

France Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce & Industry

The France Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCIFB) provides a unique platform for the industry and business in Bangladesh as well as France to come together to increase trade and investment between our two countries.

The chamber has been proactively working to facilitate a well planned series of activities ever since its creation in 1996 to actualize the rich potential of France and Bangladesh economic cooperation. The year 2020 provides us the opportunity to impart dynamism to our activities to accelerate the pace of our cooperation and new content to enrich it both by overcoming the challenges posed by the present Corona Virus pandemic and seizing all feasible opportunity even in the midst of the ongoing crisis.

The new Executive Committee of the chamber took up its responsibilities in March this year and I have had the opportunity to be elected the President of the chamber for the next two years (2020-2022). While expressing our deep gratitude to the past members of the Executive Committee for their valuable works, our new Executive Committee looks forward to carrying out their valuable works with new addition and needs of the members of our august organization. As I foresee, we have many things to do in the coming months. The present Corona Virus crisis has caused major disruption in the world trade and investment scenario. Traders and investors in both France and Bangladesh are facing the consequences of this crisis. Once sure way of overcoming our problem lies in taking stock of the magnitude and nature of our problem and start without any delay to plan actions and implement them to come into grip with our problems. From the chamber, we have already started a stock taking exercise in this regard and we would very much appreciate receiving your valuable inputs to complete this exercise at the earliest.

We have also initiated to bring succour to the vast number of workers at under privileged who are facing tremendously difficulties to cope with the adverse economic consequences for their livelihood. Our initiative in this regard has been modest so far but there are scopes for us to think whether we can do something more.

This is the time when all the governments are reoriented their policies for crisis management taking into account the need for urgent action in the international, regional and bilateral context. Our chamber can play a positive role in coming up with concrete ideas on possible actions for crisis management with specific focus on bilateral trade and investment.

As the President of France Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry, I wish you all the best as you, like all of us, are locked in a situation where problems and challenges abound. I have, however, every confident that working together, we shall be able to overcome the challenges.

The France Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry will be with all of you in working together so that undeterred by challenges of unprecedented magnitude in containing our good work at your service.



Syed Mahmudul Huq

Syed Mahmudul Huq

President

France Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry

CCIFB News

Postponement of AGM

The 22nd Annual General Meeting which was scheduled to be held on 25th March 2020 at Westin, Dhaka was postponed due to the public health risk perceived in connection to the outbreak of COVID-19 and accordingly, the election for the Office Bearers of CCIFB could not take place.

Business Luncheon Meeting

On February 20th the first Business Luncheon meeting of CCIFB in the year 2020 was held with the Executive Chairman of BIDA (Bangladesh Investment Development Authority) Mr. Md Sirazul Islam to discuss on the topic "Ease in Doing Business : is Bangladesh ideal for investments, especially FDIs'. Executive Chairman of Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA) Md Sirajul Islam presented the keynote paper at the seminar. He said the government is working hard to improve business environment with a view to attracting FDI in the country. Bida has set an ambitious target of bringing major reforms to ease the process of doing business in the country, which has attained steady economic growth in recent years and will hopefully come out of the LDC (least developed countries) group very soon, said Md Sirazul Islam. BIDA is trying to ease the process of starting up a business and providing related services within the shortest possible time. He said, BIDA is providing registrations to investors within one day." Laying emphasis on Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), he expected that the country would become one of the alternative dispute resolution-friendly nations within the region. Alternative dispute resolution (ADR) encompasses a range of options, falling between litigation and arbitration on the one hand and negotiation on the other, for effective resolution of disputes. The French Ambassador H.E Mr. Jean Marin SCHUH, who was also present at the meeting, emphasized on improving business environment and 'ease of doing business' in a bid to attract more French investment in Bangladesh. He added that France ranks 29th on the list of countries that provide FDIs to Bangladesh and 7th among European Union member states. He also mentioned that the Bilateral trade with Bangladesh reached record €3.24 billion in 2019 and this was the highest amount over the past ten years. The president of the Chamber Mr. Maruf Alam said that the chamber is constantly working to facilitate the French business in the country and it is hoped that the business relation between the two countries will develop further.



