MAIL approves 255mln Afs to boost agriculture in Afghanistan

KABUL: The Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) has announced that it had approved 255 million Afghanis in loans, aimed at beefing up agriculture in the land-locked country.

Chairing a meeting of the Agricultural Development Fund (ADF), Dr. Anwar-ul-Haq Ahadi, Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock and Chairman of the Supreme Council of the Agricultural Development Fund, approved 255 million Afghanis in loans to improve Afghanistan's agriculture situation, the ministry said in a statement referring to its website.

Appreciating the activities and role of the ADF relating to the high importance of loans in agriculture, he said that these assistances can be effective in Afghanistan's agricultural growth. Meanwhile, Dr. Aimal Arman, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Agricultural Development Fund, about the measure aims, achievements and recent progress of the fund in granting loans to agricultural businesses, collecting hard-to-get loans, the number of benefited farmers and other matters said that the measure was commendable for helping the country's farmers with a lending system in the agricultural sector, the statement quoted.

At a meeting held in Kabul, the ADF technical team submitted two loan applications to the high council and provided information on the activities of the loan applicants to the council members and approved loan offers relating to two companies active in the field of agriculture, according to the statement.

One of these companies is a food industry company that will use the money to buy wheat from local farmers and meet its needs, the statement said.

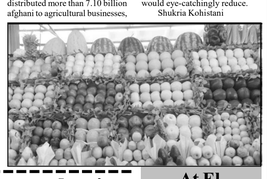
The second borrowing company is a carton manufacturing company that is to use the money to buy carton printing machines and improve the quality of its products. It should be noted that the Agricultural Development Fund is a non-bank government financial institution that operates under the leadership of the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock.

This fund has an effective role in the growth and improvement of the country's agriculture by providing services to farmers and agricultural entrepreneurs through financial intermediation and direct lending, which is one of the main tasks of the ADF, the statement added. The fund has so far approved 4.13 billion afghani and distributed more than 7.10 billion afghani to agricultural businesses, agricultural cooperatives and associations, financial intermediaries, livestock farms, fish farming, poultry, processors and exporters of fresh fruits, flour mills, agricultural equipment companies, chemical fertilizer sellers and importers, and other agricultural entrepreneurs. "More than 56,000 farmers in 32 provinces have benefited directly from these services," said the statement.

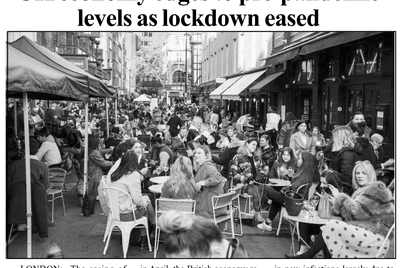
"The people of Afghanistan are more interested in investing and working inside Afghanistan," said Khaybar, a fish processing owner adding there are many fish farms in Afghanistan now that by raising fish in the fish farming they can produce more inside the country and offer fresh fish in the market. "If we have the support of the government, especially the Ministry of Agriculture, in other agricultural sectors, Afghanistan will soon be self-sufficient and the people will benefit from Afghan products," he said.

Also, in all agriculture sector, particularly in the field of dairy farms, agricultural equipment production companies, production and processing of dried fruits and production of wheat and flour in our country, they need the government cooperation to help Afghanistan become self-sufficient and the need for foreign imports would eye-catchingly reduce.

Shukria Kohistani



UK economy edges to pre-pandemic levels as lockdown eased



LONDON: The easing of lockdown restrictions in April helped the British economy grow at its fastest rate since July 2020 and recoup further ground lost during the coronavirus pandemic, official figures showed Friday.

The Office for National Statistics said the economy grew by 2.3% during April, which saw the reopening of shops selling non-essential items and a number of other service providers, such as hairdressers, resuming work. Schools were fully open for in-class learning, while pubs and restaurants were able to serve customers outdoors for the whole month.

The four nations of the U.K. — England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland — have been lifting lockdown restrictions in stages after new coronavirus infections fell sharply and vaccines were rolled out rapidly.

