

Star BUSINESS



LDC graduation won't cause medicine prices to spike: study

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Medicine prices will not rise because of Bangladesh's graduation from the group of least developing countries (LDCs) to a developing nation in 2026, but structural challenges in the health sector and rising energy costs may have an impact, a study found.

Mohammad Abdur Razzaque, chairman of Research and Policy Integration for Development (RAPID), shared this while presenting the findings of a study conducted by his organisation during a seminar at the Sheraton Dhaka in the capital yesterday.

M Abu Eusuf, executive director of RAPID, moderated the seminar, which was jointly organised by Rapid and UK International Development.

Furthermore, Razzaque said different provisions were retained while formulating the patent act of Bangladesh in 2023 to address any upward trend in medicine prices after graduation.

Razzaque added that the benefits afforded by the new patent act are compatible with the rules of the World Trade Organisation.

"Medicines that are imported now may also be imported in the post-LDC period," he said.

In accordance with the new patent law and the Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) Agreement, Bangladesh, as an LDC, enjoys a pharmaceuticals waiver.

This allows the country to produce generic versions of patented drugs, significantly reducing the cost of medications.

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Govt trying to contain food prices for Ramadan

Bashir says

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The interim government is taking steps to ensure that prices of essential food commodities are within tolerable levels during upcoming Ramadan, said Commerce Adviser Sk Bashir Uddin yesterday.

"I know you (people) are in a lot of pain. We are working on it. The prices of onion, sugar and oil have come down slightly," he added.

Bashir made these remarks while speaking as chief guest at an event on the distribution of an NRBC Bank-supported education allowance among 30 children of deceased members of Dhaka Reporters Unity (DRU) on the platform's premises.

"We are trying to make the market as tolerable as possible ahead of Ramadan. We want to keep the demand and supply at proportional levels," he said.

Food inflation in the country is already high and local markets usually witness a hike in the prices of essential food commodities ahead of Ramadan, putting a burden on consumers having to do with limited incomes.

A lot of malpractices have plagued the society in

READ MORE ON B3

AB Bank's health shows no signs of improvement

MD MEHEDI HASAN

Once a reputable private commercial lender, AB Bank's financial health is now deteriorating gradually due to boardroom mismanagement, loan irregularities, illegal facilities availed by its sponsors and inaccurate measures by the central bank.

Established in 1981, the country's first commercial private bank sat on a massive Tk 10,115 crore toxic loans till September this year. This amount represents 31 percent of the bank's total Tk 32,625 crore in disbursed loans, according to official data.

The volume of bad loans at the private commercial bank doubled in the past year till September 2024. At the end of September 2023, the bank's defaulted loan portfolio stood at Tk 5,941 crore.

To keep provisions of around Tk 8,041 crore against its bad loans, AB Bank is now enjoying a deferred facility from the central bank.

If the regulatory facility is withdrawn and AB Bank makes provisions against its bad debts, the bank will face a huge loss, according to officials at the commercial lender who spoke to The Daily Star on condition of anonymity.

Apart from the burden of default loans, AB Bank, formerly known as Arab Bangladesh Bank, is now facing liquidity stress as its deposits have fallen drastically in recent months.

Till September this year, the bank's deposits totalled around Tk 32,633 crore, down from Tk 35,438 crore at the end of December last year, according to AB Bank's financial statement.

On the basis of risk analysis, the Bangladesh Bank last year placed the bank in the red category. Subsequently, it was decided to merge the bank with a sound market peer – altogether triggering panic withdrawals.

The unexpected cash withdrawals dealt a further blow to the already troubled AB Bank, according to banking insiders.

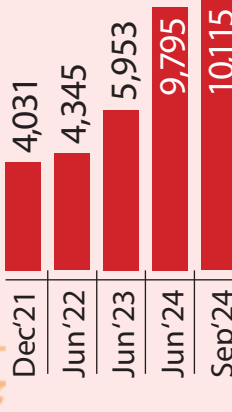
AB Bank's troubles began to surface at least eight years ago when it faced criticism for a 2016 money laundering incident flagged by the central bank.

A Bangladesh Bank inspection found that the bank laundered nearly Tk 165 crore (\$20 million) to the United Arab Emirates through

KEY POINTS

- » AB Bank started journey in 1981
- » Its bad loans increased by Tk 4,174cr in a year
- » Deposits fell by Tk 2,805cr in just nine months
- » The bank appointed a former cabinet secretary as adviser though he has no experience in banking job

DEFAULT LOANS AT AB BANK



DEPOSITS AND LOANS

Its deposits stood at Tk 32,633cr as of September

Its loans and advances stood at Tk 32,625cr as of September



SOURCE: BB AND AB BANK FINANCIAL STATEMENT

two shady organisations under the guise of investment.

M Morshed Khan, a former cabinet member of the BNP government, was one of the sponsors of the bank. The bank was under the control of Khan and his family members for a long time, industry insiders said.

During the money laundering criticism, M Wahidul Haque was the chairman of the commercial lender.

In 2017, Haque, along with vice-chairman Salim Ahmed and director Faheemul Huq, resigned from the bank's board of directors.

That year, the Bangladesh Bank appointed an observer to monitor the bank's health closely. The bank still has a central bank coordinator, despite its health showing no significant improvement.

Industry insiders said that loans approved earlier through irregular means have become defaulted in recent years. Besides, lacklustre loan recovery efforts from the top borrowers and mismanagement by the current leadership are also responsible for the bank's ailing health.

The bank is struggling to recover loans from Beximco Group, Sikder Group, Asian City, Buildtrade Group and Mahin Group, they added.

AB Bank provided a guarantee to a non-

bank financial institution Phoenix Finance on behalf of two companies – Mahin Group and Buildtrade – totaling around Tk 179 crore, but AB is now struggling to recover the amount from them.