The new Office Bearers of CCIFB

The election commissioner decided to declare a panel of the new office bearers , proposed by the majority of the members of the new Executive Committee. Syed Mahmudul Huq the Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors of Premier LP Gas Limited (TOTALGAZ) and Chairman of Bangladesh Shrimp and Fish Foundation has been elected as the new President of the France-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The Executive Committee members are:

Sr. Vice President

Mr. Moshiur Rahman Managing
Director
Paragon Group

Vice President

Ms Jordane Cathala
Chairman
C & R Sweater Ltd.

Treasurer

Mr. Shafquat Matin
Group Director
Dipon Group

Other members:

Mr. M. Maksud
Managing Director
Corona Power Generation Ltd.

Mr. Syed Khalid Masud
Vice Chairman
Dana Group

Mr. Shah Sayed Kamal
Chairman
ECM Services Ltd.

Mr. T Sivakumar Managing
Director
APL (Bangladesh) Pvt. Ltd. (CMA-CGM)

Mr. M. A. Reaz
Director
Expo Holdings (BD) Ltd.

Mr. Mohammed Kamal Uddin
Chairman
Torque Fashion Ltd.

Mr. Monzur Morshed Siddiqui
Managing Director
Total Bangladesh

Mr. Rajesh K Surana
Chief Executive Officer
LafargeHolcim Bangladesh Ltd.

Mrs. Corinne Dogra
Managing Director
Oryx Bangladesh

Mr. Deepok Kumar Baral
Chairman & Managing Director
DSM Commodities Ltd.

Ms. Naushaba Chowdhury
Managing Director
Abista FS Ltd.

Mr. Naeem Imran Salim
Managing Director
Colors & Stitches Ltd.

Mr. Mahmudul Islam Parvez
Director
Uni-Global Business Ltd.

The EC meeting

The first executive committee meeting of the year was held on 26th January 2020 at the Chambers office. The EC meeting was presided over by the President of the Chamber Mr. Maruf Alam. The Head of the Economic Department, French Embassy Mr. Pierre Henry Lenfant was present at the meeting. The agenda of the meeting was the upcoming Annual General Meeting, the work plan and annual budget of the year 2020.

Meeting with LP4Y Alliance:

Jean Vigouroux , Life Project 4 Youth Bangladesh Coordinator and Paul Le Tarnec Project Leader, Partnerships , have visited the Chambers Office on 9th January , 2020 . The discussion was held on how the Chamber can facilitate Life Project 4 Youth in their mission of social and professional insertion of impoverished Young Adults living in exclusion and extreme poverty.

LP4Y started its journey on July 4th 2009 in France and Belgium. Since 2009, LP4Y has been developing an ecosystem entirely dedicated to the integration of Young People aged 17 to 24 who are victims of exclusion. In each Life Project Center and in the Green Villages, the Young People follow an educational program, accompanied by a coach. In the 13 countries of the LP4Y Alliance (an international network of local organizations) action is being taken to encourage the socio-professional inclusion of young people.

LP4YActivities:

Life Project Centers: Life Project Centers are set up near slums areas, it create the right conditions for the Youth's social and professional development.

Green Villages: Green Villages are established in regions away from the big cities, and offer a pedagogy that is specially tailored for Youth living in rural communities.

Little Angels Academy: When the beneficiaries of a program are Young Mothers, Little Angels Academies are set up near the Life Project Centers to look after their children, allowing the mothers to pursue their training without worrying about childcare.

LP4Y Club: LP4Y Labs are development centers for innovative solutions to accompanying Young at risk Adults on the path to social and professional integration.

Youth 4 Change Network: LP4Y is a founding member of the Youth 4 Change Network (Y4CN), an international network of committed organizations working for the social and professional insertion of excluded Young Adults worldwide.

Youth Inclusion Network: YIN was developed by LP4Y in 2016 to create a network of businesses committed to working for the inclusion of excluded Youth and to fighting poverty.

How can you join the LP4Y movement-?

By being a Catalyst, one can work directly with excluded Young Adults, putting their skills to use in the field.