Despite the growth recorded in April, the British economy remained 3.7% smaller than it was in February 2020, before the U.K.'s first virus lockdown. Of the major sectors in the economy, only construction was above the level it was at on the eve of the pandemic.

The British economy is expected to regain more ground over the summer as remaining restrictions are lifted.

"Following the historic collapse in spring 2020, the U.K. remains on track to return to its pre-pandemic level by the turn of the year," said Holger Schmieding, chief economist at Berenberg Bank. "Judging by recent data trends, that could happen even sooner."

Though most sectors of the economy have reopened, there are concerns that the next planned easing for England, scheduled for later this month, may have to be delayed because of a recent spike in new infections largely due to the delta variant that was first identified in India.

The hope is that the rapid roll-out of vaccines will dramatically break the link between new infections, hospitalizations and deaths. So far, the evidence suggests that a large proportion of the people being infected are in younger age groups, many of which have yet to receive a first dose.

Under the government's plan for ending lockdown measures, social distancing restrictions are set to be lifted on June 21, which would be a particular boon to businesses such as pubs and cinemas. They are currently operating with capacity limits to meet the need to keep people apart.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson plans to announce Monday whether the next easing will take place.

At El Salvador's Bitcoin Beach, a glimpse of crypto economy

After El Salvador's congress made the bitcoin legal tender this week, eyes turned to this rural fishing village on the Pacific coast. Known to surfers for its pounding waves, El Zonte has had the cryptocurrency in its economy for the past year.

Some 500 fishing and farming families use bitcoin to buy groceries and pay utilities, something the government envisions for the country at large. Bitcoin already was legal to use in El Salvador but its acceptance was voluntary, so the legislation passed late Tuesday now requires all businesses — except those without the technology — to accept payment in bitcoin.

El Zonte's mini bitcoin economy 26 miles from the capital came about through an anonymous donor who started working through a local nonprofit group in 2019. Supporters of the financial change point to it as a demonstration case for how digital currency could help in a country where 70% of the people don't have bank accounts.

President Nayib Bukele, who pushed through the bitcoin law, touts it both as a way to help those many Salvadorans without access to traditional banking services and as a path to attract foreigners with bitcoin holdings to invest in El Salvador, which is the first nation to make the cryptocurrency legal tender.

finance

Can mining save Cornwall's economy?

At an industrial site in central Cornwall there are a couple of boreholes, each just 12cm across but driven down a kilometre into the rock.

They are pumping up water containing what may turn out to be a magic ingredient when it comes to Cornwall's future.

It's lithium, the element that goes into making batteries, for electric cars amongst other things.

"It's going to be absolutely crucial for the green industrial revolution and we think we have decent resources of it," says Lucy Crane, from the company Cornish Lithium.

Two hundred years ago, this part of Cornwall was dubbed the richest square mile on earth thanks to its copper mines, says Lucy.

And these modern day prospectors are hoping that lithium represents a new green "gold in them there hills". But it will take a couple of years before Cornish Lithium's pilot projects can establish just how much is down there.

In the meantime, with the leaders of seven of the world's richest countries here, mapping out a recovery from the biggest global health and economic shock in over a century, Cornwall itself is at an economic crossroads, more acute even than for the rest of the UK.

Cornwall's economic past was built on centuries of mining and fishing wealth, and the seeds of new industries are being sown, but its lifeblood now is tourism.

But it was also the biggest recipient of European Union (EU) development money of any area in the UK and home to coastal communities that rely on EU customers for their livelihoods. So Cornwall is now facing huge post-Brexit challenges.

Mussels to Brussels?

Few sectors were hit harder by the impact of Brexit than fishing - in particular shellfish. The UK, in common with other non-EU countries, is now banned from exporting live unpurified mussels, scallops, oysters and clams into the EU - where 90% of them are bought and eaten.

Getting his mussels to Brussels has proved nigh on impossible for Martin Laity of Sailor's Creek Shellfish, and purifying them here in the UK pre-export terminally affects their shelf life.