If the recovery of large loans had been prioritised earlier under qualified leadership, the lender's financial health could have been saved, according to AB Bank officials.

But that did not happen, as inaccurate countermeasures hampered recovery efforts.

For instance, the bank appointed former cabinet secretary Kabir Bin Anwar as an adviser to the board of directors to meet parameters under the Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) framework, according to bank documents, despite the bureaucrat having no banking experience.

The Bangladesh Bank introduced the PCA framework in 2023 to help stabilise commercial banks and restore confidence in the financial system.

This was an example of the extent of mismanagement at the bank, as the bank even got the implementation of corrective measures flawed, industry sources said.

In 2019, Tarique Afzal was appointed the president and managing director of the bank. Afzal previously served the bank as deputy managing director.

READ MORE ON B3

Energy prices have huge impact on inflation: study

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Price shocks in coal, oil, and liquefied natural gas (LNG) have profound effects on inflation, exchange rates, and reserves, according to new studies of the South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (Sanem).

For example, a 10 percent increase in coal prices leads to a 0.3 percent uptick in the consumer price index (CPI), while

Additionally, the study revealed that energy price fluctuations have a noticeable effect on Bangladesh's exchange rate.

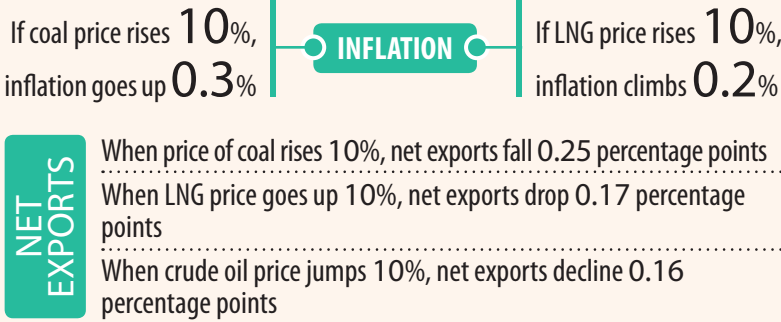
A 10 percent increase in crude oil prices causes a 0.16 percent depreciation in the value of the taka against the US dollar while LNG price hikes similarly lead to a 0.15 percent depreciation.

These price shocks also exacerbate net exports. For instance, a 10 percent rise in coal prices results in a 0.25 percentage point decline in net exports.

The first study, titled "Macroeconomic Effects of Energy Price Fluctuations: Evidence from Bangladesh", explored the ripple effects of global fossil fuel price shocks on Bangladesh's macroeconomy.

Sanem Senior Research Associate Md Tuhin Ahmed presented findings that show a significant and immediate impact on inflation, particularly the CPI, when coal and LNG prices rise.

SANEM STUDY FINDINGS



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\$4b spent a year on healthcare abroad

Expert says in keynote

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladeshis spend around \$4 billion abroad every year for healthcare, according to Malik Talha Ismail Bari, senior vice president of the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI).

This is due to a lack of specialised treatment, trust in doctors and advanced technology within the country alongside costs being comparatively lower abroad, he said.

Bari, also a director of United Hospital, was delivering a keynote paper through a presentation at a seminar, styled "Reversing the Outbound Healthcare Tourism", at the DCCI yesterday.

There are 5,461 private hospitals and clinics in Bangladesh, of which 1,810 are within Dhaka division, he said.

People in rural areas are deprived of quality and adequate healthcare services while pressure is created for an influx of patients at healthcare facilities in Dhaka.

Limited infrastructure, a lack of skilled workforce, quality and safety concerns, low doctor-patient ratio



WHY PEOPLE SEEK HEALTHCARE ABROAD

- » Lack of specialised treatment facilities in Bangladesh
- » Lack of trust in local facilities
- » Dearth of advanced technology
- » High costs of treatment
- » Long waiting time
- » Absence of skilled workforce

BY THE NUMBERS

Bangladesh has 134,000 doctors

Often the number, only 33,000 are govt doctors

There are 5,461 private hospitals and clinics

49% people do not get quality healthcare services

EXPENDITURE

Percapita health expenditure in South Asia is \$401

Whereas it is \$110 in Bangladesh

SOURCE: DCCI KEYNOTE

allocated Tk 30,125 crore, or 3.78 percent of its national budget, for public healthcare in fiscal year 2024-25.

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16434

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‘LankaBangla Mastercard Titanium’ launched for medical professionals

STAR BUSINESS DESK

LankaBangla Finance PLC, Mastercard and Bangladesh Doctors’ Foundation (BDF) jointly launched a co-branded ‘LankaBangla Mastercard Titanium’ credit card, exclusively designed for medical professionals.

Cardholders will be able to enjoy exclusive benefits, discounts and deals at Mastercard partners as well as lifestyle amenities.

Humaira Azam, managing director of LankaBangla Finance PLC, Syed Mohammad Kamal, country manager for Bangladesh at Mastercard, and Md Shahed Rafi Pavel, chairman of the foundation, inaugurated the card at the non-bank financial institution’s head office in the capital’s Banani yesterday, said a press release.

Humaira expressed her confidence that doctors would embrace this co-branded credit card as a convenient and secure alternative to cash.

“This co-branded credit card will significantly enhance the lifestyle of BDF members and their families by facilitating cashless transactions and making their lives more convenient and hassle-free,” she added.

This collaboration reiterates the company’s commitment to providing world-class products and services to its cardholders across segments,” Kamal said.

“I firmly believe this card will play an integral role in our



Humaira Azam, managing director of LankaBangla Finance PLC, Syed Mohammad Kamal, country manager for Bangladesh at Mastercard, and Md Shahed Rafi Pavel, chairman of Bangladesh Doctors’ Foundation, jointly inaugurate a co-branded ‘LankaBangla Mastercard Titanium’ credit card, at the non-bank financial institution’s head office in the capital’s Banani yesterday.

