country Competitiveness of Bangladesh: Key Reforms in Doing Business", on April 3. Private Industry and Investment Adviser to the Prime Minister Salman Fazlur Rahman, MP joined the webinar as Chief Guest while Secretary, Law and Justice Division, Md. Golam Sarwar joined as Special Guest.

In his welcome remark, the DCCI President Rizwan Rahman said that commercial dispute resolution

usually takes four years in Bangladesh. To improve the litigation system, various countries made reforms in the civil procedure or enforcement rules, expanding court automation, electronic payment, automatic assignment of cases to judges, introducing specialized commercial court and expanding ADR framework, he added.

He said that the Global Competitiveness Index 2019 ranked Bangladesh in the 105th position and the it also highlighted competitiveness

deficit in LDCs. He said that the policy-makers concerned are to take necessary initiatives in association with the private sector to improve the country's competitiveness. The DCCI president mentioned that commercial disputes can be resolved through mediation if encouraged by the regulators.

Moreover, to overcome the transition of economic graduation and to achieve the rank of Bangladesh within 100 positions in the Doing Business Index, the improvement of



DCCI organized a webinar titled “Country Competitiveness of Bangladesh: Key Reforms in Doing Business” on April 3. Private Industry and Investment Adviser to the Prime Minister Salman Fazlur Rahman, MP joined the webinar as the Chief Guest while Secretary, Law and Justice Division, Md. Golam Sarwar joined as Special Guest.

competitiveness is a pre-requisite, he added. Rizwan Rahman also said that an improved competitiveness of Bangladesh will support investment growth, export diversification and employment growth.

Private Industry and Investment Adviser to the Prime Minister, Salman Fazlur Rahman, MP, said, “We have to use one-stop services efficiently. Now, 45 services are offered through the one-stop services.” He also said, “We should have policy reforms in the taxation system.”

For more revenue generation, he emphasized the widening of the tax net. He thanked the National Board of Revenue for adding 55,000 new tax payers to the tax net in 2020 and suggested that if the tax net was enlarged, tax rate could be slashed without putting pressure on the existing tax payers.

Regarding port efficiency, he said, “Our ports are now improved.” He said that the bay terminal, Matarbari deep sea port, the second international airport in Cox’s Bazar and railway connectivity with Cox’s Bazar will be operational in the near

future. Moreover, Inland Container Depot at Kamalapur will be shifted to Gazipur under a public-private partnership scheme, he said. Another bridge over the Meghna is also under consideration. The government plans to allocate a dedicated fund for research and development and skills development, said Salman F. Rahman. But the entire judicial system needs major reforms, he said. “We have to resolve disputes at faster pace. Still the mediation and arbitration system are not used widely in because of not having a standard civil litigation management timeframe.”

“Enforcing contract is necessary for our improvement in the Doing Business Index,” he said. He emphasized reducing communications gap between stakeholders on legal reforms and requested banks, business community and all concerned to circulate the news of any reforms done by the government immediately among relevant stakeholders.

The Secretary, Law and Justice Division, Md. Golam Sarwar said, “For improvement in the Doing Business Index, the government

has done various reforms already. We should rejuvenate the private sector with proper policy reforms in arbitration, contract enforcement and resolving insolvency related issues. Enforcing contracts and resolving insolvency are inter-dependent and to facilitate these, we need a pragmatic, judicial system. We are going to implement e-judiciary project for an effective and speedy disposal of cases including commercial disputes. Steps have been taken to amend the existing Insolvency Act 1997,” he said. For an effective settlement of commercial disputes, the government is planning to establish commercial courts in Dhaka and Chattogram.

Barrister Md. Sameer Sattar presented the keynote paper. He stressed on arbitration, mediation and litigation for a speedy dispute resolution. He also urged amending the Bankruptcy Act. He said that reducing the period of litigation related to commercial disputes between companies and the amendment to the Code of Civil Procedure are badly needed and the e-filing of cases, e-payment of court fees, pre-trial electronic case management and cost penalty can be introduced.

He also said that resolving insolvency or bankruptcy plays an integral role in the Ease of Doing Business Index and “we should emphasize enhancing creditors’ rights and improving the provisions dealing with administration of the debtor’s assets during insolvency proceedings and establish a regulatory framework for professional insolvency practitioners.”

General Manager of Foreign Exchange Investment Department, Bangladesh Bank, Jagannath Chandra Ghosh, Director of BIDA Jibon Krishna Saha Roy, Representative, JETRO Bangladesh Kazunori Yamada, Chairman and chief executive officer of PRAN-RFL Group Ahsan Khan Chowdhury and Managing Director of Oryx Bio-Tech Limited David Bo


also spoke on various pertinent issues and reforms on the occasion.

The discussants highlighted that the Bangladesh Bank had done various reforms like profit repatriation of foreign companies, foreign investors of sales proceeds of share up to Tk. 10 million, introduction of international factoring in Bangladesh. All this may positively impact the next review of the Doing Business Index of Bangladesh. Still there are rooms for improvement in the VAT system, port capacity, bond capacity and customs procedures and existing documentation process. They also urged reforms in laws, improving land border facilities, an efficient banking system.

Asif Ibrahim, Chairman, Chattogram Stock Exchange Ltd., said that the government and the private sector

should positively and collectively work to do better in the Doing Business Index. He said, “We need to arrange more public-private dialogues. Inter-ministerial collaboration is also important.”

Abul Kasem Khan, Chairman, BUILD, said that reforms should be fast-tracked. Bangladesh now has a window of opportunities to avail and “if we miss it, someone will grab it.” He also stressed on the use dynamic labour force as an added advantage. He urged tax and audit system related policy reforms. Saying that special economic zones could be a gamechanger, he urged a comprehensive SEZ policy.

N. K. A. Mobin, FCS, FCA, Senior Vice-President, DCCI gave the vote of thanks 

‘Supply of essential goods adequate for Ramadan’

DCCI holds webinar on law and order and goods prices for Ramadan

The Dhaka Chamber of Commerce & Industry organized a webinar on “Law and order situation and keeping price of essentials stable in the upcoming Ramadan” on April 11.

Minister for Home Affairs Asaduzzaman Khan, MP joined the webinar as chief guest. Mayor of the Dhaka South City Corporation Barrister Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh joined as special guest.

DCCI President Rizwan Rahman in his welcome remarks said that when the economy was recovering, the second wave of COVID-19 took place. The worldwide supply chain and production is hampered, which caused inflation. Price increase on the international market and volatility in supply chain have had impact on price increase in Bangladesh. Besides, the issue of international market, creating an artificial crisis by

hoarding, lack of market monitoring, extortion in the transportation sector and an increased transport cost are some of the reasons of price spiral, especially in Ramadan.

According to a study, poverty rate soars up to 42 percent due to pandemic which was 20.5 percent a year ago. In this scenario, if prices of essential commodities increased, people would suffer a lot in Ramadan. To keep prices under control, he suggested the release of essential goods from the port considering it as a priority. The law enforcement agencies should take stern action against extortionists in the transport sector.

He also recommended a strong market monitoring and bringing the ultra poor under social safety net. “We have adequate laws, but we need to execute the rules and laws.”

Minister for Home Affairs Asaduzzaman Khan, MP said that extortion is under control now although “we could not control it fully. But we are tough against it. In Ramadan, we always experience price spiral but in many countries, they lower their price at this time.” From April 14, “We may go for a hard lockdown to save lives,” he added. He urged all to maintain health advisories and instructions from the government. “We want the help of businessmen to keep prices stable not only in Ramadan but also all the year round. The law enforcement agencies are now largely capable.”

Mayor of the Dhaka South City Corporation Barrister Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh said, “We have to be united. The DSCC has already formed a committee of nine counsellors for market monitoring. We regularly conduct mobile courts. The DSCC is a business-friendly service



DCCI's Webinar on "Law & Order situation and keeping prices of essentials stable during Ramadan" held on April 11. Minister for Home Affairs, Asaduzzaman Khan, MP joined the webinar as the chief guest. Mayor of the Dhaka South City Corporation Barrister Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh also joined as special guest. DCCI President Rizwan Rahman chaired and moderated the webinar.

organization. We will work in the greater interest of city dwellers." He also stressed on awareness of COVID-19, saying "we sometimes see negligence in terms of adhering to health advisories. Coordinated efforts will help us to come out of this pandemic. Extortion is now very minimum and our fight against extortionists will continue."

In open discussion, S. M. Nazer Hossain, Vice-President, Consumer Association of Bangladesh, said, "We lack in market monitoring. There is also blame game between large and small businessmen." He urged a coordinated market monitoring system. He also urged the businessmen to accept a lower profit margin.

Golam Mowla, President, Edible Oil Importers' Association, said that the price of edible oil is high because of an increased price on the international market. Ministry of Commerce can fix the retail price to control price hike. "We need to

establish accountability. We also need safety during lockdown."

Enayet Ullah, President, Maulvi Bazar Byabasayi Samity, said that the supply of spices is fine and there is no chance for increase in prices of the items. "Last year, we incurred a great loss." He urged that the wholesale market should be allowed to remain open during lockdown.


Monzur Shariar, Deputy Director, Consumers Rights Department, said that there is no shortage of goods. "We are monitoring the market. If government can fix the price, we will ensure it. We are ready to stay on field in Ramadan."

Taher Zamil, Director Administration, BSTI, said that the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution would look into the quality of products. The one-stop service center of the BSTI is open. Our laboratory is also open and our surveillance team are active. Mobile courts will continue nationwide," he said. He

urged the businessmen not to fake products and make profit at a lower margin.

Major Rahat from RAB 3 said, "Our patrol team is in action." He urged that personal security should be ensured." He also recommended different timing for different markets.

Additional Commissioner, DMP Mizanur Rahman said, "In Ramadan, activities of the police increased manifold. We always give support to the mobile courts. Moreover, we need to support two city corporations for conducting mobile courts. During the outbreak, we may have some deployment but we never stop monitoring. Our money escort service will be open in Ramadan."

Kazi Inam Ahmed, President, Bangladesh Super Market Owners' Association, said, "We have 300 super shops in the country. We have enough stock of goods if we want to keep price stable. We will maintain social distancing in our super shops" 

'Policy support to foster local automobile industry'

DCCI holds webinar on automobile industry development and its present situation and future



DCCI Webinar titled “Automobile Industry Development: Present situation and Future Prospect” held on April 18. Industries Minister, Nurul Majid Mahmud Humayun, MP joined the webinar as the chief guest and Ambassador of Japan to Bangladesh Ito Naoki also participated as special guest. DCCI President Rizwan Rahman chaired and moderated the webinar.

Tariff policy should be taken in a way so that it can continue for at least 5 to 10 years to support the local vehicle assembling and manufacturing industry, said Rizwan Rahman, President of the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry in a webinar, “Automobile Industry Development: Present Situation and Future Prospects”, held on April 18. Industries Minister Nurul Majid Mahmud Humayun, MP joined the webinar as chief guest. The Ambassador of Japan to Bangladesh Ito Naoki also participated as special guest.

Rizwan Rahman, President, DCCI, said that Bangladesh’s automobile

sector is mainly dominated by imported reconditioned and new vehicles mostly from Japan, China, India, Europe and the United States. Considering the growing market demand, local and foreign investors are now showing interests in investing in the automobile industry.

Before the COVID-19 outbreak, the automobile market was growing by 15 percent to 20 percent with 12 percent growth in auto parts yearly.

Despite having potential, the absence of long-term policy and consistent tax structure, lack of domestic source of raw materials and relevant skilled human resources as

well as inadequate backward linkage limit the automobile manufacturing industry development. He also urged a long-term policy and a minimum 5-10 years sustaining tariff policy to support the assembling and manufacturing of vehicles.

He also put forth the demand for a separate automobile zone and allowing joint ventures for parts manufacturing to create local experts.

Industries Minister Nurul Majid Mahmud Humayun, MP said that the purchasing power is increasing day by day. He urged the private sector and foreign investors to set up spare parts and tools manufacturing unit in

the economic zones. The government is relentlessly working for the industrialization of the country. He also invited foreign direct investment in this sector.

Research and innovation in this sector are more important, he added. The minister also said that if needed, a comprehensive policy will be pursued, especially for this industry.

The Ambassador of Japan to Bangladesh Ito Naoki said that Bangladesh has a strong possibility to establish its own local automobile industry. "When we talk about export diversification, the automobile, light engineering and agriculture-based sector can play a vital role," he said.

Japanese Mitsubishi Motors showed interest in investing in Bangladesh in the CKD assembling plant, he informed. Mitsubishi and the Ministry of Industries came to an agreement in March to sign a memorandum of understanding to conduct joint feasibility study on the viability of investment.

It will create technology transfer and employment opportunities for Bangladesh, he added. He also urged policy support, tax benefits and incentives for the industry to grow.

Taskeen Ahmed, Deputy Managing Director, IFAD Group, presented the keynote paper. He highlighted that Bangladesh has done a tremendous progress in the infrastructure sector in recent past. He said that after the completion of the Padma Bridge, it will create high local demand for commercial vehicles.

Moreover, the BBIN Motor Vehicle Agreement would boost commercial

vehicle growth on regional trade dynamics shift, he added.

After the draft Automobile Policy 2018, the market size of motorcycle industry went to a new high. Total investment in this sector is Tk. 8000 crore contributing 0.5 percent to the gross domestic product now whereas, reconditioned car constitutes 50 percent of the total car market, 45 percent are used and only 5 percent are brand new. As per the draft automobile policy, the government plans to impose a ban on used car import to facilitate local industry.

He also said that the commercial vehicle market is of around \$1 billion and the growth will be sustained in future. In the light engineering sector, the market size of auto parts industry is of about Tk. 1400 crore with an annual growth rate of 12 percent, he said.

John D. Dunham, Economic and Indo-Pacific Affairs Unit Chief of the US Embassy, said that Bangladesh was able to show a tremendous growth especially in the last decade. Bangladesh is graduating into a developing country; the government, therefore, needs to tailor ideal policies like tax and investment policies. Bangladesh's prosperity is important to the United States, he said.

Md. Touhiduzzaman, Managing Director, Pragati Industries Ltd., said, "We want vehicles to be manufactured locally. The more assemblers come, the more the sector will boost. Also a focus needs to be given on spare parts manufacturing locally. Every assembler should have a research and development cell for improvement.


Matiur Rahman, Chairman and Managing Director, Uttara Group of Companies, said, "We are far behind in this sector. A long-term policy and incentives will foster this sector. This is a promising sector and has the opportunity to attract private sector investment.

Engineer Syed Imtiaz Ahmed, President, Signal Stream Inc, Canada, added that if Bangladesh can focus on manufacturing electronic control units in Bangladesh that are massively used by car and other vehicles manufacturers, Bangladesh can grab a portion of the world automobile industry very soon.

Abdul Haque, President, BARVIDA, said that the taxation policy should be industry-friendly and the industry needs a more consistent policy support. He also said that the market of three-wheelers is enlarged in Bangladesh. He also urged policy consistency and creating affordability of middle-class people.

Hayakawa Yuho, Chief Representative of JICA Bangladesh, said that an appropriate industrial policy is needed to protect and nurture the sector. The government may think of providing investment incentives for the private sector investors from home and abroad.

The automobile policy should be carefully formulated and implemented since the situation in this sector changes day by day, he said.

DCCI Senior Vice-President N. K. A. Mobin, FCS, FCA gave the vote of thanks 

'Investment in univ R&D should get tax exemptions'

DCCI holds webinar on "Industry and Academia Linkage: Role of Academia"

Due to technological advancement and industrial transformation, automation will ax many occupations with low-skilled, repetitive jobs but to remain competitive globally, "we

need to identify the skills gap and readiness," said Rizwan Rahman, President of the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry in a webinar on "Industry and Academia Linkage:

Role of Academia" held on April 24.

DCCI President Rizwan Rahman also said that Bangladesh is blessed with a demographic dividend of 44 million



DCCI President Rizwan Rahman addressing a Webinar of DCCI on "Industry and Academia Linkage: Role of Academia" on April 24. Vice Chancellors of BUET, AIUB, Pro-Vice Chancellor of BUP and Dean from ULAB also participated the Webinar among others as Panel Discussants.

working age people but graduates are struggling on the job market as "our conventional education system lacks skill-orientation in line with the industry demands." Consequently, foreigners dominate in the technical, managerial positions of our key industries and corporate firms leading to substantial remittance outflow from Bangladesh.

The Global Innovation Index 2020 ranked Bangladesh in the 116th position among 131 economies in innovation indicator while "India ranked in the 48th position and

Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka were ahead of us."

University-industry collaboration has emerged as a means to elevate the country competitiveness in terms of developing able human resources and innovation ecosystem. Universities can integrate industry-related contents in the undergraduate programs to orient on industrial state to make them ready for meeting industrial challenges. He also suggested updating the university curriculum incorporating the best practices followed in best Western and regional universities.