By being a Partner one can make either financial or other type of Donations; by offering training sessions in English, computer skills, professional communication and other complementary professionalizing classes; by providing opportunities for the Youth to discover your company, become a client by buying Made 4 Change products, work alongside the Youth to help them improve their micro-economic activity;

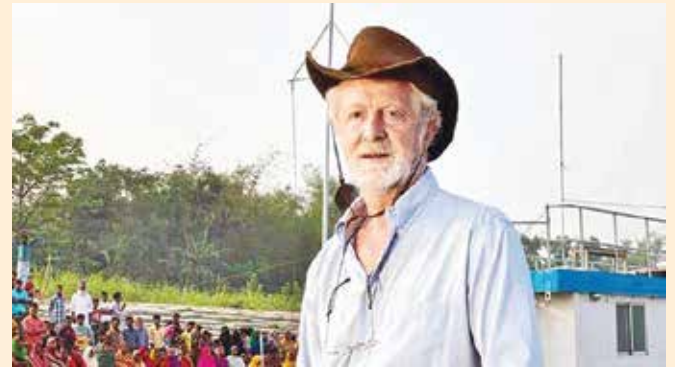
By Inviting the Youth to visit your company and take advantage of internship or employment opportunities and giving the Youth a positive experience of the professional world and an opportunity to understand how a company actually works

By making a donation to support the professional and social inclusion of excluded Youth.



A chit-chat with Yves Marre:

Yves Marre is a French entrepreneur, co-founder of Friendship (NGO) in Bangladesh, cofounder of NGO Watever in France and creator of TaraTari Shipyard in Bangladesh which is a member of CCIFB. He initiated the project: "A Hospital Barge for Bangladesh" and created the first Friendship (NGO) which is a needs-driven non-governmental organization that works in the Char islands and riverbanks of northern Bangladesh. The French government allots Friendship a river barge of 38.5 million through the Companies Fluviale de Transport. In 2004 Marre met Marc Van Peteghem, co-director of the naval architecture agency VPLP, a French-based naval architectural firm which is responsible for designing some of the world's most innovative racing boats. Van Peteghem designed a floating ambulance for Taratari, which was produced in two units to support the "Lifebuoy Friendship Hospital" and the "Emirates Friendship Hospital" which was sponsored by Unilever Bangladesh and Emirates Bangladesh respectively. With the help of Peteghem, Marre designed the first fiberglass fishing boat which were safer and more sustainable than wooden ones, with a lifetime of more than 20 years. In 2010, Taratari convinced the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations of the need to improve and renovate traditional Bengali boats. The organization put the shipyard in charge of the production of the first 25 of the country's fishing boats made of fiberglass. In 2011, UNICEF ordered 7 transport boats of the "Mandoris" type for carrying children from the islands of Kaptai Lake to school. These boats have transported over 7,000 children per year. Recently Mr. Marre took part in the Bangabondhu National Adventure Festival 2020 which took place on January 11-15th. This event has jointly organized by Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board & Bangladesh Adventure Foundation (BAF). The honorable French Ambassador H.E Jean Marin SCHUH and Ms. Anne Quemere, a world renowned French sailor & travel enthusiast also joined the festival. Mr. Marre received accolades by the French Senate several times for his representing France and also became a national citizen and passport holder of Bangladesh six years ago which was initiated by our honorable Prime Minister.



COVID-19 Relief Fund

The Chamber took over the responsibility to help the low paid wage earners –the vulnerable group of the society who has been roughly affected by the pandemic by creating a fund named COVID-19 Relief fund. With the help of the members generous contribution and their extended support, the Chamber distributed 1000 packages of food and other essentials to the slum dwellers of Dhaka city. A part of the member's contribution was also donated to an organisation named Friendship which has already taken initiative in supporting the cause.