PHOTO: MASTERCARD

members’ shopping and payment experiences,” Pavel said. All BDF members, including doctors, staff and their family members, can now avail themselves of the LankaBangla and BDF co-branded LankaBangla Mastercard Titanium credit card and its supplementary cards.

Khurshed Alam, senior executive vice-president

and head of retail business of the NBF, Md Toufique Rahman, head of cards (current charge), Md Raziuddin, head of brand marketing and communications, Sohail Alim, director of Mastercard, AM Pervaz Rahim and Halida Hanum Akhter, advisers of the foundation, MA Kaes, head of corporate affairs, were also present.

EBL hosts event for overseas education agencies



Ali Reza Iftekhar, managing director and CEO of Eastern Bank PLC, poses for photographs with representatives of leading education agencies at the ‘Student Agency Night’ at its head office in the capital’s Gulshan recently.

PHOTO: EASTERN BANK

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Eastern Bank PLC (EBL) recently organised a “Student Agency Night” at its head office in the capital’s Gulshan, bringing together premier educational agencies specialising in guiding students to pursue higher education abroad.

Representatives from around 150 educational agencies took part in the ceremony.

Ali Reza Iftekhar, managing director and CEO of the bank, inaugurated the programme, the bank said in a press release.

Speaking on the occasion, Iftekhar said, “EBL always believes that education is a tool for shaping the future of a

nation. By providing financial assistance and guidance to help students fulfill their dreams of higher education, we would like to contribute in developing the skills base to harness our demographic dividend.”

EBL has been working to empower youth and make global education accessible through innovative financial products and partnerships.

“Student File” service proposition offered by EBL is best known for providing customised banking solutions to students who are going abroad for higher education. Designed for convenience and efficiency, “EBL Student File” service provides a seamless and hassle-free way to transfer funds internationally.

Social Islami Bank celebrates 29th anniversary

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Social Islami Bank PLC celebrated its 29th founding anniversary at its head office in Dhaka.

The bank chalked out various activities, including discussion, at the bank’s head office and branches across the country.

M Sadiqul Islam, chairman of the bank, inaugurated the programme as the chief guest, said a press release.

Islam expressed greetings and gratitude to clients, shareholders, regulators and well-wishers for their support throughout the long journey of the bank.

Mohammad Forkanullah, managing director (acting), thanked the clients for staying with this bank, while presiding over the programme.

He urged all employees to work with dedication and provide service with excellence.

Maksuda Begum, vice-chairman of the bank, Md Morshed Alam Khondoker and Md Anwar Hossain, directors, attended the event.

Among others, Abdul Hannan Khan and Md Nazmus Saadat, deputy managing directors of the bank, and other senior executives of head office, Dhaka zonal head and branch managers of Dhaka region, were also present.



M Sadiqul Islam, chairman of Social Islami Bank PLC, cuts a cake with high officials of the bank at its head office in Dhaka recently to celebrate its 29th founding anniversary.

PHOTO: SOCIAL ISLAMI BANK

PRICES OF KEY ESSENTIALS IN DHAKA CITY			
	PRICE (NOV 23, 2024)	% CHANGES FROM A MONTH AGO	% CHANGE FROM A YEAR AGO
Fine rice (kg)	Tk 68-Tk 80	2.78 ↑	8.03 ↑
Coarse rice (kg)	Tk 50-Tk 55	0	2.94 ↑
Loose flour (kg)	Tk 40-Tk 45	0	-10.53 ↓
Lentil (kg)	Tk 105-Tk 110	0	0
Soybean (litre)	Tk 168-Tk 170	9.39 ↑	10.82 ↑
Potato (kg)	Tk 75-Tk 85	39.13 ↑	68.42 ↑
Onion (kg)	Tk 120-Tk 130	2.04 ↑	13.64 ↑
Egg (4 pcs)	Tk 48-Tk 50	-2.00 ↓	18.07 ↑
SOURCE: TCB			

Electro Mart holds ‘Partners’ Conference’



Kevin Bai, assistant president of Gree Global, and Md Nurun Newaz, chairman of Electro Mart Group, pose for photographs after inaugurating a conference, styled ‘Partners’ Conference of Bangladesh’, at the Radisson Blu Dhaka Water Garden in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: ELECTRO MART

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Electro Mart Group, local representative of Gree Global, yesterday organised the “Partners’ Conference of Bangladesh”.

Gree’s partners and channel partners of the country took part in the conference.

Kevin Bai, assistant president of Gree Global, and Md Nurun Newaz, chairman of Electro Mart Group, inaugurated the conference at the Radisson Blu Dhaka Water Garden in the capital, said a press release.

In his speech, Bai appreciated and thanked the partners for making Gree products readily

available for Bangladeshi consumers.

He also highlighted the success story and current position of Gree Global.

“The current growth of the electronics market in Bangladesh saw significant growth in recent years and played a vital role in growing the country’s economy. In future, the market will be larger due to rapid rural electrification, huge development works and interest of the citizens for taking modern electronics flavour.”

“Gree addressed environmental issues by promoting green energy, recycling, conservation of water and electricity, and avoiding single-use plastics,” he added.

Nurun Newaz said the group is working for the development of the electronics sector by sharing technology with Gree Global. Now, the group is manufacturing international quality Gree air conditioners at its factory at Sonarganj, Narayanganj for meeting the demands of local customers.

The electronics sector is rapidly changing and will soon be a self-sustaining industry.

“We hope that soon Gree products will be exported as made in Bangladesh,” said Md Nurul Amin, managing director of Electro Mart Group.

What forcing Google

FROM PAGE B4

She noted that it could be its users who wind up suffering, given the case Google is making in blog posts on the matter.

