



Visitors have a look at products at a six-day furniture fair kicking off at GEC Convention Centre in Chattogram yesterday. The fair is open to visitors from 10:00am to 09:00pm, with entry tickets costing Tk 20.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

## 6-day furniture fair opens in Chattogram

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A six-day furniture fair kicked off at GEC Convention Centre in Chattogram city yesterday featuring products of 27 enterprises, including New Antique, Heaven Furniture, Shoilpik, Hatil, Hatim, Vegas, P2P, JMG, Akhi and Royel and Right.

Mahabubul Alam, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FCCI), inaugurated the 13th edition of the fair, organised by Bangladesh Furniture Industries Owners Association.

The fair is open to visitors from 10:00am to 09:00pm, with entry tickets costing Tk 20.

"I am here to buy a dining table and a bed for my family," visitor Amin Mahmud told The Daily Star.

"Here I have seen dining tables and beds of various companies between Tk 40,000 to Tk 3 lakh...(My) plan (is) to buy two items within one lakh," he said.

There is a discount of 10 percent to 25 percent at the fair, which is not available at the showrooms. "So, I came here," he added.

"Furniture designs are constantly changing with time. Taking into consideration the current trends, the country is producing furniture of exceptional quality and visually pleasing designs," said Abdus Salam Shanto, manager of New Antique Furniture.

"We have brought all our best products on the occasion of the fair. All kinds of furniture are displayed considering customers' demand," he said.

"A large furniture market has developed in the country in the last two decades. Now we should look at exports. This sector can play a major role in earning foreign exchange," he said.

"All companies constantly introduce new designs with the aim of attracting customers' interest. This trend leads to a competitive environment among them," said Selim H Rahman, chairman of Bangladesh Furniture Industries Owners Association.

A significant portion of the raw materials required for furniture production need to be imported and unfortunately these materials are subject to high taxes, he said.

Customers will be able to purchase furniture at 20 percent to 30 percent lower prices if the government permits tax-free import of the raw materials, he added.

# Insurers seek tax, VAT breaks in next budget

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Bangladesh Insurance Association (BIA), a platform for insurance companies, has proposed withdrawal of the VAT applicable to policyholders in order to help the health insurance sector expand.

If a policyholder bundles health insurance with life insurance, they have to pay a 15 percent value-added tax on the health insurance premium. This increases the overall premium amount, resulting in customers losing interest in health insurance, said the BIA.

The demand came as Md Imam Shaheen, an executive committee member of the association, placed the budget proposal for the next fiscal year during a meeting with National Board of Revenue (NBR) officials at the latter's headquarters in the capital's Agargaon yesterday.

The organisation also proposed

scrapping the 5 percent gains tax on profits made by policyholders of life insurance companies.

The imposition of the gains tax is leading to a continuous decrease in the number of policyholders, Shaheen said.

"If the provision of the gains tax is not withdrawn, the volume of life insurance business will continuously decrease and it will be difficult for insurers to survive."

The rate for listed banks, insurance and financial institutions is 37.5 percent. But because insurance companies do not earn as much as banks, the association proposed to view insurance companies like other service organisations and set a new corporate tax rate.

The BIA also called for withdrawing the value-added tax on the premium for agricultural, livestock, and crop insurances for the development and widening of the farm sector.

ATM Tariquzzaman, managing

director of the Dhaka Stock Exchange, said brokers are charged a tax of Tk 50 against a trade of Tk 100,000. It was Tk 15 earlier.

**The Bangladesh Insurance Association proposed scrapping the 5 percent gains tax on profits made by policyholders of life insurance companies, saying it is leading to a continuous decrease in the number of policyholders.**

He suggested reducing the fee considering the post Covid-19 market situation and global economic pressures.

Tariquzzaman also demanded a reduction of the corporate tax rate of the listed companies.

Shaifur Rahman Mazumdar, managing director of the Chittagong Stock Exchange, said the tax rate for the non-listed companies should be increased.

Currently, the corporate tax rate for listed companies is 20 percent while it is 27.5 percent for non-listed companies.