And for that, a collective initiative of the University Grants Commission and universities is needed. He also underscored the importance of research-based universities with a special focus to science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Professor Satya Prasad Majumder, Vice-Chancellor, BUET, M. Abul Kashem Mozumder, Ph.D., Pro-Vice Chancellor, Bangladesh University of Professionals, Dr. Carmen Z. Lamagna, Vice-Chancellor, American International University of Bangladesh and Professor Imran

Rahman, Special Advisor (Board of Trustees) and Dean, University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh joined as special discussants.

Professor Satya Prasad Majumder, Vice-Chancellor, BUET, said, "Industry-academia collaboration in the United States, Europe and South Korea can be the example for us. Moreover, we need to adopt short- and long-term planning." For technological innovation, research and necessary funding for it are a must, he said.

He called upon both the government and the private sector to come up with adequate funding for research and innovation. He also underscored the importance of redesigning the curriculum emphasizing technology, innovation, business incubation, startups and entrepreneurship development.

He also said that industry representation in the academic council and advisory board of

universities will minimize the gap between industry and academia.

M. Abul Kashem Mozumder, Ph.D., Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Bangladesh University of Professionals, said that students need training and facilities to do research. Universities mainly focus on teaching, research and entrepreneurship development. He emphasized the representation of industries in the university governing body, syndicate and senate.

For research and development, he said that there is a lack of necessary funding but to get adequate funding, the government should give tax benefits to this precious investment.

Dr. Carmen Z. Lamagna, Vice-Chancellor, American International University of Bangladesh, said that unemployment rate is 4.37 percent in Bangladesh. She said that the industry and academia gap constitutes the curriculum mismatch with the industry standard, lack of working environment for interns, academics

without industry exposure etc. She also urged research and advanced training.

The government can arrange for financial incentives, policy regulations, guidance and support and infrastructure development to foster industry-academia collaboration, she added.

Professor Imran Rahman, Special Advisor (Board of Trustees) and Dean, University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh, said that a linkage between industry and academia needs joint initiatives. Universities should modernize the teaching method. There are three aspects of education that are teaching, research and career placement.

But as a whole, "we need to redesign our curriculum in line with the demand of the 4th Industrial Revolution and market demand. The most important thing is research and innovation and for that, industry can join hands to inject necessary fund for research considering it as an investment, he added **r**

Business-friendly environment also needed

DCCI holds discussion with BIDA on reforms for ease of doing business

The Dhaka Chamber of Commerce & Industry organized a discussion on the current reforms in the ease of doing business in Bangladesh and preparedness for the future. Executive Chairman, BIDA, Md. Sirazul Islam joined as chief guest and Md. Billal Hossain, Additional Secretary (Executive Member 5), BIDA joined as special guest.

DCCI President Rizwan Rahman in his remarks said that after a successful economic graduation in 2026, "Bangladesh will lose most of the preferential trade facilities which may hurt our competitive export market."

In this context, the ease of doing business is essential to reduce the cost of business as global trade is getting more competitive." Given this circumstances, it is the high time to redress the bottlenecks, reduce time, process and cost in all criteria of the doing business and streamline the entire process towards lifting the indicators of the index. To make cross-border trade paperless with automated customs clearance for low-cost trade process, "we need to hasten the corrective action plan for implementing trade facilitation agreement."

He also said that time-bound reforms

and improvement roadmap will be essential in taking the economy to a new stature keeping to the vision of the government in the changing geo-economic order.

Md. Sirazul Islam, Executive Chairman, BIDA, said that the ease of doing business is a big thing. "We do not like to mainly focus on scoring. We are, rather, trying to create a business-friendly environment. Some of the reforms have already been done by the government that BIDA is coordinating." He, therefore, requested the private sector to go through the reforms and report based on facts. BIDA needs to be



DCCI President Rizwan Rahman seen speaking at a virtual discussion meeting on “Current reforms in the ease of doing business in Bangladesh and preparedness for the future” on April 27. Executive Chairman, BIDA, Md. Sirazul Islam and Md. Billal Hossain, Additional Secretary (Executive Member 5), BIDA joined the event as the chief guest and special guest respectively.

strengthened more. “If you have any observations on the reforms, you can tell us.

Company-to-company land transfer can now be done in seven days,” he said. There will be separate courts for dispute resolution, he added. Moreover, alternative dispute resolution is also important.

Md. Billal Hossain, Additional Secretary (Executive Member 5), BIDA, said that investors always want to know the ranking before any investment and in that context we need to improve in the ranking. He requested the private sector to response the survey considering the reforms already done. For that., he requested businesspeople to know of the reforms. At present 48 services are given through the one-stop services and requested the businessmen to avail the services.

Jibon Krishna Saha Roy, Director, BIDA, made a presentation highlighting the reforms already made by the government. He said that the private sector needs to be aware of the reforms for their preparedness to respond during the survey.

He said that information dissemination is important. He said that to improve in the ranking, some major reforms have been made. Moreover, the number of procedures and cost for various index have been reduced.

Asif Ibrahim, Chairman Chattogram Stock Exchange Ltd., Md. Rashedul Karim Munna, Director, DCCI, Data Magfur, former Director, DCCI, M. S. Siddiqui, Member, DCCI and Kabir Ahmed, President, Bangladesh Freight Forwarders Association took part in the open discussion.

They said that creating an effective business-friendly environment is more important than improving in the ease of doing business ranking. They suggested collaboration among the public sector entities concerned as well as public-private consultation. They also said that businesses should be well aware of all government circulars or notifications related to trade and commerce.

Still there is a scope for improvement in institutional and regulatory reforms, they said. BIDA should heed the concerns of foreign investors to get an idea of possible reforms needed, they added.

DCCI Senior Vice-President N. K. A. Mobin, FCS, FCA gave the vote of thanks. DCCI Vice-President Monowar Hossain and members of the Board of Director joined the virtual discussion **r**

WE MOURN



Mahbub-Uz-Zaman
Managing Director
Orient Food Co.



Md. Sirazuddin Malik
Managing Director
Capital Plastic & Rubber Industries



Deen Mohammad
Chairman
Phoenix Group

Rizwan Rahman
President

Members of the Board of Directors and all staff of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce & Industry (DCCI) are mourned with profound sorrow and express deep condolences at the sad demises of Mr. Mahbub-Uz-Zaman, Former Senior Vice President, Mr. Md. Sirazuddin Malik, Former Vice President and Mr. Deen Mohammad, former Director of DCCI whom we lost forever in the month of April, 2021. (Inna Lillahe Wa Inna Ilaihe Rajiun).

Mr. Mahbub-Uz-Zaman served the Chamber in 2001, Mr. Md. Sirazuddin Malik served in 1994, 2009-10 and Mr. Deen Mohammad served the Chamber in 1982-84. Their pre-eminent contributions to the Chamber will always be remembered and cherished.

May the Almighty Allah grant them eternal peace in Jannah. Ameen

Webinar on “Country Competitiveness of Bangladesh: Key Reforms in Doing Business”



Dhaka Chamber of Commerce & Industry (DCCI) organized a webinar on “Country Competitiveness of Bangladesh: Key Reforms in Doing Business” on Saturday, April 03, 2021. The objective of the webinar was to focus on the urgent need for a legal system overhaul for maintaining the country’s rank in the competitiveness index. Rizwan Rahman, President, DCCI chaired and moderated the webinar.

Private Investment & Industry Adviser to the Honourable Prime Minister, Salman Fazlur Rahman, MP joined the webinar as the Chief Guest while Secretary of Law and Justice Division Golam Sarwar participated as Special Guest. Barrister Sameer Sattar one of the prominent and dynamic legal professionals, senior lawyer of Bangladesh Supreme Court delivered the keynote paper.

Mr. Jagannath Chandra Ghosh, General Manager, Foreign Exchange Investment Department, Bangladesh Bank; Jibon Krishna Saha, Director, One Stop Service (OSS) and Regulatory Reforms of BIDA, Ahsan Khan Chowdhury, Chairman and CEO, PRAN-RFL Group, David Bo, Managing Director, Oryx Bio-Tech Ltd, Kazunori Yamada, Representative of Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) Bangladesh, Asif Ibrahim, Chairman, Chittagong Stock Exchange Ltd., Abul Kasem Khan, Chairperson,

Business Initiative Leading Development (BUILD) participated the webinar as Panel Discussants and illuminated the discussions with their thoughtful insights.

N K A Mobin, FCS, FCA, Senior Vice President, Monowar Hossain, Vice President, DCCI also took part in the webinar. N K A Mobin, FCS, FCA concluded the program thanking all participants and guests.

Summary of Recommendations:

- Bangladesh made a few significant reforms like One Stop Service (OSS), Company Act for starting business, separate register for business property registration, getting construction permit, getting credit and protecting minority investors’ interest of doing business index.
- However, Bangladesh ranks far behind in enforcing contracts and resolving insolvency indicators that distract expected foreign investment.
- The immediate deregulation by Bangladesh Bank addressing this issue helped Japanese companies taking a loan from their parent companies. Such kind consideration and initiative by Bangladesh Government are highly applauding and it shows that

quick actions to address the problems and embracing solutions help to keep up the growth momentum.

- Commercial dispute resolution takes at least four years in Bangladesh. To improve the litigation system, changes in the applicable civil procedures or enforcement rules, expanding court automation, electronic payment, automatic assignment of cases to judges, introducing specialized commercial courts and expanding ADR framework are required.
- Concerned policymakers are required to take necessary initiatives in association with the private sector for improving country competitiveness. In this regard, a high-powered national steering committee is needed including Chamber bodies for time-bound improvement through relevant reforms agenda as well roadmap of pandemic recovery.
- Bangladesh can sign the UN treaty on mediation, namely the Singapore Convention on Mediation to achieve universal recognition of mediation as a powerful commercial dispute resolution tool.
- Trade bodies and Chambers have responsibilities to bring the people within the tax net who are presently out of the net. It will ease the tax burden on the existing tax payers moreover it will help to meet the revenue target.
- Among the business community, now, the tax-paying behavior is changing; People are more willing to pay tax now. However, mass awareness is required among the business communities to pay taxes for generating more revenues that will enable Bangladesh to move forward at a faster rate.
- In case of Enforcing Contract of EODB, at first, the whole judicial system needs to be changed. We need to change the mindset including major reforms. All the problems need to be identified and resolved.
- In order to improve in Enforcement of Contracts category, reforms must be made to— i) Arbitration, ii) Mediation and iii) Litigation processes.
- The definition of “Court” stated in Section 2(b) in the Arbitration Act should be amended to include the High Court only. If this is done, then one tier of review will be less and the parties can apply straight to the High Court to enforce the award regardless of whether it is a local arbitration award or a foreign arbitration award for international arbitration involving foreign companies.
- Existing Act should be amended allowing applications for the appointment of arbitrators to be disposed of as expeditiously as possible and, in any event, no later than a period of 60 (sixty) days.
- From the cross-border perspective, a progressive step for Bangladesh would be to become a signatory to the United Nations Mediation Convention, popularly known as the Singapore Convention. If Bangladesh were to become a signatory to this Convention and enact necessary laws, the enforcement of any cross-border settlement reached through mediation would achieve formal recognition and a significant degree of certainty.
- In connection with the litigation, it would be very helpful if Bangladesh has a separate court for commercial disputes and/or especially for cross-border commercial disputes.
- In Bangladesh, bankruptcy laws are governed by the Bankruptcy Act of 1997 (the “Bankruptcy Act”). Instead of liquidation, if businesses can be rescued, it may reduce the failure rate among firms, help maintain a higher overall level of entrepreneurship in the economy and preserve jobs.
- In order to deal with the problems related to Resolving Insolvency, the Bankruptcy Act should be amended to include/introduce the i) Introduce effective reorganization provisions, ii) Enhance creditors’ rights in insolvency proceedings, iii) Improve the provisions dealing with the administration of the debtor’s assets during insolvency proceedings, iv) Establish a regulatory framework for professional insolvency practitioners, v) Implement non-binding principles for out of court resolution methods to be used by debtors and creditors.
- The reforms should be done on a fast track basis.
- The reforms need to be a model for others, to remain competitive.
- Taxation policy and auditing process need to be changed as some of the provisions of these can be seen as detrimental to the economic growth of Bangladesh

Lockdown, shutdown or anything else?

M. S. Siddiqui

Legal Economist

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Bangladesh has been combating the COVID-19 pandemic with limited financial resources and poor health infrastructure since March, 2020. Although the government has imposed several restricted measures to curb the progression of the outbreak, those arrays of measures were not sustainable in the long run. Several reports showed the major role of lockdown to slow down the spread of COVID-19 and in response, the Bangladesh government has set up various strict measures to keep the rising of outbreak under control. But the low infection is a matter of research despite 'failure' of lockdown. However, as a middle-income country, Bangladesh might not sustain being restricted in the long run by imposing prolonged lockdown.

Last year, we saw the detrimental impacts of a nation-wide lockdown in the wake of Covid-19, especially on low-income, subsistence workers and workers who are dependent on daily wages. Finally, government has taken a bold decision to open the economic activities despite opposition from different quarters.

Although the country has been again experiencing the sudden surge of Covid-19 since early March 2021. Healthcare officials and experts blame the surge in Covid-19 cases on people's reluctance to follow health safety guidelines, but lockdown cannot last forever without causing enormous damage to national economies and compromising people's resilience.

The health experts also have different opinion from the experience of lockdown during pandemic of March 2020. The imposition of more lockdowns as they had proved completely ineffective in the country. Even, the zonal approaches of lockdown at East Raza Bazar and Wari last year left us with bitter experiences. "Imposing a lockdown is a foreign practice. We would never be able to implement it due to the suffering of our own people," expert said. "Rather the country can implement a local style of lockdown." Dr Nazrul Islam, a member of the National Technical Advisory Committee, said the imposition of restrictions on movement still be a good idea considering the recent surge in cases. It will decrease movement after evening and proper monitoring could ensure wearing of masks by everyone. For the time being, following the health rules at offices and homes is a must". Besides, we need to ensure institutional quarantine and isolation on a priority basis, as our experiences say that isolation at home is not possible.

The recent hasty decision to half the passenger capacity of public transport and hike bus fares by 60 percent, without enforcing clear directives on the operating capacities of offices and other workplaces, almost all of which are operating at fully capacity, is an example of this. The result is that during these difficult times, the sufferings of ordinary people have only been exacerbated.

BGMEA said that export orders had fallen by 30-40% due to the second wave of the pandemic in the West and buyers were creating pressure to promptly deliver the existing orders. Factories are facing order cancellations, suspension of spring/

summer shipments, and reduced orders for autumn/winter season. They normally work on autumn/winter orders from April onwards. BGMEA planned to continue to keep the factories open maintaining the safety measures. Out of statistics of last year they have hope to keep the Covid-19 infection rate below 0.03% among RMG workers.

The James P. Grant School of Public Health has undertaken a study to try and understand the needs of the population during COVID-19 on numbers of the poor, microbusiness owners, labourers, transport workers, informal sector employees and many other groups who depend on daily wages/earnings and have no social safety net, there is now only the pain of hunger. Although Bangladesh has achieved a lot over recent decades, with improved availability of food due to increased production, 40 million people—one quarter of the population—remain food insecure, and 11 million suffer from acute hunger.

BRAC's conducted a rapid perception survey on COVID-19 conducted between 31 March and 5 April 2020 for instance found that 18% and 10% of urban and rural respondents, respectively, had no food stored at home, while 37% and 21%, respectively, had only 1–3 days food reserve. These figures will worsen after the impact of COVID-19.

The poor and vulnerable already live on the edge. The added stress of the pandemic combined with prolonged shutdowns will amplify further their despair and hopelessness. In the context of COVID-19, the lockdown model is being imported from western or developed economies with stronger economic bases and better social safety nets for those in need. Those countries supported all small business and individuals with financial support for the period of lockdown. Bangladesh has such financial capacity and management capability for distribution of cash subsidy for loss of income. Bangladesh should find alternate way of fighting corona virus and keep the wheels of economy propelled. Here the economic mortalities may overtake health mortalities for the poorest who survive on daily wage labour.

Bangladesh encounters a three-way tug of war, a battle between the coronavirus pandemic, reviving the national economy and keeping society on an even keel, the policymakers need to come up with more appropriate lockdown exit framework in order to keep a sustainable socioeconomic structure of Bangladesh.

The National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC) on Covid-19 has recommended "partial or modified" lockdown of "high-risk" areas in Bangladesh. The NTAC chief informed the media that this would involve identifying and isolating Covid-19 patients and ensuring that the patients and their whole families remain in quarantine while they receive treatment.

While health is a very real concern, for Bangladesh to sustain the shutdown requires all of us to focus all of the country's resources on ensuring that no one goes without food. Nobel Laureates Esther Duflo and Abhijit Banerjee opined that, the poor and the vulnerable in the developing countries would be left with no choice but to break the shutdown for their livelihood. Do Bangladesh have any alternate to lock-down or shutdown but keeping the economic activities undisturbed?