The First EC meeting of the new Board

The first executive meeting of the new board was held on 11th of May 2020 via Zoom platform. The new President of the Chamber Mr. Syed Mahmudul Huq presided over the meeting. The committee proposed to explore the possibilities to make corporate arrangements with the private hospitals so that the members could receive COVID-19 emergency and medical support, if required. The President proposed to initiate a consultation to assess the impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on businesses of our members and formulate a possible action plan in June 2020. The committee also confirmed to make provision for holding a virtual AGM by amending the by-laws through holding an EGM (Extraordinary General Meeting) within June 30, 2020. The ongoing project with Business France was discussed briefly. The committee also proposed to explore of business opportunities including exports to and investments in the Francophone African Countries (former French Colonies in Africa).

World Francophony Day

Each year, on March 20th, International Francophonie Day is celebrated throughout the world to promote the shared values of respect for the rule of law and human rights, gender equality, solidarity and cultural diversity and a central place for women, youth and the vulnerable in its work. Under the slogan “En français... s’ilvous plait,” chosen by Secretary General of La Francophonie Louise Mushikiwabo, International Francophonie Day reflects the vitality of the French language, which is constantly being enriched by new words to take into account changes in today’s world.



Goût de/Good France,



Goût de/Good France, a huge celebration of French gastronomy in France and worldwide, is a unique global event will take place on Thursday 16 April 2020. This sixth edition of Goût de/Good France will be marked by the tenth anniversary of the inscription of the Gastronomic Meal of the French on UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity list. On 16 April, this heritage and this French customary social practice will be spread well beyond its borders, in its uniqueness and its diversity. By bringing together nearly 350,000 people to enjoy thousands of dinners à la française, Goût de/Good France proudly shares the values of French gastronomy each year.

Ambassador’s Visit to AFD-funded project of promotion of agroecology practices in the Chittagong Hill Tracks

The French Ambassador H.E Jean-Marin Schuh and his wife visited the AFD-funded project of promotion of agroecology practices in the Chittagong Hill Tracks, implemented by Secours Catholique-Caritas France and Caritas Bangladesh. The global objective of this project is to improve food security and resilience to climate change of the vulnerable population of three Chittagong Hills. It aims also to ensure that indigenous people have access to social safety and to land access system as well as to develop global cooperation around research and development of agroecology. 2300 families from indigenous communities and Bengalis are benefiting directly from this project, from which 50% are women. This visit highlighted that agroecology strengthens smallholders’ autonomy by strengthening their capacity to lift themselves out of poverty. It promotes quality and diversified agricultural production, embedded in a territory, its natural resources, climate, ecosystem as well as the knowledge of local populations.

"National and Business news"

Mujib Barsho and National Childrens Day Celebrated

The birth centenary celebrations of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

observed on 17th March 2020.

The government declared the period from March 17, 2020, to March 26, 2021 as the "Mujib

Borsho" marking the birth centenary of Bangabandhu. Along with Bangladesh, the Mujib Borsho" Childrens Day is being celebrated globally on the same day with the initiative of Unesco.

Bangladesh Bank issued regular currency notes and commemorative notes of Tk 200. Besides, the central bank also issued Tk 100 denomination commemorative gold and silver coins and Tk 100 commemorative notes.

The government had chalked out various programmes to be observed throughout the year.

However, the programs have been postponed and rescheduled following the detection of coronavirus in Bangladesh.



National independence Day

Bangladesh stepped into 50 years of its independence this year on 26th March 2020. Celebration was limited to a 31-gun salute and hoisting of the national flags. Prayers were offered seeking eternal peace of the departed souls of the martyrs of 1971 and Bangabandhu and his family members who were killed on August 15, 1975. Prayers were also offered seeking relief from the coronavirus pandemic.

Bangladesh Finance minister named world's best finance minister

Finance Minister of Bangladesh AHM Mustafa Kamal was named the best finance minister in the world by The Banker, a London-based business magazine, beating candidates from Asia Pacific, America, Africa, the Middle East and Europe. The magazine crowned Kamal with the Finance Minister of the Year for Asia Pacific and Global Award-2020. He is the first finance minister in Bangladesh to have won the accolade. The Finance Minister of the Year awards of The Banker, owned by the Financial Times Group, celebrate the officials that have best managed to stimulate growth and stabilize economies.