What is Chrome worth?

A Bloomberg analyst estimates that Chrome, which is used by more than three billion people around the world, would sell for at least \$15 billion.

But given the lack of precedent, predicting how much Chrome would fetch on the market is tricky.

A Chinese investment group bought an internet browser from Opera Software ASA in Norway for \$600 million in 2016, but it only claimed 350 million users at the time.

Who might buy it?

There are very few potential buyers for Chrome, according to Emarketer senior analyst Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf.

“It’s likely that any company with deep enough pockets to afford Chrome is already under antitrust scrutiny,” Mitchell-Wolf said.

“If I had to speculate, my inclination is to look at US-based artificial intelligence players.”

While Chrome being bought by the likes of OpenAI would certainly raise antitrust concerns, the US government could see it as a way for the nation to prioritize innovation on the global stage.

Elon Musk’s AI startup could conceivably be a Chrome contender, bankrolled by his riches and having the deal cleared thanks to his close working relationship with incoming president Donald Trump.

Win for rivals?

Analysts agreed that people will keep using Chrome regardless of who owns it, provided the quality doesn’t plummet.

“This assumes Chrome retains its most popular features and continues innovating,” said analyst Mitchell-Wolf.

“Search behaviors are a function of convenience first, trust and experience second.”

The justice department’s argument

that people use Chrome because it is a default search engine in devices is off the mark, the analyst added.

Trump factor

Many doubt that Judge Mehta will embrace all of the justice department’s proposed remedies in the case.

CFRA analyst Angelo Zino considered the measures “extreme and unlikely to be imposed by the court.”

The incoming Trump administration also “remains a wild card” regarding whether justice officials will back off the idea of breaking up Google.

Trump in October indicated he opposes dismantling Google, believing such a move would be against the interests of the US internationally.

“China is afraid of Google” and a breakup would hurt the company, Trump reasoned at the time.

Meanwhile, Trump has also accused Google of being unfair to conservatives.

Japan approves \$140b

FROM PAGE B4

The price of the staple rocketed because of hot weather and water shortages and after a “megaquake” warning in August led to hoarding. Record inflows of hungry tourists were also blamed.

Separately, Ishiba has promised to spend 10 trillion yen through 2030 to boost Japan’s semiconductor and artificial intelligence sectors and help the nation regain its tech edge.

After dominating tech in the 1980s, “Japan had quite a long period of almost just sitting back and observing a lot of this innovation,” particularly in artificial intelligence, said Kelly Forbes at the AI Asia Pacific Institute.

“What we have seen in the last maybe two to three years is Japan really waking up to the potential” of such developments, she told AFP.

Local gold price hiked by Tk 2,822 a bhoori

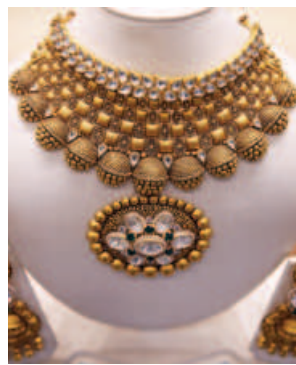
STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Jewellers have decided to hike gold prices again, raising it by Tk 2,822 to Tk 142,265 for each bhoori or 11.66 grammes with effect from today.

The previous price of each bhoori of 22-carat gold stood at Tk 139,443.

The standing committee on pricing and price monitoring of the Bangladesh Jewellers' Association took the decision of hiking the prices in a meeting yesterday, citing an increase in pure gold prices in the local market.

The price of gold in Bangladesh has been rising steadily for more than a year, influenced by hikes



in the international market and volatility in domestic supply.

In July last year, the price of gold crossed the Tk 1 lakh mark for the first time in Bangladesh.

In Bangladesh, the annual demand for gold stands between 20 tonnes and 40 tonnes.

About 80 percent of the demand for the precious metal in Bangladesh is met through smuggled gold.



Leathertech Bangladesh 2024, the 10th edition of an international technology expo, came to a close yesterday. Participants showcased a variety of leatherworking machinery, chemicals and accessories in addition to finished leather goods during the three-day event held at the ICCB in Dhaka.

PHOTO: STAR

WB focuses on creating quality jobs for youth

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The World Bank focuses on creating quality jobs for the millions of youth population entering the job market every year, its Country Director for Bangladesh and Bhutan Abdoulaye Seck said yesterday.

"We are ever more determined to give it all for Bangladesh," he said at an exhibition, titled "Paint Your Sky, Make it Yours: Future Bangladesh in the eyes of the youth", at DrikPath Bhaban in Dhaka's Panthapath.

The World Bank organised the exhibition, showcasing an inspiring collection of wall art created by students from across the country, reflecting their hopes and aspirations for a prosperous and inclusive Bangladesh.

Inaugurated by Finance Adviser Salehuddin Ahmed, the show will remain open to the public from 3:00pm to 8:00pm until November 30.

Seck said these young artists have dared to dream, to express, and to envision a better future.

"They have used their creativity to paint their vision of a new Bangladesh – a nation where justice prevails, where dreams are nurtured, and where the sky is the limit. They have painted the sky and made it theirs," he added.

He also said the exhibition renews their focus on empowering young people and creating opportunities for them.

"We are hearing their voices, aspirations, and concerns. As a longstanding development partner of Bangladesh, the World Bank recognises the pivotal role that the youths play in shaping the present and future," Seck added.

Salehuddin said students expressed their feelings very aptly by painting murals throughout the country during the mass uprising from July-August.

"Everybody knows the power of art. When

I looked at the wall, they are most expressive, students have expressed themselves very aptly," he added.

The finance adviser further said that these sorts of things are very important for Bangladesh.

The exhibition features vibrant wall art painted by students and youths across the country, highlighting their vision and issues they consider important for the future of the country.

