

Comforter prices are picking up for lower prices and falling temperatures, prompting increased investment from more than 100 companies in the country.

Story on B4



Mobile tower radiation poses no harm

Assure BTRC's surveys

MAHMUDUL HASAN

The harmful radiation emanating from mobile phone towers in Bangladesh is considerably lower than the safety levels set by international bodies, found surveys of Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) throughout this year.

There is also no harm to the environment, said the surveys carried out by measuring radiation of the electromagnetic field (EMF), which carries wireless communication signals for connectivity, in 9 cities.

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

For instance, 0.01453 milliwatts per square meter (mW/m²) was recorded when measurements were taken at the Khulna district administration office from August 22 to August 25.

The permissible threshold for exposure to electromagnetic field (EMF) is 2.106 mW/m², according to the guidelines set by the International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation Protection, International Telecommunication Union, and World Health Organization.

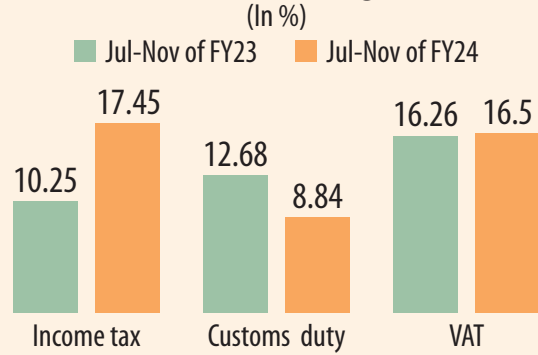
Therefore, the current level of radiation poses no threat to either public

Revenue receipts tick up but fall short of target

RECENT GOVT MEASURES TO BOOST REVENUE COLLECTION

- Increased taxes on tobacco, land registration
- Removed several VAT exemptions
- Raised import duties on select products
- Addressed profit shifting by global internet entities
- Made submission of proof of tax return mandatory
- Launched tax return preparer scheme
- Approved new Customs Act

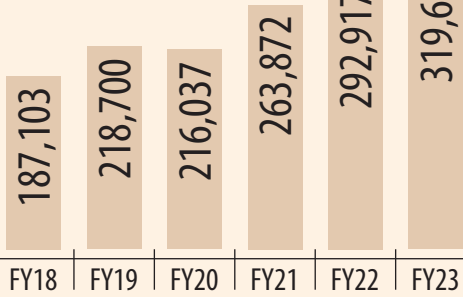
NBR's collection growth



Collections over the years

(In crore Tk)

SOURCE: FINANCE MINISTRY



GOVT GOALS:

Plans to reach 1cr registered taxpayers by 2026

Expects to install 10,000 EFDs in FY24 and another 300,000 EFDs by next five years

All govt measures expected to yield revenue gains of 0.5% of GDP in FY24



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

health or the environment, the BTRC said in reports of the surveys released at different times.

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

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

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

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

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

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REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The revenue collection growth rose slightly in the July-November period of the current financial year on the back of higher income and value-added taxes, provisional figures from the National Board of Revenue (NBR) showed.

In the first five months of 2023-24, the tax collector received Tk 132,334 crore, posting a growth of 14.26 percent year-on-year. It grew 12.68 percent as of October.

The receipts, however, were 11.06 percent shy of the Tk 148,794 crore target set for the NBR for the five-month period.

Customs collections slowed slightly to 8.84 percent to Tk 41,439 crore. This was lower than the 12.68 percent growth seen in July-November of 2022-23.

This might be a reflection of the decelerating international trade of Bangladesh, stemming from the persistently higher US dollar rate that has made imports costlier, a fall in exports, and the slowdown in economic activities at home amid economic and political uncertainty.

For instance, as a result of the consistent pressure of external payments, the local currency has lost its value by about 28 percent since January last year when foreign exchange reserves started to decline at a faster rate.

Imports declined 20.54 percent year-on-year in July-October and 10.42 percent alone in October, according to the central bank. Although exports rose 1.30 percent in July-November, it fell 6.05 percent in November.

VAT collected from the domestic sector

stood at Tk 51,510 crore, an increase of 16.50 percent from the identical period last year. The pace was also higher than in July-November of FY23 when it stood at 16.26 percent.