Focus on health and social protection, not GDP growth

The forthcoming budget should focus on health, social protection and job creation to shield the people from the impacts of the second wave of the coronavirus, instead of putting too much attention on economic growth, the Centre for Policy Dialogue said. The think-tank also reiterated the need for an expansionary macroeconomic stance in the budget for 2021–22, accommodating the required additional public spending.

“The budget will have to allocate resources in a way that would address the needs of both the immediate and the recovery phase.” In the immediate term, the government will need to focus on health risk mitigation and ensuring food security through expanded safety nets.

“In the recovery phase, which should be pursued parallelly, the budget will have to make allocations and undertake measures given the demands of entrepreneurs, enterprises, businesses and commerce.” The CPD made the calls in its budget proposals, which were presented during a virtual media briefing.

The budget for the 2022 fiscal year is being prepared in the backdrop of a number of disquieting developments in the economy: weak performance of the 2021 fiscal year budget implementation; the persistence of adverse impacts of the first wave of COVID-19; continuing stagnation in private investment; the second wave; and failure of the external sector to pick-up.

“The 2022 fiscal year budget will need to address these and the medium-term fiscal reform issues to make a recovery sustainable,” the CPD said. It recommended increasing the allocations for health and social



security on a priority basis. Some 2 to 3 per cent of the gross domestic product should be allocated for the health sector and 4 to 6 per cent for the social security sector to help the country fight the pandemic, it suggested.

“Because of the coronavirus, the poverty rate has increased when the tax collection was not satisfactory,” said Professor Mustafizur Rahman, a distinguished fellow of the CPD. “The government has to collect more taxes from the high-income group and disburse it as cash assistance among the poor now.”

The cash assistance should be given at least two to four times a year for a longer period as it seems that the coronavirus would stay for a few more years, he said. “In order to increase the financial assistance, the government can raise the maximum income tax rate to 30 per cent from the existing 25 per cent,” Prof Rahman said.

In the 2021 fiscal year budget, personal income tax rates were reduced. Providing benefits to monthly income earners of Tk. 4 lakh and above clearly went against the cause of promoting tax justice at a time when the resource was scarce, the CPD said. Rahman

called for discontinuing the existing black money whitening facility, as it discouraged timely payment of income tax and encouraged corruption.

Moreover, taxes on all essential food items should be reduced for the sake of the food security of the lower-income groups, the think-tank said. The budget proposals came as the country is passing through the second wave of the coronavirus. As a result, policymakers are, once again, posed with the challenge of maintaining a balance between the lives and livelihoods.

The agriculture sector has remained resilient during the pandemic. However, the external sector has shown a mixed performance in the 2021 fiscal year. A medium-term plan should be formulated as regards phasing out the various tax exemptions provided during the pandemic, it said.

Although Bangladesh has received a significant commitment on external funding support from multilateral and bilateral sources, the disbursement has lagged behind. “It is important for the government to pay special attention to ensure speedier disbursement,” the CPD said.

From July to December, both revenue mobilization and public expenditure showed lower uptake than the same period of the previous fiscal year. It is unlikely that the target will be fulfilled during the next six months of the 2021 fiscal year.

“Some of the underlying weaknesses in the institutional structure need to be strengthened through urgent reforms,” said Towfiqul Islam Khan, senior research fellow of the CPD, while making the keynote presentation.

Public expenditure under the next budget should highlight four areas: ensuring better health facilities for COVID-19 patients; enhancing social safety net programs for poor, new poor and marginalized people; raising allocation for employment-enhancing infrastructure development projects; and supporting agriculture, SMEs and export-oriented industries for their recovery and thereby keeping the existing jobs.

During the second lockdown, the sufferings of the poor and marginal people have further accentuated, it said. According to the think-tank, instead of setting ambitious targets which may miss the annual target by a significant margin by the end of the fiscal year, the goals for revenue mobilization should be set in a realistic manner taking cognizance of the potential shortfall in the 2021 fiscal year.

Immediate term readjustments in tax provisions should be made considering the urgency of both addressing the risks and mitigation of the vulnerabilities. In order to extend support to economic recovery over the medium term, persuasion of fiscal policy should be made in a judicious manner.

The report said as introducing new taxes or raising tax rates might be

difficult, more emphasis should be given to the enforcement of tax measures and curbing tax evasion.

The CPD reiterated its earlier proposals to initiate wealth and property tax in Bangladesh **1**

ADB cuts growth projection for second wave

The Asian Development Bank has downsized its projection about the Bangladesh's GDP growth in the current fiscal year of 2020–21, considering the second wave of COVID pandemic and fresh lockdown that restricted economic activities. The ADB in its annual flagship publication titled “Asian Development Outlook 2021” projected that Bangladesh's GDP growth would pick up to 6.8 per cent in 2020-21 with stimulus package implementation and recovery in global growth and trade.

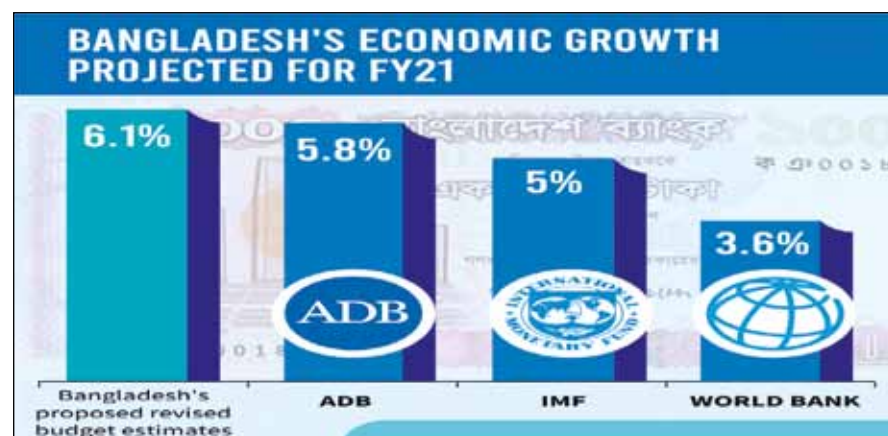
However, ADB Country Director Manmohan Parkash in a virtual press briefing on the launch of the flagship report said, “As the second wave of COVID-19 is ongoing and the situation is still fluid, these impacts were not considered in our outlook.” “These impacts could possibly shave off at least one percentage point from our current projection...it may be in the range of 5.5 to 6 per cent,

which is also quite enviable in the circumstances,” he said.

The economy was showing signs of recovery with higher remittances, exports and other indicators, but the recent surge of the pandemic and lockdown are likely to trim the growth projection, he said. The current outlook was based on data prior to March, he said.

According to the ADB outlook, Bangladesh's GDP growth in fiscal 2021-22 is expected to edge up further to 7.2 per cent as both exports and imports were picking up under sustained global recovery. The government for a second time revised down the GDP growth forecast to 6.1 per cent for the 2021 fiscal year, reflecting the devastating impacts of the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic on the battered economy. It had initially targeted to achieve an 8.2 per cent expansion of the gross domestic product in the current fiscal year and later the target was reset at 7.4 per cent.

Earlier in March, World Bank projected that Bangladesh's gross domestic product might grow as high as 5.6 per cent in the 2021 fiscal year. International Monetary Fund in its latest World Economic Outlook on April 6 forecast that the country would achieve a GDP growth of 5 per cent in the 2021 fiscal year.



“We are now experiencing the second wave of the pandemic with increased number of infections and deaths. The healthcare system has been stretched again to its limit,” said Parkash.

Mentioning that the government has imposed a lockdown and travel restrictions to control the spread of infections, he said these necessary measures would save lives but have led to a disruption in economic activities which could adversely affect livelihoods and slow down economic recovery.

A potential slowdown in vaccination due to supply related issues may further exacerbate the already adverse situation, said Parkash, adding that the impact of the second wave in countries exports were destined for could also undermine economic recovery. The Asian Development Outlook 2021 stated that a continued strong remittance inflow was likely to support domestic demand with growth in private consumption.

Pointing out that a move towards universal healthcare is critical to ensure inclusive and sustainable development, the Asian Development Outlook said healthcare in Bangladesh could improve with more public funding and effective administration. A contributory public social health insurance scheme could help achieve universal healthcare, it opined.

The ADB country director said the ongoing pandemic was an opportunity to undertake further reforms in social protection and the healthcare sector, improving competitiveness of the private sector, reducing cost of doing business, diversifying exports and developing skills.

Expanding social safety nets, enhancing investments, creating

employment, ensuring mass vaccination and improving the healthcare sector are critical actions for achieving the Eighth Five Year Plan goals, he opined. He said the financially insolvent and vulnerable people were impacted the most during the pandemic **r**

Trade benefits should be retained for graduating LDCs

The developed and developing countries should retain the same trade privileges for the least developed countries even after they graduate as the coronavirus pandemic has hit poor nations hard, officials said. Sixteen countries are set to leave the LDC group in the next decade, thanks to their better economic performance. Of them, 10 are from Asia and the Pacific. However, the economies of the graduating countries have been hit hard more compared to the developing and developed ones for their over-dependence on a single or very few export items.

“The extension [of duty benefits] should be at least 12 years instead of three to five years,” said Zuena Aziz, chief coordinator for Sustainable Development Goals Affairs at the Prime Minister’s Office of Bangladesh, at a webinar.

Narayan Raj Poudel, program director of the National Planning

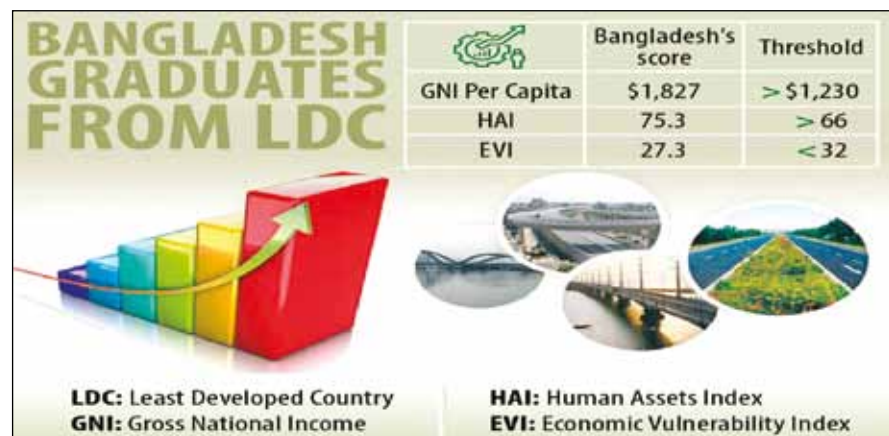
Commission of Nepal, echoed Aziz. “The continuation of the international support measures is vital for the revival of the LDCs even if they become eligible for graduation as the pandemic has affected their economies,” said Poudel.

Bangladesh organized the virtual discussion on the sidelines of the 77th Commission Session of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

While presenting a keynote paper on “Sustainable Graduation in the Challenging Time: Perspectives from Bangladesh and the region”, Aziz called for ensuring COVID-19 vaccines at an affordable price for all the people in the world, reducing inequality and managing climate changes for sustainable graduation.

She demanded the developed and developing countries provide easy access to finance and generous financing to the graduating LDCs in the areas of infrastructure development, fiscal spaces, health, education and the environment. Aziz called for debt cancellation instead of debt suspension.

The export destination of some imminent graduating countries such as Bangladesh, Nepal and Cambodia is the same single market, the European Union. The shipment from Bangladesh, scheduled to graduate



from the LDC to a developing country by 2026, is reliant on the garment industry, which contributes 84 per cent to the national exports.

Bangladesh's 60 per cent export is destined to the European Union. It is 50 per cent for Nepal and 45 per cent for Cambodia. Bangladesh is one of the worst-affected economies of the pandemic as the crisis has wiped out millions of jobs and cut exports of goods. According to the World Trade Organization, 10 per cent export of the LDCs has been impacted by the fallouts of COVID-19.

Fatima Yasmin, secretary of the Economic Relations Division of Bangladesh, sought supports for the LDCs during the graduation period and after the graduation, and vaccines for the countries at an affordable price, access to finance for climate change, and migration at reduced costs.

Kim Veara, deputy secretary-general of the National Committee for ESCAP in Cambodia, said in the pre-pandemic period, his country's annual rate of poverty reduction was 1.5 per cent, but the fallouts of the pandemic had created new poor.

Cambodia, a garment exporting nation, fell in trouble because of COVID-19, he said. He sought continuation of the ISMs and official development assistance from the developing and developed countries to revive the economy. Cambodia is set to move out of the LDC group in 2021.

Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, under-secretary-general of the UN and executive secretary of the ESCAP, said only the duty-free and quota-free market access of goods of the LDCs to the developing and developed countries was not adequate **r**

BB cuts interest rate on refinance funds

The Bangladesh Bank cut the interest rate on refinance funds for pre-shipment credit aiming at helping local exporters continue shipping products amid the coronavirus outbreak. From now on, businesses will be allowed to avail funds from the scheme at 5 per cent interest rate instead of a previous 6 per cent, according to a central bank notice. Banks will borrow money from the fund at 2 per cent interest instead of 3 per cent from the central bank and can charge exporters a maximum of 5 per cent.

On April 5, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina announced that the Bangladesh Bank will introduce a new loan facility titled pre-shipment credit refinance scheme involving Tk. 5,000 crore for local exporters.

The revolving fund will have a tenure of three years. But, borrowers have been showing reluctance to avail loans from the fund considering the high interest rate. As of March 24, borrowers took Tk. 224 crore in loans from the refinance scheme, showed data from the central bank. A maximum of 10 per cent of the commercial invoice value of exported consignments are eligible for the scheme **r**

Govt to expand safety net

The government has already provided seasonal assistance to about 10 lakh people living below the poverty line in each upazila and will expand such social protection programs to curb the adverse effects of any future economic shock, according to Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal.

A ministry official recently informed that Kamal made these comments in a letter to David Malpass, president of the World Bank Group. In the letter,

Kamal said that the government had taken various measures to strengthen job creation, improve job quality, and promote inclusive access to employment under World Bank funding.

The letter was issued about a month before the multilateral lender's board approved a \$250 million credit support for Bangladesh on March 26. The Third Programmatic Jobs Development Policy the last in a series of three loans aims to facilitate better and more inclusive job creation, enable quick recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and build resilience to future crisis. The WB and the Bangladesh government signed the \$250 million financial agreement.

As the ongoing pandemic has highlighted the urgency to enhance resilience to future shocks, the government has built on its Employment Generation Program for the Poorest, Kamal said in the letter. "As such, it adopted an expanded EGPP Plus modality that has adaptable targeting and policies to respond to a range of potential events, including natural, human, health and biological disasters," he added. Various studies have found that just 50 per cent of the government's targeted demographic receive assistance under its safety net programs.

The government has also failed to provide any assistance, financial or otherwise, to the indigent hit by the COVID-19 fallout. Economist Binayak Sen, director-general of the



Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, said that such social protection programs should be carried out through coordinated efforts between government and non-government organizations.

In his letter, the finance minister also pointed out certain steps that could be taken in this regard. "To strengthen our ability to respond to disasters, we have revised and published the Standing Order on Disasters in line with the latest global and national frameworks and development plans," he said.

"We expect that this SOD will improve coordination between government and non-government organizations, which is critical for a swift and efficient response to economic shocks." He mentioned that the coronavirus pandemic has presented extraordinary challenges for the economy over the past year.

Due to the temporary closure of offices, business, factories and public transport during a nationwide general holiday between March 26 and May 31 last year, the export sector had faced an unprecedented challenge as international orders were either cancelled or put on hold.

This affected around four million workers, mainly female, amid a temporary collapse in demand, Kamal said. He also mentioned that Bangladesh is showing signs of recovery as mobility has returned to pre-pandemic levels, while exports are on the uptick even though COVID-19 remains a threat.

And with the recent surge in infections across the country, the government imposed strict restrictions on public movement on April 14. However, with Eid-ul-Fitr just around the corner, the government recently announced that all shopping malls would reopen.

Kamal's letter also mentioned the government's progress on reform

programs to support jobs and the COVID-19 recovery, including modernising the country's trade and investment environment, strengthening systems that protect workers, and improving policies and programs that enhance access to jobs for vulnerable people.

On the modernization of trade and investment climate, he claimed that Bangladesh had achieved rapid progress in lowering the cost of starting a business by waiving fees for small firms and enacting the One-Stop Services Act to streamline common business registration and operational processes through a single online platform. He said that the OSS services for 35 key regulatory services are already operational.

The government has also taken steps to amend the Bankruptcy Act to reduce the duration of legal proceedings and recovery from four years to one or two years while increasing recovery rates.