The artworks came from 12 districts, including Dhaka, Rajshahi, Khulna, Sylhet, Chattogram, Barishal, Cumilla, Rangpur, Rangamati, Khagrachhari, and Bandarban.

Seck also said the World Bank is committed to empowering youths around the globe.

"In an incredible and an unprecedented way, and in the wake of unfathomable trauma and sacrifices, Bangladeshi students and youths have used their creativity and arts to communicate their vision for the country," he added.

\$4b spent a year

FROM PAGE B1

Pre-capita health expenditure, or annual government spending for healthcare per person, is \$110 in Bangladesh whereas \$401 in South Asia, he said.

Patients sometimes go abroad for healthcare services due to a lack of facilities, trust and comfort and reversing this trend requires formulation of a proper plan and identifying the bottlenecks, said National Professor AK Azad Khan.

"Since medical science is an ever-changing process, we need to have a proper curriculum to adopt the best technological advancements," said Khan, also president of the Diabetic Association of Bangladesh.

He also stressed on the standardisation of laboratories, adequate budgetary allocation,

facilitating more research and strengthening the Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council (BM&DC), which is the regulatory authority for medical and dental education in Bangladesh.

Trust is a crucial factor when considering this sector's development, said Rezaul Karim Kazal, professor of the obstetrics and gynaecology department at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University.

Quality hospitals should be established in rural areas for wider coverage alongside customised services for all types of patients, he added.

Only doctors should be appointed through Bangladesh Civil Service for the public health administration to be run efficiently, said Syed

Abdul Hamid, professor at the Institute of Health Economics of the University of Dhaka.

Moreover, a "health service commission" should be formed similar to the Bangladesh Judicial Service Commission, which assess the suitability of persons for entry-level appointments as assistant judges or judicial magistrates, he added.

Liaquat Hossain, registrar of the BM&DC, suggested that the national policy for registering foreign doctors to practice in Bangladesh could be simplified.

Of the 1,34,000 doctors in Bangladesh, only 33,000 are in public service, said Abul Bashar Md Jamal, a former professor of surgery at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

However, over 10,000

foreign students are studying in different public and private medical colleges here, he added.

Members of middle-income households are increasingly seeking healthcare services abroad, mainly for a lack of confidence and satisfaction, said DCCI President Ashraf Ahmed.

Only a few types of advanced treatments, such as robotic surgery, are available locally, he said.

The trend can be reversed by outperforming regional competition, ensuring customer satisfaction and enhancing quality of medical services, reliability and branding initiatives, he added.

"We need to be more open to foreign doctors, nurses, medical technologists and other specialists," opined Ahmed.

Energy prices

FROM PAGE B1

However, despite these substantial effects on inflation and the exchange rate, energy price shocks have not shown a direct, significant impact on GDP in the short term.

The second study was titled "An Assessment of Institutional Quality and Political Economy Dynamics of the Power and Energy Sector in Light of the Renewable Energy Transition in Bangladesh".

It highlighted that the poor regulatory quality, lack of policy coherence, and weak institutional capacity hindered Bangladesh's energy sector transformation.

The problematic Quick Enhancement of Electricity and Energy Supply (Special Provision) Act, 2010, which bypasses competitive bidding and undermines transparency, led to inflated electricity prices, said Ahmed while presenting the second study.

A 2023 amendment to the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC) Act further centralises power, eliminating public hearings and allowing the government to set energy prices unilaterally, according to the study.

It said the Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB), which controls most electricity distribution, monopolises the market, limiting private sector involvement and creating opportunities for rent-seeking behaviours.

The third study, titled "Assessing Investment Needs for Renewable Energy Transition in Bangladesh by 2041", estimated the investment requirements to transition Bangladesh's energy sector to renewable sources, particularly solar and wind.

Sanem Research Associate Ekramul Hasan presented an analysis indicating that the country's current renewable energy capacity of 1,219MW, which is 4.16 percent of the total generation, was far from sufficient in meeting future targets.

The total investment, including fixed operating costs for renewable plants, range from \$60.31 billion to \$76.13 billion depending on the target and cost assumptions.

A key challenge in mobilising these investments is the high upfront costs, particularly for energy storage systems, although costs are expected to decline globally, it said.

To address these needs, the study recommended mechanisms such as public private partnerships (PPPs), green bonds, and concessional financing from international bodies like World Bank and Asian Development Bank, according to the study.

Sanem Executive Director Selim Raihan said relevant stakeholders, such as ministries and other departments, do not have a clear understanding of green and clean energy and there was a lack of sincerity in the renewable energy sector.

"In the last 10 years, we have seen corruption, wrong policies, and wrong focus in the energy sector, and because of this, macroeconomic stability has also been affected," he said.

The transition towards a sustainable energy path, or towards renewable energy, has faced many obstacles in that path, Raihan added.

"We have urged the government to review this whole thing and develop a new strategy," he said.

Govt trying

FROM PAGE B1

Bangladesh over the past 15 years, for which essential food commodity prices have gone up to such high levels, Bashir said.

"We had a state, but the society was unprecedentedly divided. Our society was scared," he said.

"Now a new government has been formed based on a student-led mass movement to transform it into a dignified society," Bashir added.

DRU President Syed Shukur Ali Shuvo presided over the programme while its general secretary, Mohi Uddin, also spoke.

Stocks suffered last week on Moody's downgrade

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Dhaka stocks suffered losses last week as investors became cautious following Moody's downgrade of Bangladesh's credit rating to B2 from B1, with a revised long-term outlook of negative from stable.

The Dhaka Stock Exchange's (DSE) benchmark DSEX index plummeted 158 points or 2.95 percent, to close at 5,197 on Thursday.

The downturn snapped a three-week rally that had added 241 points earlier.