Mr. Kamal was appointed as finance minister in January last year; he served as the Planning Minister from 2014 to 2018. After he has taken over office Kamal introduced the new VAT law and Bangla Bond on the London Stock Exchange. He took steps to cap banks' lending rates at 9 percent, to reschedule logical defaulted loans at state banks and announce willful defaulters as bankrupt and realize unpaid dues through forming an asset management company. He also brought in reforms at the stock market last year. Bangladesh clocked 8.15 percent GDP growth last fiscal year, which was the highest in the Asia Pacific region.

Made in Bangladesh' smartphones covers 62% of the market

Bangladesh is on its way to becoming self-reliant in smartphone production by the year end, with locally manufactured handsets now ruling the roost. By 2022, the country will add another product to its export basket: smartphone, according to estimates. Most of the top brands have raised their game to meet the entire domestic demand from their plants in the country, while all the basic phones the country needs will be made locally within another one year, as per the local plant owners. According to Bangladesh Mobile Phone Importers Association (BMPIA), some foreign brands will go into production in their local plants and Bangladesh will be self-dependent in smartphone production within this year. Currently, nine foreign brands have their plants in the country while five of them have stopped importing devices as they are meeting their demand from local production. Samsung, controlling about one-fourth the mobile market and the South Korean tech giant is making about 97 per cent of their devices in the local plant that opened in 2018. Home-grown brands Walton and Symphony and China's Transsion Holdings, Vivo and Oppo meet their full demand from their plants in Bangladesh.

Cash Subsidy for rice Exporters

Bangladesh Bank announces that the government has decided to provide 15 per cent cash subsidy to rice exporters with the view to encouraging shipment of the surplus grain. Millers, who process rice from locally grown paddy, will be eligible for the cash subsidy on their earnings from export, according to a Bangladesh Bank notice. Bangladesh had surplus rice of 34.95 lakh tonnes last fiscal year after production hit 3.73 crore tonnes. Exporters who want to get the cash subsidy will have to take prior permission from the commerce ministry and obtain certificates from the customs department. The incentive will encourage millers to buy paddy, which will also help not lead to any abnormal spiral in prices.

GSP plus and complying with ILO standards

The European Union wants a guarantee from Bangladesh that its factories would ensure fair practice and comply with the International Labour Organisation standards if the country wants to enjoy continued trade privilege from the bloc following graduation to the developing country bracket. Bangladesh is set to lose its current trade privilege of zero-duty export benefit under the EU's Everything but Arms (EBA) scheme when the country graduates from LDC in 2024. As the EU will give three years to Bangladesh as a grace period to ensure a smooth transition, the country will finally lose the Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP) in 2027. Once the country loses the preferential treatment, Bangladesh will have to face nearly 12.50 percent duty on exports to the EU as a developing country. But Bangladesh can continue to export duty-free if it can manage EU's GSP Plus status by meeting some conditions such as core conventions of the United Nations, including practising good governance, following international standards on labour rights and human rights and ensuring protection of environment. The EU is evaluating the practices of Bangladesh about the core conventions and this will determine whether the GSP Plus status will be granted or not after the formal graduation. Among the LDCs, Bangladesh is the highest beneficiary of the EU's trade privilege, particularly because of higher garment export to the bloc. A high-powered delegation from the EU will visit Bangladesh in March and Bangladesh will have to change its business model with the EU because of the change of consumer behaviour in Europe.

MMF lags for want of Investment:

Bangladesh is lagging behind its global peers due to lack of investment and adequate government support to set up mills to produce manmade fibres (MMFs), which are gaining popularity worldwide as biodegradable raw material for apparel manufacturing. The share of MMF-based apparel is around 45 percent in the global trade, which is growing at 5 percent, as such garments are more environment friendly. The MMF based mills demands an expensive set up which was \$100 million 10 years ago and now it takes between \$400 million and \$500 million. Bangladesh has 430 spinning mills, of them 124 are based on polyester and viscose staple fibre, the two forms of MMF. Bangladesh has business potential in MMF like viscose, acrylic and polyester. Consumers are more informed and concerned about the environment, people and sustainability, because of which they now look for products, which are easy to care and environment friendly. The rise of Fast Fashion, a term used to describe clothing designs that move quickly from the catwalk to stores to meet new trends, is reducing the lead time of order delivery. Viscose, the third-most commonly used fibre in the world, has been hailed as a sustainable alternative to oilbased synthetic textiles such as polyester, acrylic, nylon and spandex. Introduced in the late 1800s as an alternative to silk, the plant-based viscose, also known as rayon, is inexpensive to make and applicable in many ways, including for casual wear items, denim, socks, bed linen, towels, face masks and wet wipes. A decade ago, Bangladesh had eight MMF-based textile companies, which has risen to nearly 60 now to meet the rising demand, said Monsoor Ahmed, secretary to the Bangladesh Textile Mills Association. Some proposals for setting up new factories are still pending with the association. Bangladesh should go for establishing mills only to produce manmade fibres, as the demand for MMF-based garment items is increasing worldwide but setting up such an expensive textile project is not easy for investors without government's supports in the form of low-cost loan and easy access to gas.



Economic Costs of Covid-19 in Bangladesh

Helal Uddin Ahmed

An invisible assassin is stalking the entire globe causing mayhem, havoc, disease and deaths wherever it goes, forcing panicked people to stay home even at the cost of their livelihoods and leaving behind a trail of shattered economies and battered societies. Even the most sophisticated and destructive arsenals ever produced by mankind and the long-accumulated pride and might of the most powerful nations on earth appear inconsequential in the face of this silent onslaught by a microscopic enemy.

As in other countries of the world, Bangladesh is also being forced to endure lockdowns since 26 March to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite some recent loosening of restrictions on garments factories and shopping malls, these lockdowns are already having a crippling effect on workers and businesses across the country. The country's economy has almost come to a standstill and debilitating effects are being observed in almost all sectors. Globally, even the rich developed nations are facing medium to long-term recessions and the oil-producing countries especially in the middle-east are enduring enormous economic pressure due to the plummeting of oil prices. All these have led to huge setbacks for Bangladesh particularly in the flow of remittances, industrial production, services sector, as well as earnings from export.

There are differing opinions on the likely impact of Covid-19 on Bangladesh economy. Both the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have expressed apprehensions about the GDP growth rate sliding to a low of over 2 percent during the current fiscal year. Their prediction appears to be quite realistic as most of the developed and developing nations are facing the prospect of negative growth rates. But the government still remains optimistic about the growth prospect. However, the damages to Bangladesh economy due to this pandemic will depend largely on the duration and pervasiveness of Covid-19, as well as the effectiveness of government measures to tackle the calamity.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has predicted in mid-May that the South Asian countries including Bangladesh might lose USD 142 billion, which is 3.9 percent of their GDP, if the pandemic lingers for 3 months. But the countries will lose USD 218 billion or 6.0 percent of GDP if it lasts for 6 months. Latest data show that export earnings in Bangladesh in March 2020 were only USD 520 million in contrast to USD 3.03 billion during the same month last year. The decline was an astonishing 83 percent. Overall, export earnings have shrunk by 13.1 percent during the first ten months of the current fiscal year. Remittances also fell by an alarming 25 percent in April following a drop of 12 percent in March. The ADB has suggested that alongside enhancing health spending and strengthening healthcare system, strong income and employment protection measures are essential for sustaining a difficult and lengthy process of economic recovery.

The poor, especially those who earn incomes and wages on a daily basis, are the worst sufferers in the present situation. Economic stagnation is having a terrible effect on the lives and livelihoods of those people whose incomes hover near the poverty line. These segments of population have become quite weak due to the fragility of their economic circumstances as well as their vulnerability in times of calamities. Large segments of the population that belong to the poor and low income category are employed in the informal sector and do not have stable incomes. Therefore, the status of these poor and powerless people needs to be considered foremost for gauging the impact of the current pandemic on Bangladesh.