Legislation in this regard is to be submitted for approval by the cabinet in the coming weeks and the subsequent submission to the Parliament. The Customs Act 2018 issued new customs rules and directives and established a risk management unit to operationalize modern risk-based customs procedures, speeding up clearance time and freeing up space at ports **r**

Govt to buy more LNG from spot market

The government approved a proposal to buy another 33.60 lakh MMBtus of liquefied natural gas from the spot market to meet the growing demand for the super-chilled fuel. Vitol Asia Pte of Singapore will supply the fuel. Each MMBtu will cost \$8.012. The cabinet committee on purchase approved the proposal submitted by Petrobangla, a corporation of the energy and mineral resources



division, to make the purchase at Tk. 267.57 crore.

This is the sixth time the government would buy the fuel from the spot market. With this, the government has so far approved the purchase of a total of 270.10 lakh MMBtus of LNG from the sport market from three firms. In September last year, the government moved to the spot market for the first time to purchase the fuel at a cheaper rate. At that time, the Vitol won the work order to deliver 3,490,200 MMBtus for Tk. 132.93 crore.

The government on February 17 this year approved two proposals over purchasing 67.2 lakh MMBtus of LNG from Vitol Asia Pte for Tk. 623 crore. Under one proposal, each MMBtu would cost \$9.31 while it is \$9.36 in another.

On March 10, the government approved two more proposals to purchase 67.2 lakh MMBtus of LNG for Tk. 527.24 crore from the Vitol and AOT Trading AG of Switzerland. Each MMBtu was priced at \$7.44 and \$8.345 respectively.

On March 24, the purchase committee approved a proposal to purchase 33.6 lakh MMBtus of LNG from US firm Excelerate Energy LP at a cost of Tk. 218.07 crore. Each MMBtu cost \$6.53.

On April 7, it approved the purchase of 33.60 lakh MMBtus of LNG from AOT Trading AG, Switzerland at a cost of Tk. 243.30 crore. Each MMBtu was priced at \$7.28 **r**

Taliban caused \$1b damage to Afghan infrastructure: Ghani

President Ashraf Ghani accused the Taliban of causing one billion US dollars damage to infrastructures in Afghanistan. During a meeting titled 'Governance and human resources week' at the Presidential Palace, Ghani said that the Taliban were currently busy destroying the country's infrastructures. He did not mention the period during which the damage was made, but said that the insurgent group in recent years caused destructions to the country worth a billion dollars.

"If they cannot construct infrastructures of the country, they should at least do not destroy them," he said. "With the dignified withdrawal of international forces from Afghanistan, a chapter of our international relations ended and a new season has opened." Inauguration of 1,000 projects and



announcement of 11,000 teacher positions

Ghani also announced 1,000 projects and 11,000 teacher posts during the meeting. He said that the projects would be implemented in Balkh, Herat, Nangarhar and Kandahar provinces with local people contributing 21 percent to

implementation of these projects.

The president said 11,000 teachers post would be filled through an open competition and all people would equally take part in the employment process. The government's '100 days, 100 news' program launched on April 12 during which 28 projects were implemented in some provinces **L**

Delayed Dorjilung gets a mention at Bhutan-Bangladesh meeting

The joint statement from Bhutan and Bangladesh said that the Prime Ministers of Bhutan and Bangladesh noted the substantial progress made in the past towards signing a memorandum of understanding among Bangladesh, Bhutan and India on trilateral cooperation in hydro-electricity.

The reference is to the long delayed 1,125MW run of the river Dorjilung project. It said, "In order to move forward, they agreed that a Secretary-level meeting among the three countries should take place at an early date. They also decided to explore the possibility of bilateral cooperation in this sector."

Lyonchhen Dasho Dr. Lotay Tshering said that he had gone with the main aim of paying respect to the father of nation of Bangladesh and the



project came up in the talks with his Bangladesh counterpart. He said that the trilateral project was also raised in his last visit to Bangladesh. Lyonchhen said that now the expert group between the countries would take it up. The Minister for Economic Affairs Loknath Sharma said that since the two Prime Minister's have discussed it there should also be talks at the secretary level.

Lyonpo said that the regional integration of the energy is important as this region is one of fastest

developing regions in the world but there are energy shortage issues and so if there is regional integration then it will benefit all. Lyonpo said that the Detailed Project Report for the project has been ready since 2016. India's role in the project is important as the power has to be evacuated via India. This whole idea was first discussed between the three countries based on the SAARC Energy Cooperation Framework signed by all the SAARC countries in the 18th SAARC summit in November 2014. The whole idea behind this framework was to provide for better regional integration.


Druk Green Power Corporation then went ahead and did the Detailed Project Report for the project which was ready by 2016.

Bhutan drafted an MoU and sent it to Bangladesh which agreed to it

and signed by around February 2016. This formally brought both countries on board. A MoU copy had also been sent to India to sign but New Delhi is yet to get back to both Bangladesh and Bhutan.

Then during the visit of a government of India delegation from 7th to 11th April 2016 lead by the then Indian Power Secretary P. K. Pujari, Bhutan raised the issue of the 1,125 MW Dorjilung project.

Former Prime Minister Dasho Lyonchhen Tshering Tobgay raised the issue of Bangladesh's investment in the Dorjilung project with the delegation that also consisted of the Joint Secretary North and Joint Secretary Hydro.

Similarly, the Ministry of Economic Affairs through its former Secretary Dasho Yeshe Wangdi also raised the issue in the delegation level talks between the two sides. At the time the Indian Power Secretary is said to have expressed that the GoI is very supportive of the proposal and that the proposal is under active consideration 

Export of Nepali felt products surge 61.97pc

With the pandemic wreaking havoc on the global economy, the export of most Nepali handicraft products has also declined, as most in the industry predicted. But exports of Nepali felt products have continued to rise despite the challenges posed by the pandemic. Traders attributed the growth to products being competitive in the international market, in terms of price and quality.

According to the Trade and Export Promotion Centre, the country exported felt products worth Rs. 2.74 billion in the first eight months of the current fiscal year (mid-July to mid-



March), a sharp rise of 61.97 percent as the export bill amounted to Rs. 1.69 billion in the same period last fiscal year 2019–20. The country exported felt products worth Rs2.15 billion in the last fiscal year.


Based on data for the last five years, the export of felt products have increased by 69.17 percent and traders are bullish on further growth. "The demand for Nepali handicraft has been increasing as many types of products can be produced using felt and their designs continue to be updated," said Maheshower Shrestha, CEO of Everest Fashion, a felt producer based in Kathmandu Valley.

Dharma Raj Shakya, immediate past president of the Federation of Handicraft Associations of Nepal said that Nepali felt products are competitively priced at reasonable prices compared to other countries that also produce felt products.

"There is good demand for Nepali felt products through online shopping portals operating in the US and European market where customers can buy the goods at low prices and demand has not been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic," he said. According to felt traders, the major markets for Nepali felt products are the US and European countries followed by Japan and Canada. Felt products are mainly used as decorative items.

Refined sheep wool is the main raw material for Nepali felt crafts. According to traders, most of the

raw material is imported from New Zealand with imports from Australia and China as well. Shrestha said that the pandemic has not impacted the supply of raw material.

Shrestha, who has been in the felt business for over 22 years, said that production declined by 10 percent once the pandemic measures hit the nation. Before the pandemic, his company was producing 5.5 million products annually with all produced goods exported 

Lanka declares worst economic downturn in 73 years

Sri Lanka announced that its economy shrank 3.6 per cent last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, making it the worst downturn since independence from Britain in 1948. The unprecedented recession compared with a 2.3 per cent GDP growth in 2019, the Central Bank of Sri Lanka said in its annual report for 2020.



It hoped the economy would rebound in 2021 and record an optimistic six per cent growth on the back of improved local manufacturing and services. "The pandemic has also offered an opportunity to reset the economy's focus and to address longstanding structural weaknesses and establish a production-based, productivity-driven economy," the bank said.

The pandemic hit the island's lucrative tourism sector while sharp contractions were seen in

construction, manufacturing as well as in services, the bank said. It said the central government's debt also rose to 101 per cent of GDP last year, up from 86.8 per cent of GDP in the previous year, underscoring the debt crisis faced by the South Asian nation.

International rating agencies have expressed fears for Sri Lanka's ability to service its huge foreign debt as the country's foreign reserves fell sharply in the past year. The island's economy was trying to recover from the effects of the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings that killed 279 people when the pandemic hit in early 2020.

Two weeks ago, Sri Lanka secured a \$500 million (RM2 billion) loan from China to shore up its foreign exchange reserves as the local currency came under intense pressure and fell to a record low. Chinese influence in the South Asian nation has been growing in recent years through loans and projects under its vast Belt and Road infrastructure initiative, raising concerns among regional powers and Western nations.

Between 2005 and 2015, Colombo borrowed billions from China, accumulating a mountain of debt for expensive infrastructure projects **r**

Pakistan needs 7-9pc growth

Pakistan needs to grow at 7-9 percent for 30 years to reduce public debt and create jobs by bringing a radical shift in functioning of the state and redefining the government role as a facilitator, says a new reform agenda. Pakistan Institute of Development Economics launched 'Reforms for Accelerated Prosperity and Inclusive Development' (RAPID) report that also seeks to limit the constitutional terms of the prime minister and the members of the parliament to "maximum two."



Minister for Planning and Development Asad Umar hosted the launching ceremony, as the country remains in search of a long-term economic framework in absence of new five-year plan. There should be a maximum of two terms for the prime minister and all the legislators to break monopoly of political families that will lead to a stable democracy, according to the report. Currently, there is no limit on terms of PM and the legislators.

The PIDE reforms agenda emphasizes achieving 7 percent to 9 percent economic growth rate annually for next 30 years to create two million jobs per annum and reduce the public debt, which it said has already become "unsustainable." The reform package puts the government at the centre of the economic growth model, instead of the private-sector led growth.

The private sector is bad in absence of the regulations and it is also a mafia, said PIDE Vice Chancellor Dr Nadeemul Haque. But Haque stressed that there was a need to reduce the footprints of the government, which controls up to 80 percent of the economy.

"Washington-consensus is not even implemented in Washington and the idea of free markets without government regulations is buried," said the planning minister.

The ministersaidthatmacroeconomic stabilization has taken roots during the past over two years and both current accounts and the primary

budget were in surplus. However, despite the primary budget being in surplus, the public debt has been increasing both in terms of GDP as well as in absolute terms.

"We are fixated with the macroeconomic stabilization and IMF programs are by definition recessionary," said Haque.

"There is assumption that economic growth is averse of stabilization and this needs to be examined," said Planning Commission Deputy Chairman Jehanzeb Khan. There is not enough harmonization of policies, as competing revenue policies have implications for the growth, he added. The 7.11 percent economic growth rate is required only for full employment, said Haque. Pakistan's long run economic growth was declining due to a decline in both productivity and investment, which was very dangerous trend. There is also a steady increase in the public debt, which has to be stopped by ensuring high economic growth. The debt will keep piling up, if the country keeps growing at around 4 percent, according to the report. In order to bring the debt down, the economy has to grow at a rate that is "greater than 8 percent."

The country has an average growth rate of around 3 percent and to triple it would require massive resources, ownership of reforms and breaking the monopoly of the elites. There is a need to shift from brick and mortar growth to "endogenous growth", showed the report.

Umar said that more than economic growth rate, the equitable growth was more important.

"The elite capture is a reality in Pakistan and there is elite capture in the decision making that puts pressure of adjustments on the poor people," said the minister **r**

South Korea economy recovers to pre-pandemic levels

South Korea's economy expanded 1.6 per cent quarter-on-quarter in the first three months of the year, signalling a faster-than-expected recovery to pre-COVID-19 levels, central bank data showed on April 27. Bolstered by improvement in private consumption and exports, "the 1.6 per cent growth in the first quarter has pushed the real gross domestic product (GDP) level higher than that of the last three months of 2019," Park Yang-su, head of the economic statistics department at the Bank of Korea, said in a briefing tied to the data.

On a quarterly basis, South Korea's economy has recovered slowly since the third quarter of last year. After contracting 1.3 per cent in the first quarter of 2020 and 3.2 per cent in the second, it began to show signs of recovery in the second half. It expanded by 2.1 per cent in the third quarter and 1.2 per cent in the fourth. The country's GDP expanded 1.8 per cent year-on-year in the first quarter of 2021.

A noticeable recovery in private consumption, which had faltered due to the government's strict social distancing rules, buoyed the rebound in GDP, data showed. Consumption of durable goods such as cars and non-durable goods, such as groceries and clothing, increased by a combined 1.1 per cent quarter-on-quarter in January–March. This compares with the corresponding figures of zero per cent and minus 1.5 per cent in the third and fourth quarters of last year.




"The increased gift exchanges that replaced face-to-face gatherings during the Lunar New Year holidays in February and alleviation of social distancing rules around that time improved consumption in businesses and services that require offline interactions," Park said.

The BoK cast a rosier outlook on private consumption, projecting further gains stemming from an improved job market, but warned that risks tied to COVID-19 had not disappeared and sectors that required face-to-face services were still vulnerable.

Exports expanded 1.9 per cent quarter-on-quarter in the January–March period, while imports increased 2.4 per cent. Exports, which account for half of Asia's fourth-largest economy, expanded 4.5 per cent year-on-year, but shed some quarterly momentum in the first three months of the year. They had seen 5.4 per cent quarter-on-quarter growth in the last three months of 2020.

"The growth itself has become slower compared with the fourth quarter of last year, but a recovery in the IT economy and the overall global economy is expected to continue to drive Korea's exports," Park said. The 1.6 per cent GDP growth exceeded market expectations, as think tanks and brokerages had projected 1.2 per cent expansion on average.

But the BoK and experts alike have stressed the need for an accelerated vaccination campaign to truly back their optimistic outlooks. As of April 27 a meagre 4.7 per cent of the population, or 2.4 million people, had received one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Meanwhile, Minister of Economy and Finance and Deputy Prime Minister Hong Nam-ki on April 27 nodded toward the BoK data, saying: "Korea's economy saw a faster-than-expected recovery toward pre-pandemic levels" 

Over 80pc Thai businesses struggling for COVID-19

More than 80 per cent of Thai organizations surveyed by PwC recently said they were hit adversely by the COVID-19 pandemic, while the report indicated that successful crisis recovery hinges on improving



resiliency. The Thailand part of PwC's "Global Crisis Survey 2021" – a global survey of 2,814 business leaders in 73 countries – explores how the 52 Thai respondents faced the pandemic, what they learned and

how they're preparing for the future.

Phansak Sethsathira, a risk consulting partner for PwC Thailand, said 84 per cent of Thai respondents said their businesses had suffered badly. Some reported that the operation and supply chain was the most affected area of their business as transport restrictions had brought imports to a halt and disrupted production. The next most affected areas were workforce and financial liquidity.

Like their global counterparts, the Thai respondents adjusted their work processes and operations in response to the pandemic. This has included implementing new technologies, deferring investment to manage liquidity, improving remote working capabilities and changing the way they communicate with key stakeholders. These changes have created new challenges for Thai business leaders.

"Insufficient monitoring of new or updated remote-working systems widens the opportunities for malicious actors to take advantage of system weaknesses," warned Phansak. "These actors can pose as a trusted colleague or organization and trick victims into transferring sensitive data. With remote-working policies likely to be in place for some time, the risk of data breaches and stolen information has never been higher. If they can steal the right information, the actors can commit fraud, damage information systems, hurt reputations and other malicious — and costly — acts," he said.

Survey results show that most Thai respondents had a business continuity plan in place before COVID-19. However, only 31 per cent had a designated crisis-response team.

Phansak said the effectiveness of a BCP is at risk without a crisis-response team overseeing the

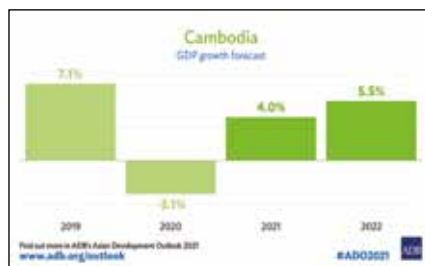
overall execution. "Having a well-designated crisis-response team is key to mobilising things quickly and recovering sooner. In times of crisis, one single crisis response weakness or mistake can cause wider consumer and stakeholder distrust," Phansak said.

Another focus of the survey was to learn whether companies are determining long-term threats and COVID-19's impact on corporate strategy. Most Thai respondents reported that they haven't assessed this, nor have they conducted an "after action" or lessons learned review.

"A post-crisis review allows you to improve your response plan and manage the next crisis better," Phansak said **r**

ADB forecasts 4pc Cambodia's economic growth in 2021

Cambodia's economy is forecast to grow 4.0 per cent this year and 5.5 per cent in 2022, as economic recoveries in major trading partners boosts demand for the Kingdom's exports, according to an Asian Development Bank report released on April 28.



ADB country director for Cambodia Sunniya Durrani-Jamal said: "The economy contracted by 3.1 per cent in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The government has responded quickly to the recent spike in cases, and we expect the economy to return to growth in 2021.