Other key indices also took a hit. The DSEX30 index, comprising 30 blue-chip companies, dropped 67 points to 1,919 in at the end of Thursday, the last trading day of the previous week.

The Shariah-based DSES index declined 38 points to settle at 1,151.

"Market movement was driven by negative changes in the market capitalisation of bank, pharmaceuticals and chemicals, and fuel and power scrips amid positive changes in the market cap of financial institutions scrip," said Shanta Securities in its weekly market review.

Average daily turnover fell 16 percent to Tk 466 crore, reflecting reduced investor engagement.

The pharmaceuticals sector recorded the highest turnover, accounting for 13.5 percent of the week's total, followed by banking sector at 13.3 percent and textile sector at 9.8 percent.

However, all major sectors experienced losses. The power sector suffered the most, down 3.9 percent, while banking, pharmaceuticals, and food sectors slid by 3 percent, 2.79 percent, and 2.68 percent, respectively.

Among individual stocks, Agni Systems led trading with Tk 74 crore in turnover followed by Sonali Aansh, Islami Bank, Bangladesh Shipping Corporation, and Beximco Pharma.

Some 287 stocks declined, 72 advanced, and 23 remained unchanged. The Chittagong Stock Exchange mirrored the trend, as its CASPI shed 296 points to close at 14,584 on Thursday.

STOCKS		WEEK-ON WEEK
DSEX ▼	CASPI ▼	
2.95% 5,197.58	1.98% 14,584.26	

COMMODITIES		AS OF FRIDAY
Gold ▲	Oil ▲	
\$2,715.28 (per ounce)	\$71.18 (per barrel)	

LDC graduation won't cause

FROM PAGE B1

This allows the country to produce generic versions of patented drugs, significantly reducing the cost of medications.

However, if any new medicine is patented abroad after Bangladesh's graduation from LDC status, the companies will have to pay a 4 percent royalty to the patent holder.

"This may increase the prices of only these kinds of medicines by 2 percent to 4 percent," Razzaque said.

The researcher also said the government will be unable to provide incentives for medicine

exports after graduation, which may impact the export of pharmaceuticals.

He suggested formulating a competitive drug policy and increasing public investment in the health sector.

He also called for making the Active Pharmaceuticals Ingredients Park, which has been under construction for many years, operational quickly.

"A form of micro health insurance may reduce the burden of health costs for the poor," he added.

The chief adviser's Special Envoy for International Affairs Lutley Siddiqi said any decision regarding LDC graduation

needs to be carefully examined through a cost-benefit analysis based on data and research.

"The decision will not be rushed," he added.

Abdur Rahim Khan, additional secretary to the commerce ministry, said the prices of at least 50 medicines increased by 10 percent to 70 percent in domestic markets recently.

He also mentioned that an American investor recently wanted to invest in drug manufacturing in Bangladesh, but faced many stringent conditions from the narcotics department.

"Such conditions need to be eased to attract more

foreign investment in the sector," he said.

Khan also reiterated calls to make the API Park in Munshiganj functional as soon as possible.

Abdul Muktedir, president of the Bangladesh Association of Pharmaceuticals Industries, said if Bangladesh cannot make raw materials, the sector cannot compete globally.

"The more research is done, the more competitive the local pharmaceuticals sector will be," he said, adding that a favourable policy can reduce prices in the domestic market and lead to significant export growth.

He said that the bank is now in a tight liquidity situation but it is able to manage the situation. "We faced a massive deposit withdrawal pressure when our bank was enlisted in the red category by the central bank. But the list itself was faulty," he added.

AB Bank's health shows

FROM PAGE B1

Contacted, he told The Daily Star that no new loans have defaulted, but loans disbursed between 2010 and 2017 have now become defaulted. "We have not disbursed any large loans for a long time."

Defaulted loans increased

because interest is added to the existing default loan amounts, he added. "Loans to Asian City and Buildtrade are all legacy issues," said the AB Bank MD.

Regarding the guarantee to Phoenix Finance, he said the guarantee was issued before his tenure and that

loans to Mahin Group and Buildtrade were given in 2010.

Regarding the appointment of Kabir Bin Anwar, he said there had been a proposal for his appointment, but the bank did not appoint him as an adviser.

Bangladesh Lamps Limited
Head office: House-22, Road-4, Block-F, Banani, Dhaka-1213
NOTICE OF THE 63RD ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
Notice is hereby given that the 63rd Annual General Meeting of the Company will be held on Sunday, 22nd December 2024, at 11:00 a.m. through digital platform to transact the following business:
AGENDA
Ordinary Business:
1. Consideration and adoption of the Directors' and Auditors' reports and the Audited Financial Statements of the Company for the year ended 30 June 2024.
2. Declaration of dividend for the year 2023-2024.
3. Election of Directors.
4. Appointment of Auditors for the year 2024-2025 and fixation of their remuneration.
5. Appointment of professional for the certification on Corporate Governance for the year 2024-2025.
Special Business:
6. To change the name of the Company to "Bangladesh Lamps PLC" from "Bangladesh Lamps Limited".
Pursuant to the Companies Act, 1994 (2nd Amendment Act, 2020), to adopt the change of registered name of the Company to "Bangladesh Lamps PLC" from "Bangladesh Lamps Limited" and to amend Clause I of the Memorandum of Association of the Company and other relevant clauses of the Memorandum and Articles of Association of the Company, and to pass the following resolution as special business:
"Resolved that the proposal of changing of registered name of the Company to "Bangladesh Lamps PLC" from "Bangladesh Lamps Limited" in accordance with the Companies Act, 1994 (2nd amendment 2020) and the amendment in the Clause I of the Memorandum of Association of the Company along with other relevant clauses of the Memorandum and Articles of Association of the Company, be and are hereby approved subject to approval of the regulatory authorities.
Further resolved that the old name of the Company will be replaced by the new name in all the statutory title documents, licenses and other relevant documents."
By order of the Board