Personal and corporate income taxes and travel taxes generated Tk 39,384 crore for the NBR, up 17.45 percent from a year earlier. The growth was 10.25 percent in July-November of FY23.

The government has set a Tk 430,000 crore collection target for the NBR for FY24, which ends in June. Receipts averaged 12.12 percent in the past five years.

Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office, said considering the overall economic situation, the collection is not that bad. "It could have been worse."

He said raising revenue collection in line with the IMF target will be challenging since most of the taxes would have to be collected by the NBR.

He attributed the currency depreciation and higher inflation to the spike in the income tax and VAT collections.

Recently, the government told the IMF that it was beefing up efforts to strengthen the tax administration.

It has taken steps to increase taxpayer registration by making it mandatory to present proof of tax return submission to receive 38 government services, which has helped increase the number of registered taxpayers by 10 lakh in FY23.

The government plans to reach one crore registered taxpayers by 2026.

Besides, the NBR installed 9,572 electronic fiscal devices (EFDs) as of July. In FY24, it expects to install another 10,000 EFDs and another 300,000 EFDs over the next five years.

The government said it has adopted measures that are expected to yield revenue gains of 0.5 percent of GDP in FY24.

Towfiqul Islam Khan, a senior research fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said: "Without a big push, we will not be able to reach the revenue generation target. If we can't accelerate the pace, the IMF programme will be threatened as well."

He urged the NBR to raise its efficiency to raise more taxes.



The overall collections in July-November might give some relief to the government as it has stepped up efforts to raise more taxes to broaden its capacity to spend amid a tight fiscal situation.

It will have to accelerate the tax receipts to meet the conditions set with the \$4.7 billion loan programme of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

For example, the government will have to increase collections by 20.41 percent to Tk 394,530 crore in June. Receipts stood at Tk 327,650 crore at the end of FY23 against the IMF target of Tk 345,630 crore.

The NBR failed to hit the collection target for the 11th straight year in FY23.

Tax disputes of Tk 19,000cr pending with higher courts

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The collection of nearly Tk 19,000 crore in direct taxes has been stuck at higher courts owing to cases filed by large corporates, some individuals and taxmen, according to the Large Taxpayers Unit (LTU) of the income tax department.

This involves a total of 1,051 cases, including 116 writs and 870 reference cases, which are pending in the higher courts and thus causing delays in the realisation of taxes by the LTU, the main collector of direct tax for the National Board of Revenue (NBR).

This was shared at a discussion organised by the LTU at its office yesterday in order to expedite the settlement of the cases in top courts and realise the tax.

NBR Members -- Taxes Legal and Enforcement Ahammad Ullah and Taxes Appeal and Exemption Md Iqbal Hossain -- took part in the meeting, where Additional Attorney General Sk Md Morshed spoke.

"It was like an ice-breaking meeting. We want to work more closely with the attorney general's office in order to quickly settle the cases," said Md Iqbal Bahar, commissioner of the LTU, after the meeting.

The field office under the income tax wing of the NBR deals with 1,313 tax files, mainly large taxpaying firms, including banks, non-bank financial institutions, insurers, telecom companies, manufacturers and pharmaceuticals, and 860 high tax paying individuals.

The LTU collected Tk 25,858 crore in taxes in fiscal year 2022-23, which was one-fourth of the total income tax logged by the revenue administration that year.

The field office settled Tk 1,500 crore worth of tax disputes as of June this year through alternative dispute resolution, an out of court settlement mechanism.

Bahar said there has been a gap in communication between the NBR and the attorney general's office, and this has to improve in order to quickly resolve the cases stuck in higher courts.

A senior official of LTU said most of the cases are of similar nature or analogous, and could be resolved easily if proper steps are taken.

The 860 reference cases involve over Tk 17,000 crore of tax disputes, according to LTU data.