"This will help increase household incomes, but not all sectors and regions will benefit equally, so it will be essential to closely monitor household welfare and the need for additional support," she said.

Cambodia Chamber of Commerce vice-president Lim Heng said the country's economic activities will only bounce back if "more and more people get vaccinated."

He said: "We can only estimate Cambodia's economic growth until we have injected 75 per cent or more [of the population] and can maintain economic stability as well as Cambodia's economic well-being.

"Now, some factories have been shut down by the COVID-19 outbreak, which has led to the Cambodian economy continuing to decline." He cautioned, however, that if the government cannot control the outbreak "in one or two months ... and COVID-19 continues, this forecast will not be met."

According to the Asian Development Outlook (ADO) 2021, industrial production is expected to rise 7.1 per cent in 2021 and 7.0 per cent in 2022 on the back of a rebound in the garments, footwear and travel goods sector, as well as growth in other light manufacturing such as electronics and bicycles.

Agriculture is expected to grow by 1.3 per cent in 2021 and 1.2 per cent in 2022, underpinned by higher crop production after last year's flood damage, continued growth in aquaculture and rising agriculture exports to China.

Services will recover more slowly, expanding by 3.3 per cent in 2021 and 6.2 per cent in 2022. Efforts to contain a local outbreak of COVID-19 that began in February are dampening service sector activities **r**

China most impressive in trade recovery: UK think tank

World goods trade is staging an impressive recovery and China has stood out the most, the British think tank Oxford Economics said in a report. "At the broad regional level, trade gains have been most striking in China — as was the case after the global financial crisis," said the report.



According to the think tank, the position of the world's second largest economy as "a competitive supplier of goods like medical PPE and electronics has helped boost exports."

Data from the Chinese General Administration of Customs showed that China's total goods imports and exports surged 29.2 percent year on year to 8.47 trillion yuan (about \$1.3 trillion) in the first quarter of 2021, and exports jumped 38.7 percent from a year earlier.

As to the US-China trade relations, the think tank said the coronavirus crisis initially hit China-US trade hard, adding to the damage caused by the tariff war that began in 2018.

Although barriers are still substantially depressing bilateral trade, "bilateral trade flows have recovered over recent months, especially Chinese exports to the US", Oxford Economics added.

Overall, the Oxford Economics forecasts the world goods trade is expected to expand by 10.5 percent

this year after dropping 6.1 percent in 2020 and service trade will remain a significant drag on overall trade. The think tank said the rebound in goods trade "has been much faster than it was after the global financial crisis, even with the many coronavirus restrictions still in place" **r**

China mulls strengthening budget review, supervision

Chinese lawmakers are deliberating a draft revision of a decision on strengthening the review and supervision of the central government budget, as part of efforts to build a modern fiscal system.

The revised draft was submitted at the ongoing session of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, the top legislature. Consisting of 12 articles, the draft covers topics including budget implementation and auditing supervision, and the regulation of budget adjustment review.

It also specifies the role of the NPC in reviewing and supervising the central government budget. The draft summarizes and incorporates related reform measures, experience and effective practices of the NPC's budget review and supervision work in recent years, aiming to ensure the full implementation of budget law, said Shi Yaobin, director of the Commission for Budget Affairs with the NPC Standing Committee.

The move is necessary and feasible because of new situations in the new era and the new development stage, Shi added.



Japanese firms brace for further COVID hit

Japanese companies think the country will suffer a fourth round of coronavirus infections, with many bracing for a further blow to business, a Reuters monthly poll showed. Japan has so far seen far fewer COVID-19 cases than many Western countries, but concerns about a new wave of infections are rising fast.



A delay in vaccinations versus other Group of Seven advanced countries and a lacking sense of crisis among the public will trigger a new wave of infections, some firms wrote in the poll.

The Corporate Survey found almost all Japanese companies anticipated a new wave of infections in Japan. Many expected it to peak in May, around the time of the Golden Week holidays, which would diminish hope for a domestic demand-led recovery.

If the new wave of infections led Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's government to issue a fresh state of emergency, which entails business restrictions and penalty, that would hurt sales at 59 percent of firms, the April 2-13 survey found. "Restaurant and tourism industries have been so exhausted that I'm concerned a new wave of infections will deal a body blow," a chemicals maker manager wrote in the survey.

A wholesaler said a new wave of infections and a state of emergency would make companies more cautious about spending and output **r**

Oman becomes latest GCC country to introduce VAT

Oman has introduced a 5 percent value-added tax, becoming the fourth Gulf Cooperation Council country to implement a so-called consumption tax. The move followed the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. Arab News reports that Oman has predicted it will raise OMR400 million (\$1.04 billion) from the tax this year, equivalent to 1.5 percent of GDP, as it looks to narrow a widening fiscal deficit.

In June 2016, all six GCC states signed the Common VAT Agreement, pledging to introduce a 5 percent VAT rate. Qatar is expected to go ahead with VAT in the second or third quarter of this year and is said to be close to finalising its tax administration system, Dhareeba.



Goods and services exempt from VAT include financial services, health care, education, local passenger transport, bare land, resale of residential real estate and residential rents. Zero-rated goods and services include all

exports, basic foodstuffs, medicine and medical equipment, investment in gold, silver and platinum, crude oil and derivatives and natural gas, among certain transport goods **r**

Egypt targeting 5.4pc real GDP growth

Egypt is targeting a 5.4 percent real GDP growth in the 2021–2022 fiscal year and eyeing decreasing the budget deficit to GDP ratio to 6.7 percent, Minister of Finance Mohamed Maait announced. Maait made his statement while delivering the government's fiscal statement for the 2021–2022 fiscal year draft budget before the general assembly meeting.

Maait also said that the 2021–22 fiscal year budget is targeting a 1.5 percent budget initial surplus. The 2021–22 fiscal year budget revenues are estimated at EGP 1.3 trillion, while expenses are expected to post EGP 1.8 trillion, according to Maait. He also added that the the 2021–22 fiscal year budget is witnessing an unprecedented increase in public investment allocations, reaching EGP 358.1 billion, with a growth rate of 27.6 percent compared to the allocations of the 2020–21 fiscal year budget.

Maait noted that EGP 10 billion were allocated for gas prices subsidies and for financing the decrease in electricity prices for the manufacturing sector. He added that the 2021–22 fiscal year budget has EGP 2.1 billion allocated for the conversion of old vehicles to run using natural gas.



The 2021–22 fiscal year draft budget includes the allocation of EGP 87.2 billion for supply commodities subsidies, EGP 19 billion for social security pensions and for the 'Takaful and Karama' program, according to Maait. It also includes an allocation

worth EGP 7 billion for treatment at the state's expense, targeting the expansion of the inclusive health insurance system to cover Luxor, Aswan, Ismailiya, Suez, and South Sinai, according to the minister.

The minister also expounded that the 2021–22 fiscal year draft budget includes an increase in wages and compensations for state employees by 11.4 percent to reach EGP 361 billion. Maait said that the 2021–22 fiscal year draft budget is in line with presidential directives to maximize public expense objects, support national mega projects, and back productive activities and segments most hit by the pandemic **r**

Nearly SR3b trade between Bahrain and KSA

Saudi Arabia accounted for almost half of all GCC trade with Bahrain during the first quarter of 2021. Non-oil trade between the two countries

reached SR2.96 billion (\$789 million) according to the latest figures released by Bahrain's eGovernment and Information Authority; reflecting both Kingdoms' commitment to ongoing economic diversification. The continuous flow of trade is largely due to the uninterrupted movement of commercial goods between the two countries via the King Fahd Causeway. New logistics technology and the introduction of the Authorized Economic Operator program that expedites processing for multinationals based in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia has cut the waiting period for trucks from an average of four hours to 20 minutes.

Discussing the trade figures between Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, Ali Al Mudaifa, executive director of Bahrain's Economic Development Board said: "Bahrain's trading relationships continue to grow strongly. Bahrain offers the region's best value operating costs and great connectivity — only a 40-minute drive away from the region's biggest market — coupled with the introduction of the AEO and advanced logistics technology have helped to drive increased trade. It is great to see both Kingdoms working to find creative solutions to keep business flowing across our borders."

The total value of trade in between the GCC and Bahrain reached SR6.6 billion (\$1.76 billion), a rise of 6 percent from Q1 2020. Reaching second place in GCC trade with Bahrain is the United Arab Emirates, recording SR2.4 billion (\$639 million), an increase of 15 percent from Q1 2020. Trade with Oman also showed a significant increase, reaching SR862 million (\$230 million), a 27 percent rise from Q1 2020. Oman was followed by Kuwait, recording SR 367 million

(\$98 million) in bilateral trade in Q1 2021.

The value of global imports increased by 4 percent, reaching SR13.2 billion (\$3.52 billion) during the first quarter of 2021. Exports of nationally produced products from Bahrain increased by 18 percent, reaching SR6.75 billion (\$1.811 billion) globally. The manufacturing sector is a key driver of the Kingdom's economic diversification and a significant and consistent contributor to Bahrain's economy accounting for 14.5 percent of the GDP 

S Arabia readies plans to diversify economy


Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, said in a televised interview that he will further centralize policymaking, to ensure the success of his drive to diversify the economy. In the interview, aired on Saudi TV, he said the kingdom had set up a Budget Bureau to take over setting the state budget from the finance ministry, and would by the end of this year launch a new Policies Office.

The moves continue a shift of policy decisions away from traditional bodies such as the finance ministry and central bank, which began with the formation of a Council of Economic and Development Affairs, headed by the prince, after his father King Salman took the throne in 2015. "Policies today are being translated by committees but in the future the dedicated office... will issue orders to ministries to implement the prepared strategy with clear roles and objectives," he said.

Prince Mohammed, who became crown prince in 2017 in a palace coup that ousted his predecessor, has consolidated his hold over the main

levers of power in the world's largest oil exporter. He is also the minister of defence, head of the supreme council for state run oil company Saudi Aramco and chairman of sovereign wealth fund the Public Investment Fund, the main engine tasked with delivering on his diversification drive.

His remarks marked the fifth anniversary of Vision 2030, a program intended to modernize the kingdom, wean the economy off oil revenues and lure foreign investment to establish new sectors and spur job creation. Prince Mohammed said that before King Salman assumed power the "situation of the state was weak" with ministries scattered and no public policy.

"Nothing will be achieved without a strong state position that draws policies and sets strategies and aligns them with the different entities," he said 

UAE economy performs better than expected

The UAE economy performed better than expected in 2020 despite the current global challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, said Abdulla bin Touq Al Mari, Minister of Economy, following the issuance of the preliminary results of the country's economic performance by the Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Centre.

The results highlight the effectiveness of the proactive economic measures and incentive packages rolled out



by the UAE government, based on policies that highlight the country's speed and flexibility in responding to global changes, as well as its constant efforts to promote economic diversification. The preliminary results of the UAE's economic performance for 2020 revealed that the country's macroeconomic indicators had seen a relatively limited decline in gross domestic product and in the non-oil GDP last year by 6.1 per cent and 6.2 per cent, respectively, at constant (real) prices compared to 2019. This is a comparatively low decline considering that the slump in major global economies reached several times lower.

Al Mari indicated that 2020 was an unprecedented year full of economic and health challenges that negatively impacted major global economies, and the UAE was not immune to the global economic system in this vulnerability. This is particularly so since the country's economy is linked through foreign trade, foreign investment, tourism and the logistical sector with the movement of trade and investment and global transportation, which declined significantly in 2020 worldwide.

However, the government's proactive economic policies in dealing with the repercussions of the crisis, and the launch of supportive economic packages had a positive role in limiting the negative effects of the pandemic on various vital sectors and on economic activity in particular **r**

Lebanon launches first electric car

A Lebanon-made electric car made its debut, the first time the Mediterranean country has manufactured an automobile, despite struggling amid a dire economic crisis with frequent power cuts. The red

sports car named "Quds Rise", using the Arabic name of Jerusalem is the project of Lebanese-born Palestinian businessman Jihad Mohammad.

It's the "first automobile to be made locally", Mohammad said, at the unveiling in a parking lot south of Beirut. It was built in Lebanon "from start to finish", he said of the prototype, emblazoned at the front with a golden logo of the Dome of the Rock, the shrine in Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque compound, Islam's third holiest site. The car is to cost \$30,000.

Production of up to 10,000 vehicles is hoped to start later this year in Lebanon, with cars to hit the market in a year's time, said Mohammad, the director of Lebanon-based firm EV Electra. Mohammad, 50, said he set up the company four years ago after years abroad, employing Lebanese and Palestinian engineers among 300 members of staff.

He says his long-term goal is to compete on the international market for hybrid and electric cars, as well as to make sales in Lebanon. But the unveiling comes as Lebanon struggles amid its worst economic crisis in decades, and imported car sales are at a record low, in part due to capital controls and drastic devaluation on the black market **r**

Kuwait travel agents incur over KD100m in losses

The COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions have taken a heavy toll on travel firms in Kuwait, with losses estimated at over KD100 million, a Kuwaiti unionist has said.

Around 200 travel offices have been closed and 90 per cent of employees have been laid off due to inability to pay them as a result of the sluggish business, Abdul Rahman Al Kharafi, a

member of the Union of Tourism and Travel Offices, added. "Most of these offices employ only one worker, who handles all booking and accounting business and other affairs," he said.

To help bring the travel industry back to normal, he proposed ending domestic isolation for those who have been vaccinated. "It is illogical to quarantine at home for almost one week the vaccinated arrivals in Kuwait," he said.

"It is also necessary to allow the entry into the country of expatriates who have valid residency permits and have already got the vaccination," Al Kharafi added. Since last February, Kuwait has enforced a ban on foreigners' entry as part of efforts to curb to a spike in COVID-19 infections in the country. Starting from February 21, Kuwait introduced mandatory seven-day hotel quarantine to all passengers arriving in Kuwait at their expense. Upon the end of the institutional quarantine period, passengers will have to undergo domestic quarantine for seven more days.

In yet another measure, Kuwait last month suspended all commercial flights with India until further notice, over a dramatic surge in coronavirus cases there. The ban applies to passengers directly coming from India or through a third country unless they have stayed for at least 14 days outside India. Indians in Kuwait are almost 1 million, being one of the largest foreign communities in the Gulf country **r**



Brazil registers record 14.4m unemployed

Pandemic-battered Brazil registered a record 14.4 million unemployed workers in the three-month period to February 2021, up two million from the year before, officials said. The unemployment rate for the period came in at 14.4 per cent, said the national statistics institute IBGE. That was up from 11.6 per cent the year before, when the coronavirus pandemic was just starting to be felt in Brazil. Latin America's biggest economy has been hit hard by COVID-19, which has devastated the country since the first case was confirmed in February 2020. "In one year of the pandemic, 7.8 million jobs were lost," IBGE said in a statement.

The December-February jobless rate was up 0.2 percentage point from November-January, the second straight increase after four months of decline — the latest sign the Brazilian economy's pandemic recovery could be in trouble. "The new record in the unemployed population grabs one's attention," said analyst Andre Perfeito, of consulting firm Necton. "It reinforces the perspective that



the labour market is fragile, meaning domestic demand can't be considered an engine for GDP growth this year."

The number of "discouraged" workers who have given up job-hunting also reached a record, at six million, up 26.8 per cent in a year, according to IBGE. Brazil's death toll in the pandemic surpassed 400,000, second only to the United States. President Jair Bolsonaro faces backlash for downplaying COVID-19 and flouting expert advice on containing it. The Senate opened an inquiry this week into allegations the

government mismanaged the crisis.

Brazil's economy contracted 4.1 per cent last year, faring relatively well compared to other major economies. But policy makers now face rising inflation and signs of a weakening rebound. Analysts polled by the central bank are forecasting economic growth of 3.09 per cent this year, but the figure has been revised steadily down as Brazil continues to struggle with a new surge of COVID-19 and shortages of vaccines for the country's 212 million people **r**

Biden's corporate tax plan takes aim at income inequality

From John Kennedy to Ronald Reagan to Donald Trump, American presidents have taken aim at corporate America's tax-avoidance schemes before and mostly missed. Now, President Joe Biden is training the government's sights again on the loopholes, shelters and international havens that have long allowed multinational companies to dodge taxes in ways that ordinary households cannot.

The idea is twofold: First, to help pay for Biden's trillions in proposed spending for everything from roads and bridges and green energy to internet access, job training,

preschool and sick leave. And second, to shift more of the federal tax load onto companies and narrow America's vast income inequality. Affluent investors reap the biggest windfalls when after-tax corporate profits accelerate.

"The burden," said Thornton Matheson, senior fellow at the Tax Policy Center, would "fall predominately on wealthier individuals." Biden, in effect, wants to swing the pendulum back. At one time the early-to-mid-1950s corporations accounted for 30 percent of federal tax collections. Last year, their share barely topped 7 percent.