Mohammad Ruhan Miah, FCS
Company Secretary
Dhaka
24-11-2024
NOTES :
1. 17-11-2024 was the Record Date. The shareholders, whose names will appear in the share register of the Company or in the depository register on that date, will be eligible to attend the Annual General Meeting.
2. Pursuant to the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission's Order No. Order no. SEC/SRMIC/94-231/91, dated March 31, 2021, and BSEC/ICAD/SRIC/2024/318/87, dated March 27, 2024, the AGM will be virtual meeting of the Members, which will be conducted via live webcast by using digital platform.
3. For the sake of convenience, shareholders are requested to submit their queries on the Directors' report / Audited Financial Statements for the year ended on 30 June 2024, if any, at the Share Office of the Company preferably 7 days before the day of the General Meeting.
4. A shareholder entitled to attend and vote at the meeting may appoint a proxy to attend and vote in his/her place. The proxy form, stamped with a revenue stamp of Tk. 100, shall be submitted at the Share Office of the Company or through e-mail at mohammad.mosadaque@transcombd.com / abu.yousuf@transcombd.com 48 hours before the meeting, i.e. by the close of business on 19th December 2024.
5. The Members will be able to submit their questions/comments and vote electronically 24 hours before commencement of the AGM and during the AGM. For logging into the system, the Members need to put their 16-digit Beneficial Owner (BO) ID number/Folio Number and other credential as proof of their identity by visiting the link <https://agm.bl.com.bd>
6. We encourage the Members to login to the system prior to the meeting start time of 11:00 a.m. Bangladesh Standard Time (BST) on December 22, 2024. Please allow ample time to login and establish your connectivity. The webcast will start at 11:00 a.m. Bangladesh Standard Time (BST). Please contact at 01712-778840 for any technical difficulties in accessing the virtual meeting and at 01713-082494 for share related issue.
 TRANSTEC
ON and AHEAD



Cox's Bazar, the longest unbroken sea beach in the world, was relatively quiet even a few days ago, but now the air is alive with the bustle of holidaymakers.

Navana Pharma posts 12% profit growth in Q1

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Navana Pharmaceuticals' profit grew in the first quarter of the current financial year thanks to strong sales.

The pharmaceutical company's profit rose 12 percent year-on-year to Tk 13.37 crore in the July-September period of this year.

Its earnings per share (EPS) rose to Tk 1.25 from Tk 1.11 in the same period last year, according to the company's unaudited financial statements.

The drugmaker attributed the EPS growth to increased revenue and improved material utilisation.

The company's net sales jumped 31 percent year-on-year to Tk 213.74 crore.

Its net operating cash flow per share (NOCFPS) also surged to Tk 2 from Tk 1.19, which the company attributed to higher cash collections from customers compared to payments to drugmaking vendors.

Founded in 1992, Navana Pharmaceuticals operates under two divisions: veterinary and human health, as per its website.

The veterinary division produces and markets veterinary medicines and feed supplements for poultry, dairy, and aqua sectors.

Meanwhile, the human health division manufactures a wide range of products, including tablets, capsules, oral liquids, and eye drops.

Tourism in Cox's Bazar gaining momentum

MOKAMMEL SHUVO

With temperatures around Bangladesh dropping ahead of winter, hotels, restaurants and tourist attractions around Cox's Bazar are being crowded by visitors.

The longest unbroken beach in the world was relatively quiet even a few days ago, but now the air is alive with the bustle of holidaymakers.

This has breathed fresh life into the businesses of tom-tom riders, photographers, jet ski riders, horse riders and roaming vendors that dot the beachside city.

The local tourism industry has been left out in the lurch since July, when student-led protests against the Awami League government caused disruptions in transport.

Since then, political uncertainty and inclement weather have repeatedly led to disruptions in tourist movement.

This prolonged lack of visitors to the country's premier tourist destination plunged the local economy into a sort of recession, industry insiders said.

Now, with crisp wintry winds filling the air, business appears to have come back on track, bringing smiles to the many big and small stakeholders.

They now expect plentiful business, especially with many students set to get holidays after examinations in the winter.

Akram Hossain, who takes tourists along to ride the waves on a jet ski, said there are around 40 jet skis along the beach. Most earn Tk 15,000 to Tk 20,000



per day if they find an adequate number of customers.

He was beaming, saying that the brisk business he was enjoying had already earned him a Tk 700 bonus.

Another smiling face belonged to Saiful, a horse rider at the Shughandah beach.

He said they earn Tk 1,500 to Tk 1,800 per day from offering rides on local horses while rides on imported foreign breeds can fetch over Tk 5,000 per day.

For the past few months, they could earn only Tk 300 to Tk 400 per day he lamented.

Nazmul Hossain said he and his family had come to enjoy their vacation just prior to the peak season as he was concerned that costs would escalate when business

was in full swing.

Abul Kasim Sikdar, president of the Cox's Bazar Hotel Motel Resort Owners' Association, said: "Every day around 30,000 to 35,000 tourists are visiting Cox's Bazar. But even more are expected to arrive after the end of the examinations in December."

He hoped for good business in December, January and February.

"A tourism fair with attractive cultural programmes will kick off possibly in mid-December. The tourists will surely enjoy that fair," he said.

He added that the law-and-order situation is much better now.

Many hotels and resorts are also giving discounts to tourists this month, he said.

Economic recovery amid supply chain disruptions

MAMUN RASHID

Asia forms the backbone of the world economy, powering vital supply chains from electronics hubs in Taiwan and South Korea to garment factories in Bangladesh. Yet, in recent years, disruptions such as semiconductor shortages, geopolitical tensions between China and the US, tensions in the Middle East and logistical bottlenecks have rippled across economies in Japan, Malaysia, and India. These issues reveal the fragility of global supply networks and highlight the pressing need for resilience. As Indo-Pacific nations forge pathways to recovery, there are lessons for countries like Bangladesh to navigate these global shifts effectively.