Speaking at the event, NBR Chairman Abu Hena Md Rahmatul Muneem said: "After graduation from the LDC status, we will have to increase the capacity in different sectors. The government's total tax revenue should also be increased."

"So, companies will have to move away from their dependency on tax exemptions. Besides, we will have to increase the tax net."

Bangladesh has one of the lowest tax-to-GDP ratios in the world.

"However, the NBR will consider if unreasonable tax pressure is created in different sectors, including banks," Muneem added.

STOCKS	
DSEX ▲	CASPI ▲
0.37%	0.9%
6,346.06	18,102.64

  

COMMODITIES	
Gold ▼	Oil ▼
\$2,025.03	\$72.75
(per ounce)	(per barrel)

  

ASIAN MARKETS			
MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI
▲ 0.66%	▼ 0.53%	▼ 0.11%	▲ 3.23%
72,202.12	36,160.66	3,130.78	2,789.49

## Indian consumer goods sector slows

REUTERS, Chennai

Sales volume growth in the Indian consumer goods sector in the October-December quarter slowed sequentially amid soft sales at mom-and-pop stores, market researcher NielsenIQ said on Tuesday, even as rural regions bridged the gap with thriving urban areas.

Consumer goods makers, over the last few quarters, grappled with subdued sales in the hinterlands as people cut back spending on both essentials and discretionary items amid price pressures.

Sales volume in the sector increased 6.4 percent in the fourth quarter of calendar year 2023, slower than the 8.6 percent growth in the previous quarter, NielsenIQ said, as growth at smaller stores fell short of large supermarkets.

However, there was an uptick in rural demand.

"For the first time in 2023, consumption gaps between urban and rural markets are narrowing," said Roosevelt D'souza, head of customer success at NielsenIQ in

India.

Sales volume in rural areas climbed 5.8 percent in the December quarter, compared with a 6.8 percent growth in urban regions, according to NielsenIQ. In the previous three quarters, urban consumption had outgrown rural by 3.8 to 6.2 percentage points.

In rural India, "habit-forming categories", such as biscuits and noodles, thrived as product prices slipped 0.4 percent across the country, marking the first decline in more than two years, NielsenIQ said.

Packaged food manufacturers, including Saffola cooking oil maker Marico, and Good Day biscuits-maker Britannia Industries, have cut prices on the back of easing commodity prices to better compete with smaller rivals.

Consumer goods majors Hindustan Unilever, Pepsi India bottler Varun Beverages, and Adani Wilmar, and ITC, have so far reported mixed results for the December quarter. Meanwhile, Dabur India, said growth in rural areas outpaced urban pockets.

## BP rebounds into \$15.2b net annual profit

AFP, London

British energy giant BP rebounded into vast profit in 2023, it said Tuesday, after slumping into a loss the prior year on its exit from Russia following Moscow's Ukraine invasion.

Profit after taxation rocketed to \$15.2 billion last year from a net loss of \$2.5 billion in 2022, when it had taken a gigantic charge of \$24 billion on its exit from Russian energy group Rosneft.

However, underlying profit

excluding exceptional items halved to \$13.8 billion on lower refining margins and oil prices, BP added in a results statement.

That compared with a record \$27.7 billion the prior year when prices of fossil fuels had surged on key energy producer Russia's assault on neighbouring Ukraine, boosting the global sector.

The London-listed titan also cheered investors on Tuesday with the announcement of huge share buybacks and the ramping up of its shareholder dividend.



ACI CO-RO Bangladesh Ltd opened its factory, located in Arahazur upazila of Narayanganj, yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

## ACI CO-RO opens

FROM PAGE B1 billion by 2030, which presents abundant opportunities.

"We are blessed with a wealth of raw materials for fruit drink production. Our continuous growth in the production of fruits such as mangoes, jackfruits, lychees, pineapples, bananas, and guavas ranked top in the global market," he said.

The agriculture minister added that Bangladesh, with a population of 17 crore, offers a substantial market for foreign investors.

At the event, Danish Ambassador Christian Brix Moller said ACI CO-RO's commitment to delivering

superior products aligns seamlessly with our shared values. "Investing in Danish quality is not just an investment in products, it is an investment in the well-being and prosperity of Bangladesh."