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| STOCKS | |
|----------|-----------|
| DSEX ▼ | CASPI ▼ |
| 0.20% | 0.16% |
| 6,249.29 | 18,541.21 |

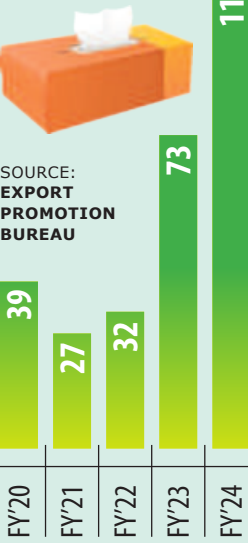
| COMMODITIES | |
|-------------|--------------|
| Gold ▲ | Oil ▼ |
| \$2,036.26 | \$73.40 |
| (per ounce) | (per barrel) |

| ASIAN MARKETS | | | |
|---------------|-----------|-------------|------------|
| MUMBAI ▲ | TOKYO ▼ | SINGAPORE ▲ | SHANGHAI ▲ |
| 0.51% | 1.59% | 0.14% | 0.57% |
| 70,865.10 | 33,140.47 | 3,112.50 | 2,918.71 |

Exports of paper and paper items reach 5-year high

PAPER & PAPER PRODUCTS EXPORT

Jul-Nov period; (In mn US\$)



SOURCE: EXPORT PROMOTION BUREAU

MAJOR EXPORT ITEMS

- A4 paper
- Tissue paper
- Paper plate
- Paper cup
- Knives
- Forks
- Corrugated cartons

MAJOR DESTINATIONS

- Middle East
- Africa



JAGARAN CHAKMA

Bangladesh's export earnings from paper and paper products in the July-November period of this fiscal year have reached a five-year high thanks to improvements in product quality and competitive prices, according to industry insiders.

The exports amounted to \$110 million, which on a year-on-year comparison, is a growth of 51.42 percent, according to data of the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB).

Paper and paper product exports remain buoyant at a time when earnings from other exports have been slowing down, leading to sluggish growth in export receipts.

Bangladesh's exports grew 1.3 percent year-on-

year to \$22.23 billion in the July-November period of fiscal 2023-24, shows data of the EPB.

The paper and paper products are mainly shipped to Middle Eastern and African markets while a very small quantity goes to European and US markets, industry insiders said.

"The profit margin is higher for exports. Manufacturers have improved their product quality, which is encouraging exports," said Mohammad Sharafath Ali, deputy general manager of sales and marketing at Amber Super Paper Ltd.

Besides, the government provides a 10 percent cash incentive on the export earnings, which is also lucrative for exporters.

However, manufacturers are facing trouble in

meeting local demand, he added.

Excluding two big conglomerates, most paper mills are finding it hard to import raw materials as they cannot open letters of credit (LCs) on time due to an ongoing shortage of US dollars, Ali said.

As a result, around 10 to 12 small-scale mills have postponed production temporarily.

Had it been possible to import raw materials as needed, exports would have grown further, he added.

Mohammad Alauddin, deputy general manager and head of sales marketing of Bashundhara Paper Mills Limited, said they export paper products to 52 countries, including the US and European markets.

The company has three production units for paper

and paper products.

According to him, tissue paper is a major export item among Bangladesh's paper products.

The business involving paper has changed in recent decades as demand has gone down for A4 paper whereas it increased for industrial packing paper, tissue and specialty papers characterised by particular properties, he noted.

"We are upgrading our machines in a way such that plates, cups, straws, knives, forks, all sorts of these products can be made with different paper," Alauddin said.

Single use disposable or recyclable paper products will dominate the future market, he added.

The sector's sales are growing steadily at home

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\$1.5lb added to central bank reserves in a week

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Bangladesh Bank's foreign currency reserves rose by \$1.51 billion within the span of a week largely thanks to loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

On December 13, the reserves stood at \$19.17 billion. It improved to \$20.68 billion on December 20, central bank figures showed yesterday.

The boost comes after Bangladesh received \$689 million from the IMF and \$400 million from the ADB a week earlier.

The forex figure is based on the calculation made in line with the balance of payments and investment position manual (BPM6) of the IMF.

In July, the BB began publishing foreign currency reserves as per the manual to ensure that the country's dollar stockpile is reported accurately.

Amid higher import bills against moderate remittance and export receipts, the gross international reserves slipped to \$24.3 billion in 2022-23 from \$36 billion in 2019-20. It stood at \$46.4 billion in 2020-21, the highest on record.

The sharp decline has prompted the government to turn to global lenders to tackle macroeconomic pressures, stop the further fall of the local currency, and rein in consumer prices.