As corporations have generated an ever-smaller share of federal tax revenue, the burden has fallen more heavily on individuals, through the income tax and the levies that pay for Social Security and Medicare. The president wants to stop companies from stashing profits in countries with low tax rates.

To do so, he's proposed a 21 percent minimum tax on multinationals' foreign earnings and is urging other countries to follow suit. His plan would also rescind what the administration sees as international loopholes in Trump's 2017 tax legislation.

To strengthen its ability to root out tax cheating, the administration has proposed adding \$80 billion to the IRS budget over a decade to bolster the agency's underfunded enforcement team. As part of his effort to reduce America's wealth gap, he's also proposed raising the tax rate on long-term capital gains for Americans who earn over \$1 million a year.

Many analysts see Biden's corporate tax plan as a gamechanger if Congress embraces it.

If adopted, the 21 percent minimum global tax "effectively spells the end of the tax haven as we have come to know it," said Alexander Arnon, an analyst at the non-partisan Penn Wharton Budget Model, a research organization associated with the University of Pennsylvania.

Penn Wharton's analysts estimate that a 21 percent minimum global tax and other international provisions of Biden's tax plan would raise \$987 billion from 2022 through 2031 nearly half as much as Biden's overall corporate tax plan would produce. Biden would collect an additional \$892 billion from the centerpiece of his plan: an increase in the overall corporate tax rate to 28 percent from the 21 percent Trump slashed it to in 2017, the Penn Wharton analysis finds **r**

US recovery from pandemic recession slows momentum

Powered by consumers and fueled by government aid, the US economy is achieving a remarkably fast recovery from the recession that ripped through the nation last year on the heels of the coronavirus and cost tens of millions of Americans their jobs and businesses. The economy grew last quarter at a vigorous 6.4 percent annual rate, the government



said, and expectations are that the current quarter will be even better. The number of people seeking unemployment aid a rough reflection of layoffs last week reached its lowest point since the pandemic struck. And the National Association of Realtors said that more Americans signed contracts to buy homes in March, reflecting a strong housing market as summer approaches.

Economists say that widespread vaccinations and declining viral cases, the reopening of more businesses, a huge infusion of federal spending and healthy job gains should help sustain steady growth. For 2021 as a whole, they expect the economy to expand close to 7 percent, which would mark the fastest calendar-year growth since 1984.

The economic gains have become increasingly evident in recent weeks. In March, US employers added 916000 jobs the biggest burst of hiring since August. At the same time, retail spending has surged, manufacturing output is up and consumer confidence has reached its highest point since the pandemic began.

The speed of the rebounding economy has been particularly striking given the scope of damage the pandemic inflicted on it beginning in March of last year. With businesses all but shut down, the economy contracted at a record annual pace of 31 percent in the April-June quarter of last year before rebounding sharply in the subsequent months.

In its report, the government said the nation's gross domestic product its total output of goods and services accelerated in the January-March quarter from a 4.3 percent annual gain in the last quarter of 2020. It was the first of three estimates of growth last quarter; the government will revise the figure twice in the coming weeks.

Some economists say growth in the current April-June period could reach a 10 percent annual pace or more, driven by a surge in people traveling, shopping, dining out and otherwise resuming their spending habits **r**

Eurozone suffers double-dip recession as pandemic continues

Europe's economy officially entered a double-dip recession in the first three months of the year, as it struggled with a surge in COVID-19 cases and a slow vaccine rollout. GDP shrank by 0.6 percent across the Eurozone in the first quarter, and by 0.4 percent across the wider EU27, the latest Eurostat figures show.

That left the European economy contracting for the second quarter in a row, and slipping into a double-dip recession after a rebound in growth last autumn. However, among the national economies that have reported data so far, that pattern was repeated only by Italy. Other countries reported some growth in one or other of the last two quarters.



The French economy did grow in the first three months of this year, by 0.4 percent, after a decline at the end of 2020, although the rebound was described by the national statistical agency as “limited.”

In Germany, it was the other way around, with some growth in the fourth quarter of last year and a sharp decline of 1.7 percent revealed by the latest figures. The drop in output was smaller than the 1 percent contraction expected by economists, but still far short of the rebound seen in the United States and China, two other pillars of the global economy.

US growth figures released showed that the US economy grew 1.6 percent during the first quarter, buoyed by widespread coronavirus vaccinations and massive federal stimulus spending. Economists expect Europe to also see an upturn in the coming weeks as the continent’s vaccine rollout accelerates and coronavirus lockdowns are eased **r**

Suez gridlock chokes global trade

Suez Canal crisis caused by Ever Given, a huge bulk carrier that had run aground, could mean shipping delays and higher prices for consumers around the globe, according to analysts. The extent of the impact of the canal gridlock on the global trade depends on how quickly the massive vessel, which holds upward of 20,000 shipping containers, can be moved out of the way, maritime experts said.

The 220,000-tonne Ever Given that is 400 meters long and almost 60 meters wide has become wedged between the two sides of the canal for the past six days, apparently grounded by wind during a sandstorm. Trade experts warn that the situation could be catastrophic for the global

economy, which is already struggling to recover from the devastating blow of the COVID-19 pandemic. The blockage could lead to a sharp rise in essential commodity prices including crude oil and food grains among other items and could severely impact global trade. It is costing nearly \$400 million per hour as hundreds of ships ferrying cargo through the canal have been forced to divert and take longer routes.

Vijay Valecha, chief investment officer, Century Financial, said when it comes to shipping goods from Asia to Europe, there are virtually no alternatives such as rail or truck transportation **r**

Global crypto market crosses \$2t for first time

Led by Bitcoin, the global cryptocurrency market has zoomed past \$2 trillion in market capitalization amid a surge in institutional demand. Bitcoin alone has contributed more than \$1 trillion after its price more than doubled in 2021 and is currently hovering around \$57,000 per digital coin. The other key cryptocurrencies Ethereum, Binance Coin, Polkadot, Tether and Cardano have a combined value of about \$422 billion.

The electric car company Tesla has announced to start accepting Bitcoin as payment. Tesla has already invested \$1.5 billion in Bitcoins. Tesla CEO Elon Musk said late last month that people in the US can now buy a Tesla with Bitcoins, and the option to pay with the popular cryptocurrency will be available to other countries later this year.

According to Shivam Thakral, CEO, BuyUcoin, the digital assets have beaten every other asset class as Bitcoin and Ethereum have grown 100 per cent and 190 per cent this year, respectively.

“The growing global support for crypto industry is not surprising as think tanks/institutions across the globe have realised the importance of digital assets and want to take first mover advantage. There is no other asset class in the world which can provide such a strong hedge against inflation,” Thakral said in a statement.

In India, with Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman saying that all windows on cryptocurrencies will not be closed down, industry stakeholders last month said that a positive move at this point can unleash a host of opportunities for the country. India’s leading cryptocurrency players, represented by IAMAI (Internet and Mobile Association of India) have appealed to the government of India not to ban cryptocurrency, saying that a robust mechanism to regulate the ecosystem is needed.

The government has listed the Cryptocurrency and Regulation of Official Digital Currency Bill, 2021 for introduction, consideration and passing in the current session of Parliament **r**

WTO confident on global economic recovery in 2021

The World Trade Organization raised its growth forecast for global goods trade by eight per cent this year the biggest increase since 2010 saying that vaccines had given the world a chance of stopping COVID and jump-starting the economy.

WTO director-general Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala said the outlook, however, was clouded by risks from the rollout of coronavirus vaccines and the possible emergence of vaccine-resistant strains. She warned that COVID-19 continues to pose the greatest threat to the outlook as new waves of infection could undermine any hoped-for recovery **r**

জিডিপির প্রবৃদ্ধি হবে ৩ দশমিক ৬ শতাংশ; বিশ্বব্যাংকের পূর্বাভাস

চলতি ২০২০-২১ অর্থবছরে বাংলাদেশের মোট দেশজ উৎপাদনের (জিডিপি) প্রবৃদ্ধি ৩ দশমিক ৬ শতাংশ হতে পারে বলে জানিয়েছে বিশ্বব্যাংক। সম্প্রতি প্রকাশিত বিশ্বব্যাংকের 'সাউথ এশিয়া ইকোনমিক ফোকাস স্প্রিং ২০২১: সাউথ এশিয়া ভ্যাকসিনেটস' প্রতিবেদনে প্রবৃদ্ধির এ পূর্বাভাস দেয়া হয়। এতে বলা হয়, বাংলাদেশে অর্থনৈতিক পুনরুদ্ধার শুরু হয়েছে, তবে এখনো অর্থনীতিতে ব্যাপক অনিশ্চয়তা আছে। করোনার দ্বিতীয় ধাক্কার কারণে রফতানি ও প্রবাসী আয় বাধাগ্রস্ত হতে পারে। তবে এর মধ্যেও আগামী অর্থবছরে বাংলাদেশের প্রবৃদ্ধি বাড়বে বলে আশা বিশ্বব্যাংকের।

এর আগে গত জানুয়ারিতে গ্লোবাল ইকোনমিক প্রসপেক্টস প্রতিবেদনে বিশ্বব্যাংক বলেছিল, ২০২০-২১ অর্থবছরে বাংলাদেশের প্রবৃদ্ধি ১ দশমিক ৬ শতাংশ হতে পারে। কিন্তু অর্থনৈতিক পুনরুদ্ধারে গতিপ্রকৃতি বিবেচনা করে তিন মাস পরই এ পূর্বাভাসে পরিবর্তন আনা হলো। মূলত যেটুকু আশা করা হয়েছিল, তার চেয়েও বেশি প্রবাসী আয় আসায় চলতি অর্থবছরে জিডিপির প্রবৃদ্ধিতে এ পরিবর্তন। এছাড়া, ২০২০ সালের দ্বিতীয়ার্ধে করোনা সংক্রান্ত বিভিন্ন বিধিনিষেধ উঠিয়ে দেয়ায় বাংলাদেশের অর্থনীতি পুনরুদ্ধারের পথে হাঁটতে শুরু করে।

বিশ্বব্যাংক বলছে, আগামী অর্থবছরে বাংলাদেশের প্রবৃদ্ধি ৫ দশমিক ১ শতাংশ হতে পারে। পরের বছর তা বেড়ে ৬ দশমিক ২ শতাংশে দাঁড়াতে পারে। করোনা মহামারী পরিস্থিতি কোন দিকে যায়, পরিবর্তিত পরিস্থিতিতে সরকার কী ধরনের নীতি গ্রহণ করে, তার ওপরও অনেক কিছু নির্ভর করছে। ২০২২ সালের মধ্যে প্রায় ৭০ শতাংশ জনগোষ্ঠীকে টিকার আওতায় আনতে হলে ৪৪ থেকে ১৮৮ কোটি ডলার প্রয়োজন হবে বলেও প্রতিবেদনে উল্লেখ করা হয়েছে। সেখানে বলা হয়েছে, দেশের প্রবৃদ্ধি নির্ভর করবে বর্তমান করোনার টিকা প্রদান কর্মসূচির গতিপ্রকৃতি, চলাচলে নতুন নিষেধাজ্ঞা, কত দ্রুত অর্থনৈতিক পুনরুদ্ধার হবে তার ওপর।

প্রতিবেদন প্রকাশ উপলক্ষে সম্প্রতি বিশ্বব্যাংকের ওয়াশিংটন কার্যালয় থেকে এক অনলাইন সংবাদ সম্মেলনের আয়োজন করা হয়। সম্মেলনে বিশ্বব্যাংকের দক্ষিণ এশিয়াবিষয়ক ভাইস প্রেসিডেন্ট হাটউইগ শেফার বলেন, করোনার কারণে বহু লোক দারিদ্র্যসীমার নিচে নেমে গেছে। অনেকে কাজ হারিয়েছেন। এমন অবস্থায় নিরাপদ অর্থনৈতিক পুনরুদ্ধারের পথ হলো টিকা প্রদান। বিশ্বব্যাংক বাংলাদেশসহ বিভিন্ন দেশকে টিকা কেনার অর্থ দিচ্ছে। বিশ্বব্যাংক দক্ষিণ এশিয়ার সব মানুষের জন্য টিকা নিশ্চিত করতে চায়।

এ সময় বিশ্বব্যাংকের দক্ষিণ এশিয়াবিষয়ক প্রধান অর্থনীতিবিদ হ্যানস টিমার বলেন, বাংলাদেশের বিপদ এখনো কাটেনি। এখনো অনেক অনিশ্চয়তা আছে। গত দুই প্রান্তিকে অর্থনৈতিক পুনরুদ্ধারে নানা ধরনের কার্যক্রম শুরু হয়েছে। কিন্তু এর মানে এই নয় যে সমস্যা অতিক্রম হয়েছে। দক্ষিণ এশিয়ার দেশগুলোয় কত লোক কোভিড-১৯-এ সংক্রমিত হচ্ছেন, তা নির্ধারণ করা কঠিন। সরকারি তথ্য-উপাত্তে যে সংখ্যা দেখানো হয়, তা সংক্রমিত ব্যক্তির প্রকৃত সংখ্যা নয় বলেও উল্লেখ করেন তিনি।

চলতি অর্থবছরে একমাত্র ভূটান ছাড়া বাকি সব দেশের জিডিপি প্রবৃদ্ধি হবে বলে জানায় বিশ্বব্যাংক। সংবাদ সম্মেলনে বলা হয়, ভারতে ১০ দশমিক ১ শতাংশ প্রবৃদ্ধি হতে পারে। মালদ্বীপের প্রবৃদ্ধি সর্বোচ্চ ১৭ দশমিক ১ শতাংশ হতে পারে। এছাড়া পাকিস্তান ১ দশমিক ৩ শতাংশ, নেপাল ২ দশমিক ৭ শতাংশ, আফগানিস্তান ১ শতাংশ ও শ্রীলংকা ৩ দশমিক ৪ শতাংশ প্রবৃদ্ধি অর্জন করতে পারে। আর ভূটানের জিডিপি ১ দশমিক ৮ শতাংশ কমে যেতে পারে। সার্বিকভাবে ২০২১ সালে দক্ষিণ এশিয়ার গড় প্রবৃদ্ধি হতে পারে ৭ দশমিক ২ শতাংশ।

প্রণোদনা প্যাকেজ সম্প্রসারণ ও মেয়াদ বৃদ্ধির পরামর্শ; প্রাক-বাজেট আলোচনায় অর্থনীতিবিদরা

ঘোষিত প্রণোদনা প্যাকেজ অব্যাহত রাখার পাশাপাশি যেসব খাত প্রণোদনা সুবিধা পায়নি, সেগুলোকেও প্যাকেজের আওতায় আনা প্রয়োজন। যেসব খাত সরাসরি জনগণের স্বার্থের সঙ্গে জড়িত, আগামী বাজেটে প্রয়োজন হবে সেসব খাতের ওপর জোর দেয়া। জেলা পর্যায়ে স্বাস্থ্যসেবা উন্নয়নের ওপর প্রয়োজন বিশেষ নজরের। আবার করোনাভাইরাস পরিস্থিতির কারণে সরকার ঘোষিত প্রণোদনা প্যাকেজ সম্প্রসারণ ও মেয়াদ বৃদ্ধি করার দরকার হতে পারে। এসব পরামর্শ অর্থমন্ত্রীকে দিয়েছেন অর্থনীতিবিদরা।

সম্প্রতি অর্থমন্ত্রী আ হ ম মুস্তফা কামালের সঙ্গে ২০২১-২২ অর্থবছরের প্রাক-বাজেট আলোচনায় হয় দেশের প্রতিষ্ঠাতা অর্থনীতিবিদ, সংগঠন ও গবেষণা প্রতিষ্ঠানের শীর্ষ নির্বাহীদের। ভারুয়াল ওই সভায় অংশ নেন সেন্টার ফর

পলিসি ডায়ালগের (সিপিডি) চেয়ারম্যান ড. রেহমান সোবহান, অর্থনীতিবিদ ড. ওয়াহিদ উদ্দিন মাহমুদ, ড. কাজী খলীকুজ্জামান আহমদ ও ড. এসআর ওসমানী, সাবেক অর্থমন্ত্রী এম সাইদুজ্জামান, তত্ত্বাবধায়ক সরকারের সাবেক অর্থ উপদেষ্টা ড. এবি মির্জা আজিজুল ইসলাম ও ড. আকবর আলি খান, বাংলাদেশ ব্যাংকের সাবেক গভর্নর ড. মোহাম্মদ ফরাস উদ্দিন, ড. সালেহ উদ্দিন আহমেদ, ড. আতিউর রহমান।

এছাড়া অংশ নেন সাবেক অর্থ সচিব এম মতিউল ইসলাম, মীর মুস্তাফিজুর রহমান, মাহবুব আহমেদ, ড. মোহাম্মদ তারেক, পলিসি রিচার্স ইনস্টিটিউট (পিআরআই) চেয়ারম্যান ড. জাইদি সাত্তার, নির্বাহী পরিচালক ড. আহসান এইচ মনসুর, বাংলাদেশ অর্থনীতি সমিতির সভাপতি অধ্যাপক ড. আবুল বারকাত, সাধারণ সম্পাদক ড. জামালউদ্দিন আহমদ, ঢাকা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের

অর্থনীতি বিভাগের অধ্যাপক ড. এমএম আকাশ। অর্থমন্ত্রী আ হ ম মুস্তফা কামাল বলেন, অর্থনীতিবিদদের সব পরামর্শ আমরা রেকর্ড করেছি। এরপর যারা বাজেট প্রণয়ন করছেন, তাদের সঙ্গে আলোচনা করে অর্থনীতিবিদদের পরামর্শগুলো গুরুত্বসহকারে বিবেচনা করা হবে। গত বছরও করোনাভাইরাসের মধ্যে বাজেট প্রণয়ন করতে হয়েছে। এ বছরও একই অবস্থা। এ সময় শুধু দেশীয় বিবেচনায় কিছু করা সম্ভব নয়। প্রধানমন্ত্রী সবসময় দেশের সাধারণ মানুষের জীবনের নিরাপত্তার ওপর জোর দিয়ে আসছেন। তার নির্দেশে আমরা জনকল্যাণমুখী বাজেট প্রণয়নের চেষ্টা করছি।

অর্থনীতিবিদরা কী পরামর্শ দিয়েছেন এমন প্রশ্নের উত্তরে অর্থমন্ত্রী বলেন, ঘোষিত প্রণোদনা প্যাকেজ অব্যাহত রাখার পাশাপাশি যেসব খাত প্রণোদনা সুবিধা পায়নি, সেগুলোকেও

প্যাকেজের আওতায় আনার পরামর্শ দিয়েছেন অর্থনীতিবিদরা। যেসব খাত সরাসরি জনগণের স্বার্থের সঙ্গে জড়িত আগামী বাজেটে সেসব খাতের ওপর জোর দেয়া হবে। জনগণের হাতে টাকা-পয়সা যেতে পারে। অর্থনীতিবিদরা তাদের আলোচনায় জেলা পর্যায়ে স্বাস্থ্যসেবা উন্নয়নের ওপর বিশেষ নজর দেয়ার পরামর্শ দিয়েছেন। এছাড়া মুদ্রানীতি সম্প্রসারণমূলক হওয়া প্রয়োজন। করোনাভাইরাস পরিস্থিতির কারণে সরকার ঘোষিত প্রণোদনা প্যাকেজ সম্প্রসারণ ও মেয়াদ বৃদ্ধির পরামর্শ দিয়েছেন অর্থনীতিবিদরা। তবে প্যাকেজের বিষয়ে প্রধানমন্ত্রীকে অবহিত করব, তিনি এ বিষয়ে সিদ্ধান্ত নেবেন।

সভায় আয়কর আদায়ের হার বাড়ানোর ওপর জোর দেয়া হয়েছে। কারণ প্রতিবেশী দেশগুলোর তুলনায় আমাদের ট্যাক্স-জিডিপি অনুপাত অত্যন্ত কম। যেসব পণ্যের ওপর যে হারে কর আদায় করা উচিত, আমাদের এখানে সে হারে আদায় হচ্ছে না। অনেক ক্ষেত্রেই ট্যাক্স মওকুফ করা হয়। যেমন: সরকারের বিভিন্ন মেগা প্রকল্পে এ ধরনের ব্যবস্থা রয়েছে। আমরা চেষ্টা করছি ট্যাক্স-জিডিপি অনুপাত বাড়ানোর জন্য। পর্যায়ক্রমে করপোর্ট ট্যাক্স কমিয়ে আনা হচ্ছে। চলতি বাজেটে এটা কমানো হয়েছে, আগামী বাজেটেও বিষয়টি বিবেচনা করা হবে।

কালো টাকা সাদা করার বিষয়ে অর্থনীতিবিদদের পরামর্শ প্রসঙ্গে তিনি বলেন, অপ্রদর্শিত অর্থ ঘোষণা দিয়ে তা সাদা করার নিয়ম এখনো আছে। এ কারণে বৈধ ব্যবসায়ীরা নিরুৎসাহিত হচ্ছেন কিনা সেটি যাচাইয়ের জন্য পরামর্শ দিয়েছেন অর্থনীতিবিদরা। অপ্রদর্শিত অর্থ বিশেষ করে জায়গা-জমি বা এ ধরনের সম্পত্তি ক্রয়ে বিনিয়োগ করা হয়। জমি রেজিস্ট্রেশনে বেশি দামে কিনে কম দাম দেখিয়ে কর ফাঁকি

দেয়ার প্রবণতা রয়েছে। এটা বন্ধ করার জন্য ডিজিটলাইজেশন করার কাজ চলছে। এছাড়া অপ্রদর্শিত অর্থের উৎস বন্ধ করতে কাজ করা হচ্ছে।

৮ মাসে রাজস্ব প্রবৃদ্ধি ৫.১৭%, ঘাটতি ৪৩ হাজার কোটি টাকা

করোনার প্রথম ধাক্কা সামলে গতি ফিরে পেয়েছিল অর্থনীতি। গত কয়েক মাস ধরে আমদানি-রফতানি বেড়েছে, স্থানীয় উৎপাদন ও সরবরাহেও গতি আসে। ফলে রাজস্ব আদায়ও বেড়েছে। রাজস্ব লক্ষ্যমাত্রার তুলনায় ৪৩ হাজার কোটি টাকা ঘাটতি থাকলেও বেড়েছে আহরণ ও প্রবৃদ্ধি। চলতি অর্থবছরের ফেব্রুয়ারিতে গত অর্থবছরের ফেব্রুয়ারির তুলনায় প্রায় ২ হাজার কোটি টাকা বেশি রাজস্ব আহরণ করে জাতীয় রাজস্ব বোর্ড (এনবিআর)। এক্ষেত্রে প্রবৃদ্ধি দাঁড়িয়েছে ১০ দশমিক ১৮ শতাংশ। আর অর্থবছরের আট মাসে (জুলাই-ফেব্রুয়ারি) গত অর্থবছরের তুলনায় সাড়ে সাত হাজার কোটি টাকারও বেশি আহরণ হয়েছে। প্রবৃদ্ধি দাঁড়িয়েছে ৫ দশমিক ১৭ শতাংশ। সম্প্রতি প্রকাশিত এনবিআরের সর্বশেষ প্রতিবেদন সূত্রে এসব তথ্য জানা গেছে।

এনবিআরের প্রতিবেদনে দেখা গেছে, চলতি অর্থবছরের ফেব্রুয়ারিতে স্থানীয় পর্যায়ে মূল্য সংযোজন কর (মুসক) বা ভ্যাট থেকে ৫ হাজার ৩১২ কোটি ৫৫ লাখ টাকার রাজস্ব আহরণ হয়েছে, যা গত অর্থবছরের ফেব্রুয়ারির চেয়ে ১২ দশমিক ৭৫ শতাংশ বেশি। গত ফেব্রুয়ারিতে এ খাতে রাজস্ব আহরণ হয়েছিল ৪ হাজার ৭১১ কোটি ৬৫ লাখ টাকা। তবে গত আট মাসে এ খাতে আগের বছরের একই সময়ের চেয়ে রাজস্ব

আহরণ কিছুটা কমে দাঁড়িয়েছে ৩৮ হাজার ৭৩৪ কোটি ৯৭ লাখ টাকা। এছাড়া আমদানি পর্যায়ে মুসক বা ভ্যাট থেকে গত ফেব্রুয়ারিতে রাজস্ব আহরণ হয়েছে ৩ হাজার ৫০ কোটি ২ লাখ টাকা, যা গত অর্থবছরের ফেব্রুয়ারির তুলনায় ১০ দশমিক ৫১ শতাংশ বেশি। আর আট মাসে এ খাতে রাজস্ব আহরণ হয় ২২ হাজার ৭০৯ কোটি ৩২ লাখ টাকা, যা গত অর্থবছরের একই সময়ের চেয়ে ১০ দশমিক ৩৮ শতাংশ বেশি।

আয়কর খাত থেকে গত ফেব্রুয়ারিতে রাজস্ব আহরণ হয়েছে ৫ হাজার ৮৮১ কোটি ৪৪ লাখ টাকা। যা গত অর্থবছরের ফেব্রুয়ারির তুলনায় প্রায় ৬ শতাংশ বেশি। আর আট মাসে এ খাতে রাজস্ব আহরণ হয়েছে ৪৬ হাজার ৬৯৬ কোটি ৬৯ লাখ টাকা, যা গত অর্থবছরের একই সময়ের চেয়ে ৬ দশমিক ৪৪ শতাংশ বেশি। এছাড়া চলতি অর্থবছরের আট মাসে আমদানি শুল্ক খাত থেকে রাজস্ব আহরণ হয়েছে ১৮ হাজার ৩১৮ কোটি ৪৮ লাখ টাকা, যা গত অর্থবছরের একই সময়ের চেয়ে ৮ দশমিক ১৭ শতাংশ বেশি।

আমদানি পর্যায়ে সম্পূরক শুল্ক থেকে আট মাসে রাজস্ব আহরণ হয়েছে ৫ হাজার ২০৯ কোটি ৭৭ লাখ টাকা, যা গত অর্থবছরের একই সময়ের চেয়ে ২ দশমিক ৭৫ শতাংশ কম। স্থানীয় পর্যায়ে সম্পূরক শুল্ক থেকে আট মাসে রাজস্ব আহরণ হয়েছে ১৮ হাজার ৬৫১ কোটি ২২ লাখ টাকা, যা গত অর্থবছরের একই সময়ের চেয়ে ১১ দশমিক ৮৬ শতাংশ বেশি। এছাড়াও গত আট মাসে আবগারি শুল্ক থেকে রাজস্ব আহরণ হয়েছে ২ হাজার ১৪০ কোটি ৫২ লাখ টাকা। ভ্রমণ কর থেকে রাজস্ব আহরণ হয়েছে ১৮৩ কোটি ২০ লাখ টাকা। পাশাপাশি টার্নওভার ট্যাক্স থেকে রাজস্ব আহরণ হয়েছে ৬৫ লাখ টাকা।

যন্ত্রের কাছে চাকরি হারাতে প্রতি ১০ জনে ৬; ওয়ার্ল্ড ইকোনমিক ফোরামের প্রতিবেদন

করোনা মহামারীর কারণে গত বছর বিশ্বজুড়ে চাকরি হারিয়েছে কয়েক কোটি মানুষ। মহামারী থেকে যখন ঘুরে দাঁড়াচ্ছিল বিশ্ব, তখন ফের করোনার হানায় চাকরি হারানোর ভয়ে আছে বিভিন্ন দেশের মানুষ। এরই মধ্যে ভবিষ্যৎ শ্রমবাজার নিয়ে একটি ভয়ংকর রিপোর্ট প্রকাশ করেছে ওয়ার্ল্ড ইকোনমিক ফোরাম (ডব্লিউইএফ)। তারা বলছে, ২০২৫ সালের মধ্যে মেশিন বা যন্ত্রের কাছে চাকরি হারাতে প্রতি ১০ জনের মধ্যে অন্তত ছয়জন। তখন কর্মস্থলে মানুষ ও মেশিন প্রায় সমান কাজ করবে।

ডব্লিউইএফের প্রতিবেদনে আরো বলা হয়, করোনার আগে এবং করোনা মহামারী চলাকালীন মেশিনের ব্যবহার অত্যধিক বৃদ্ধি পেয়েছে, যার কারণে আরো বেশি লোক তাদের চাকরি হারাতে। ১৯টি দেশের ৩২

হাজার চাকরিজীবীর ওপর পিডব্লিউসির পরিচালিত জরিপের ভিত্তিতে প্রতিবেদনটি করেছে ওয়ার্ল্ড ইকোনমিক ফোরাম। চাকরির নিরাপত্তা নিয়ে কর্মীরা কী ভাবছে, কাজের বৈচিত্র্য ও অন্তর্ভুক্তি, দক্ষতা, কর্মস্থানের দূরত্ব, সংস্থার পক্ষে কাজ করতে কতটা সক্ষম তার ভিত্তিতে।

বিশ্বব্যাপী জরিপ করা ৪০ শতাংশ কর্মচারী মনে করছেন যে তারা আসন্ন পাঁচ বছরের মধ্যে চাকরি হারাবেন। একই সঙ্গে ৫০ শতাংশ লোক মনে করেন যে তারা ভবিষ্যতেও দীর্ঘমেয়াদি কর্মসংস্থানের বিকল্পগুলো পেতে সক্ষম হবেন। বিশ্বব্যাপী ৪০ শতাংশ মানুষ লকডাউনকালে তাদের ডিজিটাল দক্ষতা উন্নত করেছে, আবার ৭৭ শতাংশ মানুষ নতুন কিছু শিখতে পেরেছে এবং নিজের দক্ষতা বাড়িয়েছে।

বিডার ওয়েব পোর্টাল থেকে দেয়া হবে ৪৭ সেবা

বাংলাদেশ বিনিয়োগ উন্নয়ন কর্তৃপক্ষের (বিডা) ওয়ান স্টপ সার্ভিস (ওএসএস) পোর্টালে নতুন করে যুক্ত হলো আরো পাঁচটি সেবা। সম্প্রতি বিডার নির্বাহী চেয়ারম্যান মো. সিরাজুল ইসলাম এ সেবাগুলোর উদ্বোধন করেন। এর ফলে এখন থেকে বিডা ওয়েব পোর্টালের মাধ্যমে অতিক্রান্ত সহজেই ৪৭টি সেবা পাবেন বিনিয়োগকারীরা। সম্প্রতি বিডা আয়োজিত এক ভার্চুয়াল অনুষ্ঠান থেকে এসব সেবার উদ্বোধন করা হয়। অনুষ্ঠানে সভাপতিত্ব করেন বিডার নির্বাহী চেয়ারম্যান মো. সিরাজুল ইসলাম। সভায় প্রধান অতিথি ছিলেন বিদ্যুৎ বিভাগের সচিব মো. হাবিবুর রহমান। বিশেষ অতিথি ছিলেন জাতীয় রাজস্ব বোর্ডের সদস্য জাকিয়া সুলতানা (ভ্যাট অডিট অ্যান্ড ইন্টেলিজেন্স)।

নতুন যুক্ত হওয়া এ পাঁচ সেবার মধ্যে রয়েছে জাতীয় রাজস্ব বোর্ডের অনলাইন ভ্যাট রেজিস্ট্রেশন প্রদান, ঢাকা ইলেকট্রিক সাপ্লাই কোম্পানি লিমিটেডের (ডেসকো) বিদ্যুৎ সংযোগ প্রদান, ওয়েস্ট জোন পাওয়ার ডিস্ট্রিবিউশন কোম্পানি লিমিটেডের বিদ্যুৎ সংযোগ প্রদান, নর্দান ইলেক্ট্রিসিটি সাপ্লাই কোম্পানি লিমিটেডের বিদ্যুৎ সংযোগ প্রদান এবং বিডা থেকে দ্বিতীয় আইআরসির সুপারিশ।

অনুষ্ঠানে সভাপতির বক্তব্যে বিডার নির্বাহী চেয়ারম্যান বলেন, সারা দুনিয়ার অর্থনীতি যেখানে মুখ খুঁড়ে পড়েছে, সেখানে গত বছরও বাংলাদেশে ৫ দশমিক ২ শতাংশের মতো জিডিপি প্রবৃদ্ধি হয়েছে। ডিজিটাল বাংলাদেশের ডিজিটাল সেবাগুলোর মাধ্যমে লকডাউনের মধ্যেও তা সম্ভব হয়েছে। করোনাকালীন লকডাউনের সময়েও বিডা প্রতিদিন বিনিয়োগকারীদের অনলাইন সার্ভিসের মাধ্যমে সহায়তা করে এসেছে উল্লেখ করে মো. সিরাজুল ইসলাম বলেন, শুধু ওএসএস পোর্টালে সার্ভিস সংযুক্ত করাই বিডার উদ্দেশ্য নয়। বিডার উদ্দেশ্য হচ্ছে উন্নত বিনিয়োগ পরিবেশ বিনির্মাণের লক্ষ্যে বিনিয়োগকারীদের অনলাইনের মাধ্যমে স্বচ্ছ দ্রুত সেবা দেয়া। যাতে বিনিয়োগকারীরা একই প্ল্যাটফর্ম থেকে সব ধরনের বিনিয়োগ সেবা পেতে পারেন।

সভায় প্রধান অতিথির বক্তব্যে মো. হাবিবুর রহমান বলেন, বাংলাদেশে বিনিয়োগ পরিবেশ উন্নত করার জন্য দ্রুত বিদ্যুৎ সেবা দেয়ার বিকল্প নেই। আমরা সব সময় বিনিয়োগকারীদের নিরবচ্ছিন্ন বিদ্যুৎ সরবরাহের জন্য কাজ করে যাচ্ছি। বিডার অনলাইনের মাধ্যমে তিনটি বিদ্যুৎ কোম্পানির