"The mussels wouldn't survive the purification and the transit, if I was to send that to France now, 90% of them would be dead on arrival," says Martin.

The end of the Brexit transition period was catastrophic for Martin. His business disappeared on day one, he says. And while the government might be touting trade deals with countries like Australia or Canada, he can't imagine them replacing his lost markets, not least because they import very little shellfish.

"Also you have got to look at the sustainability angle - our oyster boats work with sail power and when you are told to sell your stuff 9,000 miles around the world, it goes against the grain of what you are trying to achieve," he says.

He also warns that a decline in fishing could undermine one of Cornwall's strongest attractions.

"The entire reason we have a tourism industry is because people like the ambience of what's happening - busy people working hard in a port - it attracts people from around the world to see that. They want to see character and our industry is character"

Holiday hoops

This summer Cornwall will attract more tourists than usual as disruption to travel takes the shine off holidays abroad.

And the view from Cornwall's number one tourist attraction is an optimistic one.

The Eden Project offers a glimpse of life from far-flung corners of the world, but it is nestled among the sheer walls of an old clay mine - another reminder of the region's foundations.

The site's interim chief executive David Harland hopes visitors will remember how much easier it is to holiday in the UK, without "all the hoops you have to jump through", and keep coming back.

But even then the region will still need support, he says.

"We are standing here in Cornwall in one of the few areas of economic deprivation left in England and what we are looking for right now is a roadmap towards genuine levelling up - to find ways to make sure the wealth is genuinely spread across the country," he says.

Handouts

The EU used to provide grants worth up to £100m a year over the last 20 years - including support for the Eden project. The government has promised that will be replaced by domestic grants from a new Shared Prosperity Fund - a pot of money available to all UK areas to which the chancellor has so far committed only £220m in total.

Tim Dwelly, former leader of the Labour Group on Cornwall Council fears that means his region will receive just a fraction of the money it used to receive.

"It is genuinely shocking to think that government expects Cornwall to gear up for these huge challenges with about 5% of the budget we need. This is not levelling up, it's levelling down," he says.

It means more hope than ever is being invested in new industries like lithium mining, and geothermal energy too. These industries have the potential to kill two economic birds with one stone - decarbonisation and levelling up, while reducing people's dependency on a sector that is both fickle and seasonal.

"One in five jobs in Cornwall depends on tourism and we need to change that," says Conservative MP for Truro and Falmouth, Cherilyn Mackrory. "We want a different Cornwall that isn't reliant on handouts." BBC

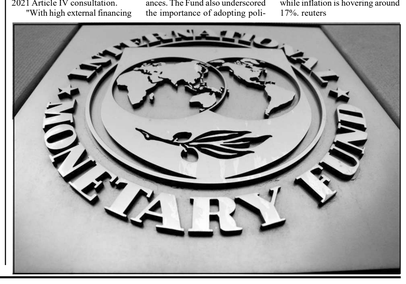
Turkey's economy to grow 5.8% in 2021 -IMF

The Turkish economy will grow 5.8% this year and return to a lower trend from 2022 onwards, the International Monetary Fund said on Friday, calling for steps to address high inflation and low reserves.

"Mainly reflecting a large positive carryover from the sharp activity rebound in the second half of 2020, growth should reach about 5.75% this year," the Fund said in a statement concluding its 2021 Article IV consultation.

"With high external financing needs, sizeable domestic foreign exchange deposits, and low reserve buffers, the economy remains vulnerable to shocks and to changes in sentiment at home and abroad."

The rapid economic recovery after the coronavirus outbreak with state bank-led credit growth and liquidity support was exceptional, the Fund said, adding that, however, policies fuelled inflation, dollarisation and external imbalances. The Fund also underscored the importance of adopting policies to reduce vulnerabilities and committing to a firm monetary policy stance to fight inflation.

"Directors also emphasized the importance of strengthening central bank independence, rebuilding high-quality reserves, further simplifying the operational framework, and improving policy communication," it said.

The lira has fallen some 11% so far this year, on top of double-digit falls in the past three years, while inflation is hovering around 17%. reuters