The Covid-19 pandemic exposed and exacerbated vulnerabilities in global supply chains. Semiconductor shortages became one of the striking examples, severely impacting industries reliant on electronics. Disruptions in chip manufacturing in Asia cascaded across global industries. Geopolitical tensions further compounded these issues, particularly trade disputes between the US and China, with tariffs and sanctions disrupting established supply routes.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict and recent Middle East tensions rubbed salt into the wounds, increasing costs in energy and agriculture and causing shipping delays due to rerouting around conflict zones. These shipping bottlenecks led to higher fuel consumption, longer transit times, and more CO2 emissions, complicating sustainability efforts. Furthermore, labour shortages including visa restrictions – particularly in the shipping industry – highlighted the human dimension of supply chain fragility. The reliance on alternative transport modes, such as airlift and trucking, introduced further complications, including higher costs and logistical challenges.

In response to these disruptions, Indo-Pacific economies have adopted a range of strategies to build resilience in their supply chains. One of these approaches has been diversification. Businesses have expanded their supplier bases across multiple countries to reduce reliance on a single region, minimizing risks associated with geopolitical tensions.

Digitalisation has emerged as a cornerstone of supply chain resilience.

Advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, and the Internet of Things are being employed to enhance visibility and efficiency. Automation and robotics are also being leveraged to mitigate risks associated with labour shortages and improve productivity.

Sustainability has also become a central focus. Countries are increasingly adopting environmentally friendly practices, such as reducing carbon footprints and integrating green technologies. This two-fold focus on resilience and sustainability positions the Indo-Pacific region as a leader in adapting to new global economic realities.

For Bangladesh, these strategies offer valuable lessons. As the country seeks to strengthen its role in global supply chains, it can draw inspiration from its Indo-Pacific counterparts. Diversifying export markets and reducing overreliance on a few sectors, such as garments, will be crucial. Investing in technological upgrades, particularly in automation and digital infrastructure, can enhance productivity and competitiveness. Regulatory reforms in labour and environmental standards will align Bangladesh with international trade norms, paving the way for integration into trade blocs like the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

Bangladesh can also leverage its strong ties with the EU to modernise its infrastructure. The EU's Global Gateway initiative offers investment opportunities in ports, transportation networks, and digital infrastructure. By prioritising these areas, Bangladesh can navigate the challenges of global supply chains while positioning itself as a competitive player in the evolving economic landscape.

For Bangladesh, embracing these strategies will not only address immediate challenges, but also lay the foundation for long-term growth. Strengthening resilience and sustainability in supply chains is not just an economic imperative – it is a pathway to securing a more stable and prosperous future.

The writer is chairman of Financial Excellence Ltd. This piece is the excerpt of a discussion at the recently held Bay of Bengal Conversation.



What forcing Google to sell Chrome could mean

AFP, New York

US antitrust lawyers are calling on a judge to force the sale of Google's Chrome browser to limit the company's market clout in a move that would shake up the internet giant.

On Wednesday, the US Department of Justice submitted its recommendation for the breakup to US District Court Judge Amit Mehta, who is set to impose steps next year to address Google's monopoly power in online search.

Blow to Google?

"This would be a huge gut punch to Google," said Wedbush Securities analyst Dan Ives.

Google provides free search, making money off targeting ads and features that promote online commerce.

"It would greatly alter (Google's) business model," said Syracuse University professor of advertising Beth Egan.

Selling Chrome would also deprive Google of a rich source of information used to train its algorithms and promote its other services like Maps.

Launched in 2008, Chrome dominates the browser market, dwarfing rivals Edge and Safari, developed by Microsoft and Apple, respectively.

Egan believed Google would find a way to recover if forced to sell Chrome.

"I don't think divesting the browser is going to kill Google as a company," Egan said.

READ MORE ON B2

Japan approves \$140b stimulus

AFP, Tokyo

Japan's minority government signed off Friday on a \$140-billion stimulus drive aimed at putting more money in consumers' pockets after the ruling party's worst election result in 15 years.

The October 27 contest saw voters – angry over corruption in the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and inflation – deprive new Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba's coalition of a majority in parliament's lower house.

The package worth 21.9 trillion yen (\$141.8 billion) includes handouts of around 30,000 yen for low-income households, fuel and energy subsidies, and assistance to small businesses, according to the government.

The overall business impact was expected to be 39 trillion yen.

"To enhance the vitality of Japan as a whole, we will strengthen the growth of the national and regional economies and raise wages for all people, of all generations," top government spokesman Yoshimasa Hayashi told reporters.

To pay for the package, the second in as many years, the government will table a supplementary budget by the end of the year in the lower house.

But views about the move among people on the streets were mixed.

Voter Katsuhiro Hirakawa, 63, accused politicians of making "whatever decisions they want without listening to the voices

of us ordinary citizens".

Authorities should "think carefully about why they need more tax revenue, or how they can reduce wasteful spending, before making decisions on budgets", he told AFP in Tokyo.

And Hisaki Sato, 46, wanted more help for the middle class, adding: "We're now living in an age when not only low-income

households but middle-income families are in need of more stimulus measures."

The middle class is "home to many people who are contributing directly to the economy, so I want the government to cherish them as well".

To win enough lawmakers' support, Ishiba agreed to include the lifting of an income tax threshold pushed by the



A woman looks at bags at a shop at the popular tourist destination Ameyoko market, in the Ueno area of central Tokyo. Japan's stimulus, worth 21.9 trillion yen (\$141.8 billion), includes assistance to small businesses among other sectors.

PHOTO: AFP