According to the latest estimates of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), 20.5 percent of the country's population lives below the poverty line. This translates into 34 million when converted into numbers. An analysis by the Dhaka-based South Asian Network on Economic Modelling (SANEM) shows that this number would rise by 36 million if the income for poverty level is raised by 1.25 percent. Although these susceptible 36 million have not been officially categorised as poor, they can certainly be viewed as economically powerless. A huge chunk of this vulnerable population is likely to fall into the poverty trap because of the current pandemic.

According to the preliminary estimates of SANEM based on the income and expenditure survey conducted by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), the poverty rate in Bangladesh would rise to 40.9 percent if Covid-19 causes 25 percent fall in family incomes, as is evident from the recent trends. Consequently, the successes achieved in alleviating poverty over the past two decades may fizzle out due to the current crisis. The negative impact on income may differ with the nature of work or vocation. The model developed by SANEM indicates that a large segment (43 percent) of this vulnerable population is engaged in crop-production, livestock-rearing and fish-cultivation. Other notable at-risk segments are industrial workers, including those employed in RMG factories (16%), retail businesses (11%), transportation (10%), and construction sector (7%). SANEM also points out that though the average rate of poverty may rise to 40.9 percent countrywide, this rate may be surpassed in 40 riskier districts like Rangamati, Mymensingh, Sunamganj, Cox's Bazar, Nilphamari, Narail, Chattogram, Netrakona, Chuadanga, Sherpur, Barguna and Shariatpur. The government has already announced financial incentives for countering the impact of Covid-19 and is also executing various social safety measures. The successes of these programs will depend largely on three factors. Firstly, the poor and helpless people need to be identified correctly and, the typology and duration of assistance provided to them should be determined properly. Secondly, reaching this assistance to the vulnerable sectors and populations should be ensured in a timely manner. And thirdly, an appropriate supervision and evaluation process should be put in place in order to ensure transparency, accountability and effectiveness of the measures. According to the Labour Force Survey 2016-17 of BBS, 85.1 percent of Bangladesh's workforce are employed in the informal sector. Because of their acute vulnerability during the current crisis, the IMF has recently recommended some policy responses for informal workers as they account for about 60 percent of non-farm employment in the Asia-Pacific region. These include: expanding the existing social assistance programs; introducing new transfers; establishing public works programs; and, preserving livelihoods through employment retention by extending supports to small businesses.

The latest data from the International Labour Organization (ILO) on the labour market impact of Covid-19 reveals the devastations it is causing on the lives of workers in the informal economy and on hundreds of millions of workers globally. The agency warns that continued sharp decline in working hours across the globe due to the pandemic implies that 1.6 billion workers in the informal economy or nearly half the global workforce are facing an imminent danger of their livelihoods getting destroyed. The ILO has called for urgent, targeted and flexible measures for supporting the workers and businesses, especially the small enterprises and those in the informal economy.



However, although huge challenges exist for protecting the vulnerable population and informal workers during the pandemic, there are also extraordinary opportunities for addressing longstanding inequalities in the areas of access to health and basic services, financial products and digital economy, as well as social security for the informal workers. The crisis has already upended the conventional norms on providing education and social assistance through internet, mobile and digital platforms by reaching broader segments of population. What is required now is a new deal that guarantees social protection against the negative economic consequences of the pandemic, and builds a stronger social safety net framework for the future.

The measures proposed by a recent IMF blog-post for this new deal have three broad dimensions. First: 'Getting the basics right', whereby developing countries should use the crisis to mount an effective public health response by shoring up public health infrastructure, expanding coverage, and plugging loopholes in the provision of clean water and sanitation. Secondly, more expansive and inclusive social safety nets should be put in place. And thirdly, there should be more investments in building digital capacity and bandwidths for expanding the availability of digital platforms for education and financial services.

(Dr. Helal Uddin Ahmed is a retired Additional Secretary of GoB and former Editor of Bangladesh Quarterly. Email: hahmed1960@gmail.com)

Website update:

TENDER ALERT (for International Tenders)

<http://www.ccifb.com.bd/tender-alert/>

COVID-19 (for government circulars, notices ,informative documents and videos related to the pandemic)

<http://www.ccifb.com.bd/covid-19/>



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