Soren Holm Jensen, president of CO-RO A/S said: "We have established a great organisation, and we are now poised to launch new Sunquick products across Bangladesh as well as export markets."

Arif Dowla, managing director of ACI Ltd, said: "This not only marks a milestone for ACI CO-RO, but also a significant stride towards redefining the ready-to-drink market in Bangladesh."

## Floor price lifted

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In July 2022, the commission set the floor price, which is the lowest price at which a stock can be traded, for every share to halt the free-fall of the indices amid uncertainties brought on by the lingering fallout of the coronavirus pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war.

Last month, the regulator withdrew the floor from all stocks except 35. The list was narrowed further later.

Yesterday, Aftab Automobiles gained the highest among the shares that traded on the DSE, surging 10 percent. Nurani Dyeing and debutant Best Holdings also rose 10 percent each. Central Pharmaceuticals shares

grew 9.96 percent and Fu-Wang Ceramic Industries jumped 9.95 percent.

Khulna Paper & Printing posted the sharpest decline, falling 7.57 percent. Miracle Industries dipped 6.87 percent, IFIL Islamic Mutual Fund One shed 5.88 percent, SEMI FBLSI Growth Fund lost 5.26 percent, and Delta Spinners was down 5.12 percent.

Central Pharmaceuticals was the most-traded stock on the day, with its shares worth Tk 83 crore changing hands. BD Thai Aluminum witnessed a turnover of Tk 56 crore and Fu-Wang Food Tk 55 crore.

The Caspi, the broad index of the Chittagong Stock Exchange, added 70 points, or 0.39 percent, to 18,102.

## BBS misses deadline

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In Bangladesh, a provisional GDP report is published near the end of the fiscal year while the final report is only published three to four months after the conclusion of a fiscal year.

"We have prepared this for the first time, so we have sent it to the honourable prime minister for approval. Once we get the approval, we will publish the report," Shahnaz Arefin, secretary to the Statistics and Informatics Division, told The Daily Star.

She added: "We are not publishing this because of the IMF's conditions."

At a meeting in 2020-21, the Economic Relations Divisions, the finance ministry, and the Planning Commission decided to move towards publishing a quarterly GDP

report because most Saarc countries do it, according to the secretary.

"The move had faced some problems. But we have managed to resolve them with the IMF's help."

The secretary said BBS officials were given 12 training sessions to help them publish the quarterly GDP report. "That took some time, but now we will regularly publish the data."

The BBS has already carried out back calculations and published GDP reports, beginning from the fiscal year 2015-2016 to 2022-23, in order to prepare the data for the current financial year.

The reports have already been published on the statistical agency's website. Now, it is aiming to publish fresh data for the first time this fiscal year.

## Subletting surges

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DEMAND FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING SQUEEZING LIVING SPACE

To cater to the rising demand for affordable housing, construction companies have started building smaller units that have lower rents. However, this comes at a cost as average bedroom sizes have decreased by 0.7 percent year-on-year in 2022 while the decline was 28 percent compared to 2020.

The reduced living space also translated into increased sharing of household amenities, with 26.6

percent of all households in the country having to share a single bathroom.

Some 31.2 percent of these households are spread across the two city corporations of Dhaka, with subletting being the primary reason for them to share their bathrooms.

Rajshahi has the highest number of households with shared bathrooms after Dhaka, accounting for 32.3 percent of the total.

Barishal has the lowest number of households with shared bathrooms, making up 10.8 percent.

## Boeing proposes

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Khan replied that an audit team of International Civil Aviation Organization was currently engaged with the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh.

The minister said Bangladesh and the US would work together as partners to develop the country's tourism and aviation industry.

Later in the day, High Commissioner of Australia Nardia

Simpson also paid a courtesy call. She said 80,000 Bangladeshi expatriates were currently living in Australia.

The high commissioner expressed interest in establishing direct air communication between the two countries.

The minister said the current relationship between Bangladesh and Australia was very good. "The issue of direct flights will be considered," he added.