সেবা যুক্ত হওয়ার ফলে বিনিয়োগকারীরা সহজেই ৭ থেকে ২৮ দিনের মধ্যে বিদ্যুৎ সংযোগ পাবেন। শুধু তা-ই নয়, এখন থেকে অনলাইনের মাধ্যমে বিনিয়োগকারীদের যাবতীয় অভিযোগও দ্রুত নিষ্পত্তি করা হবে।

সিএমএসএমই খাতে ৩০০ কোটি টাকা ঋণ দেবে এসএমই ফাউন্ডেশন ২৫-৩০ শতাংশ পাবেন নারী-উদ্যোক্তারা

কুটির, অতিক্ষুদ্র, ছোট ও মাঝারি (সিএমএসএমই) উদ্যোক্তাদের ৩০০ কোটি টাকা ঋণ দেবে এসএমই ফাউন্ডেশন। এর মধ্যে চলতি অর্থবছরে ১০০ কোটি এবং আগামী অর্থবছরে ২০০ কোটি টাকা বিতরণ করা হবে। কোভিড-১৯ পরিস্থিতিতে দেশের অর্থনৈতিক পুনরুদ্ধার কার্যক্রম ত্বরান্বিত করা এবং পল্লী এলাকার প্রান্তিক জনগোষ্ঠীর জীবনমান উন্নয়নে সরকারের দ্বিতীয় দফার প্রণোদনার আওতায় এ ঋণ দেয়া হবে। মোট ঋণের ২৫-৩০ শতাংশই নারী-উদ্যোক্তাদের মাঝে বিতরণের লক্ষ্য ঠিক করা হয়েছে। প্রণোদনা প্যাকেজের আওতায় উদ্যোক্তারা ৪ শতাংশ সুদে এ ঋণ পাবেন।

গ্রাহক পর্যায়ে ঋণের পরিমাণ হবে সর্বনিম্ন ১ লাখ টাকা থেকে সর্বোচ্চ ৭৫ লাখ টাকা পর্যন্ত। ব্যাংকার-গ্রাহক সম্পর্কের ভিত্তিতে সর্বোচ্চ ২৪টি সমান মাসিক কিস্তিতে ঋণ পরিশোধ করা যাবে। ব্যাংকের চাহিদাকৃত ডকুমেন্টসহ সম্পূর্ণ ঋণ আবেদনপত্র ব্যাংকের কাছে দাখিলের ১৫ কার্যদিবসের মধ্যে ঋণ মঞ্জুর করে গ্রাহকের অনুকূলে বিতরণের উদ্যোগ গ্রহণ করবে সংশ্লিষ্ট ব্যাংক। সাধারণভাবে একক ও যৌথ মালিকানাধীন উদ্যোগের অনুকূলে ঋণ বিতরণ করা হবে। তবে প্রান্তিক ক্ষুদ্র, বিশেষকরে নারী-উদ্যোক্তাদের ঋণের আওতায় আনার লক্ষ্যে ব্যাংকার-গ্রাহক সম্পর্ক ও ঐকমত্যের ভিত্তিতে সর্বোচ্চ পাঁচজন উদ্যোক্তার অনুকূলে গ্রুপভিত্তিক ঋণ বিতরণ করা যাবে।

ঋণ প্রদানের জন্য অংশীদার ব্যাংক ও আর্থিক প্রতিষ্ঠানের সঙ্গে আলোচনা করে উদ্যোক্তাদের জন্য সুবিধাজনক এক বা একাধিক শাখায় ফোকাল কর্মকর্তা নির্ধারণ করবে এসএমই ফাউন্ডেশন। উদ্যোক্তারা ফোকাল কর্মকর্তার সঙ্গে যোগাযোগ করবেন। ফোকাল কর্মকর্তা এসএমই ফাউন্ডেশন, ব্যাংকের প্রধান কার্যালয় ও শাখা এবং উদ্যোক্তাদের সঙ্গে সমন্বয় করবেন। দেশের সব সিএমএসএমই উদ্যোক্তাদের এ সুযোগ গ্রহণের জন্য সংশ্লিষ্ট ব্যাংক, অ্যাসোসিয়েশন, ট্রেডবডি এবং এসএমই ফাউন্ডেশনের সঙ্গে অনতিবিলম্বে এ বিষয়ে যোগাযোগ করতে হবে।

এদিকে এ ঋণ বিতরণের লক্ষ্যে এরই মধ্যে ১১টি ব্যাংক ও ব্যাংক-বহির্ভূত আর্থিক প্রতিষ্ঠানের সঙ্গে চুক্তি সম্পাদনের মাধ্যমে ঋণ বিতরণের উদ্যোগ গ্রহণ করেছে এসএমই ফাউন্ডেশন। ব্যাংক ও আর্থিক প্রতিষ্ঠানগুলো হলো ব্র্যাক ব্যাংক, প্রিমিয়ার ব্যাংক, মিউচুয়াল ট্রাস্ট ব্যাংক, ব্যাংক এশিয়া, সাউথইস্ট ব্যাংক, ঢাকা ব্যাংক, ডাচ-বাংলা ব্যাংক, প্রাইম ব্যাংক, বেসিক ব্যাংক, আইডিএলসি ফাইন্যান্স ও লংকাবাংলা ফাইন্যান্স।

এসব প্রতিষ্ঠানই সারা দেশের নারী-উদ্যোক্তা এবং এসএমই ফাউন্ডেশন, বিভিন্ন সরকারি-বেসরকারি সংগঠন ও অ্যাসোসিয়েশনের পক্ষ থেকে সুপারিশকৃত এসএমই উপখাত, ট্রেডবডি এবং গ্রুপের তালিকাভুক্ত উদ্যোক্তা এবং সিএমএসএমই খাতের জন্য সরকার ঘোষিত প্রথম দফার প্রণোদনা প্যাকেজের আওতায় ঋণ না পাওয়া পল্লী ও প্রান্তিক পর্যায়ে উদ্যোক্তাদের ঋণ দেবে।

চুক্তির শর্ত অনুযায়ী ব্র্যাক ব্যাংক ভৈরব, ব্রাহ্মণবাড়িয়া, পূর্ব মাদারবাড়ী-চট্টগ্রাম, হাজারীবাগ-ঢাকা সহ সারা দেশের চামড়া ও চামড়াজাত পণ্য প্রস্তুতকারী ক্লাস্টার, পিরোজপুরের বলদিয়া ও যশোরের নরেন্দ্রপুরের ক্রিকেট ব্যাট ক্লাস্টার, গাইবান্ধার গোবিন্দগঞ্জের হোসিয়ারি ক্লাস্টার, সিরাজগঞ্জের শাহজাদপুর, বেলকুচি, উল্লাপাড়া টেক্সটাইল ক্লাস্টার, মানিকগঞ্জের ঘিওর হস্তশিল্প ক্লাস্টার, জামালপুরের হস্তশিল্প ক্লাস্টার, সাতক্ষীরার ব্যান্ডেজ ও গজ ক্লাস্টার, যশোরের ঝিকরগাছা ফুল প্রসেসিং ক্লাস্টার, নীলফামারীর সৈয়দপুর বুট গার্মেন্টস ক্লাস্টার, মৌলভীবাজারের বড়লেখা আগর-আতর ক্লাস্টার, ঝিনাইদহের হস্তশিল্প (বাঁশজাত পণ্য) ক্লাস্টার, পিরোজপুরের নাজিরপুর হস্তশিল্প (হোগলা পাটি, মোড়া) ক্লাস্টার, কুষ্টিয়ার কুমারখালী টেক্সটাইল ক্লাস্টারের উদ্যোক্তাদের ঋণ প্রদান করবে।

আইডিএলসি ফাইন্যান্স যশোর, নাটোর, পাবনা, হবিগঞ্জ, চট্টগ্রাম, বগুড়া সহ সারা দেশের হালকা প্রকৌশল শিল্প ক্লাস্টার, ঢাকার ইসলামাবাগ প্লাস্টিক ক্লাস্টারে ঋণ দেবে। মিউচুয়াল ট্রাস্ট ব্যাংক টাঙ্গাইলের পাথরাইল, দেলদুয়ার, বেলতা, কাশিহাটী হ্যান্ডলুম ক্লাস্টার, প্রিমিয়ার ব্যাংক গৌরীপুর বুট গার্মেন্টস ক্লাস্টার, ময়মনসিংহের চামড়া ও চামড়াজাত পণ্য প্রস্তুতকারী উদ্যোক্তা, মুদ্রণ শিল্প সমিতির সদস্য উদ্যোক্তাদের, ব্যাংক এশিয়া ঢাকার শ্যামপুর, জুরাইন ইলেকট্রিক্যাল প্রডাক্টস ক্লাস্টার, বগুড়ার আদমদীঘর শাঁওইল হ্যান্ডলুম ক্লাস্টার, মুন্সীগঞ্জ ক্ষুদ্র গার্মেন্টস ক্লাস্টার, ঢাকার কেরানীগঞ্জের তৈরি পোশাক শিল্প ক্লাস্টার, নরসিংদীর টেক্সটাইল ক্লাস্টারের ঋণ দেবে।

TRADE INFORMATION

April 2021

The following **Trade Inquiries** have been received in the Chamber from different sources abroad. Interested member-firms may like to contact them directly without any obligation on the part of DCCI.

FAIRS & EXHIBITIONS

Canadian National Exhibition

Date: 20 August -06 September, 2021
 Venue: 100 Princes' Blvd, Toronto, Canada
 Organizer: Canadian National Exhibition
 E-mail: info@theex.com
 Fax: 416-263-3838
 Website: www.theex.com

China International Beauty Expo

Date: 04 September- 06 September, 2021
 Venue: China Import and Export Fair(Canton Fair Complex), Guangzhou, China
 Organizer: GUANGZHOU JIAMEI EXHIBITION CO.,LTD.
 Contact Person: westguan
 E-mail: westguan@chinainternationalbeauty.com
 Website: www.gzen.chinainternationalbeauty.com

Cosmoprof Worldwide Bologna

Date: 09 September- 13 September, 2021
 Venue: bologna fieri, Bologna, Italy
 Organizer: Bologna Fiere
 Contact Person: segreteria.generale
 Tel: +39 0574 6851
 E-mail: segreteria.generale@bolognafiere.itv
 Website: www.bolognafiere.it

The Big 5

Date: 12 September - 15 September, 2021
 Venue: Dubai World Trade Centre, Dubai, UAE
 Organizer: dmg :: events (Middle East Asia)
 Contact Person: louisawalton
 E-mail: louisawalton@dmgeventsme.com
 Website: www.dmgevents.com

Beautyworld Middle East

Date: 05 October - 07 October, 2021
 Venue: Dubai World Trade Centre, Dubai, UAE
 Organizer: Messe Frankfurt Middle East GmbH
 Contact Person: Mr. Manager
 Tel: +971 4 389 4500
 E-mail: info@uae.messefrankfurt.com
 Website: www.ae.messefrankfurt.com

Anuga - Food & Beverage Fair

Date: 09 October - 13 October, 2021
 Venue: Koelnmesse GmbH, Cologne, Germany
 Organizer: Koelnmesse GmbH
 Tel: +49 7665 947750
 E-mail: info@koelnmesse.de
 Website: www.koelnmesse.com

Salon International

Date: 16 October - 18 October 2021
 Venue: ExCel London, London, UK
 Organizer: Professional Beauty Group
 Contact Person: Claudia
 E-mail: claudia@professionalbeauty.co.uk
 Website: www.professionalbeauty.group/site/Home

China Import and Export Fair (Phase 2)

Date: 23 October - 27 October, 2021
 Venue: China Import and Export Fair(Canton Fair Complex), Guangzhou, China
 Organizer: China Foreign Trade Centre (Group)
 E-mail: info@cantonfair.org.cn
 Website: www.cftc.org.cn

China Import and Export Fair (Phase 3)

Date: 31 October - 04 November, 2021
 Venue: China Import and Export Fair(Canton Fair Complex), Guangzhou, China
 Organizer: China Foreign Trade Centre (Group)
 Contact Person: info
 E-mail: info@cantonfair.org.cn
 Website: www.cftc.org.cn

International Tourism & Travel Show

Date: 05 November - 07 November, 2021
 Venue: palais des congrès montréal, Montreal, Canada
 Organizer: Expo Media Inc
 Contact Person: Mr. Sylvie Munroe-Cox
 Tel: +1 514-527-9221
 E-mail: smunroe@expomediainc.com
 Website: www.expomediainc.com/fr/accueil

MEDICA

Date: 15 November - 18 November, 2021
 Venue: messe dusseldorf, Düsseldorf, Germany
 Organizer: Messe Dusseldorf GmbH
 Contact Person: Info / Messe Düsseldorf
 Tel: +49 611 90300
 E-mail: info@messe-duesseldorf.de
 Website: www.messe-duesseldorf.de

Vietnam Foodexpo

Date: 17 November - 20 November, 2021
 Venue: Saigon Exhibition and Convention Center, Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam
 Organizer: Vietnam Trade Promotion Agency
 Contact Person: ngocntq.vietrade
 E-mail: ngocntq.vietrade@gmail.com
 Website: www.vietrade.gov.vn

Note: Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, information about trade fairs and events may change. To get more information, please contact the organizers.



Discussion meeting on “Nokol Ponso Kinbona, Nokol Ponso Bechbona” organized by Samakal held on April 3. Rizwan Rahman President, DCCI joined as a guest speaker. Speaker of Bangladesh Parliament Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, MP and Industries Minister, Nurul Majid Mahmud Humayun, MP also joined the event.

Ministry Finance organized a stakeholders’ discussion on the upcoming budget held on April 8. Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal, MP chaired the discussion session. DCCI President Rizwan Rahman represented DCCI while other business leaders and high government officials also took part in the meeting.



DCCI President Rizwan Rahman joined a webinar titled “Need to attract FDI and smooth LDC graduation” hosted by ERF on April 17. Planning Minister M A Mannan, MP joined the webinar as the chief guest. Executive Chairman, BIDA Md. Sirazul Islam joined as special guest.



On the occasion of Holy Ramadan, DCCI President Rizwan Rahman, Senior Vice President N K A Mobin, FCS, FCA, Vice President Monowar Hossain, members of the Board and distinguished Past Presidents of DCCI joined for a virtual get together on April 30.

DCCI President Rizwan Rahman joined a webinar on 'Halal 360: Connecting your business to the halal ecosystem' on April 12 organized by Standard Chartered Sadique, Malaysia.



DCCI President Rizwan Rahman joined the 23rd Trustee Board Meeting of BUILD on April 13. Chairperson of BUILD Abul Kasem Khan and President of CCCI Mahbulul Alam also joined.



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- Air-conditioned, well-equipped and safe academic atmosphere
- Post-lecture tutorial support
- Student counseling & extracurricular activities
- Online class facility
- Computer lab with internet facility along with enriched library
- Strict hygiene maintenance during physical class

Contact Address:

Dhaka Chamber Building (10th & 11th floor)

65-66 Motijheel C/A, Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh.

Help Line – +8801718741039, 9552562 Ext: 232

E-mail: info@dbicollege.edu.bd, Website: www.dbicollege.edu.bd

Online Training Courses and Workshops of DBI for the month of June 2021

1	Procurement Strategies for Competitiveness and Cost Savings	1,525/-	4-5 June 2021 3.00 pm - 5.00 pm
2	English for Written Communication: Meet the Need	1,525/-	4-5 June 2021 7.00 pm - 9.00 pm
3	Bangladesh Labour Act as amended upto 2018 and Bangladesh Labour Rules 2015	1,525/-	11-12 June 2021 3.00 pm - 5.00 pm
4	Implementation of Budgetary Control: A Great Way to Remain Competitive	1,525/-	11-12 June 2021 7.00 pm - 9.00 pm
5	Customer Behaviour and Excellent Customer Services	1,525/-	18-19 June 2021 3.00 pm - 5.00 pm
6	Understanding L/C Procedures for Export & Import Operation	1,525/-	18-19 June 2021 7.00 pm - 9.00 pm
7	Managing Accounts-Best Practices	1,525/-	25-26 June 2021 3.00 pm - 5.00 pm
8	Excel Training : Beginners to Advance	1,525/-	25-26 June 2021 7.00 pm - 9.00 pm

Registration Deadline : at least 1 day before starting date

Contact : DBI, 65-66 Motijheel C/A, (11th fl), Dhaka-1000
Cell : 01718-972656, 01913-756587 & 01913-745062
Phone : 9552562 Ext. 281, 124 & 137
E-mail : dbi@dhakachamber.com
Website : www.dcci-dbi.edu.bd

** Seats are Limited*
** Certificates Awarded*
** Tailor-made Courses*
/Workshops Arranged