

## BSC issues tender to dispose of two old oil tankers

DWAIPAYAN BARUA, Ctg

The Bangladesh Shipping Corporation (BSC) has finally taken steps for the disposal of two of its oldest oil tankers, which, according to experts, had become unfit by 2015.

An international tender was issued yesterday to dispose of both the 37-year-old ships, which cost the corporation around Tk 20 crore annually for maintenance and repairs to keep them operational.

Quotations have been sought on an "as is where is" basis from local or international firms for "Banglar Jyoti" and "Banglar Shourabh", both of which had earlier been damaged in fire incidents, claiming lives of four people.

BSC Managing Director Commodore Mahmudul Malek said the selling process would be completed under the open tender method, keeping the window open for the participation of international firms also.

### The tankers, which would be sold to shipbreakers, were built in Denmark in 1987

Tender documents would be sold out until January 5 next year, he said.

The tender can be dropped at the BSC head office in Chattogram and in its Dhaka office, while it can be submitted through email too.

The tankers, which would be sold to shipbreakers, were built in Denmark in 1987 in a customised way to dedicatedly conduct ship-to-ship fuel transfer at sea.

These tankers had been engaged in lightering crude oil, imported by Eastern Refinery Limited, from bigger oil tankers anchored at the outer anchorage and bringing it to the port's dolphin jetty for unloading to the plant of the importer.

"Banglar Jyoti" got damaged in an explosion-led fire on September 30 this year when it was about to unload fuel at the port's dolphin jetty. Three persons onboard were killed.

Fire damaged "Banglar Shourabh" when it completed a ship-to-ship fuel transfer at the port's outer anchorage on October 5 this year, taking the life of one.

Although both the ships became unfit by 2015, the BSC continued to operate them, as it failed to purchase new ones, according to the merchant mariners.



Fashion brands at Bashundhara City Shopping Complex in Dhaka offered discounts of 20 to 70 percent on winter apparel and remaining summer stock, enticing shoppers with a "Black Friday" spree.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

# 'Black Friday' saw modest sales amid high inflation

## Discounts targeted upcoming winter, summer stock clearance

SUKANTA HALDER

Retailers of branded apparel, shoes and cosmetics in Bangladesh got a fairly good response from customers upon offering discounts and cashback on Black Friday amid high inflationary pressure and political uncertainty in the country.

Retailers said they offered different discounts and cashback opportunities to encourage shopping as winter approaches.

Besides, there were some seasonal products in stock from the summer, which would be difficult to sell next summer. So, discounts were being offered on those products, they added.

Black Friday is a consumer holiday that started in the US but has since spread to other parts of the world. Many countries, like Canada, England, India, and Australia, have adopted this shopping tradition.

On this occasion, which begins following the Thanksgiving Day celebrations in the US, retailers in the West offer huge discounts on various products to mark the start of the Christmas shopping season.

As such, some Bangladeshi retailers also offered discounts for three days on the occasion and got fairly good responses for their products.

During a visit to Bashundhara City recently, it was seen that discounts were being offered by most brands, with customers flocking to the outlets.

Nur Alam Jibon, branch manager of an outlet of Fiona, a retailer of clothes, shoes and accessories at the Bashundhara City shopping mall, said business had been slowing down due to persistent inflation and political uncertainty.

"It has become very difficult to break even.

So, discounts are being offered. We are getting a good response from customers," he added.

Jibon mentioned that they are offering discounts ranging from 26 to 50 percent on various products.

Low and middle-income earners in Bangladesh have been bearing the brunt of persistent inflation for a long time, with overall inflation hovering above 9 percent since March 2023.

Inflation hit a four-month high of 11.38 percent in November driven by soaring food prices, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

Mehadi Hassan, assistant manager of a Gentle Park outlet at Bashundhara City, said various types of discounts have been offered to encourage people to shop ahead of winter.

"We are offering discounts ranging from 40 to 60 percent on various products. The products which had a 70 percent discount offer have already sold out," he added.

Robin Mia, supervisor of an MBRELLA outlet at the same mall, said when customers come to the outlet, their first question is whether discounts are applicable on all products.

"Although sales have not been as expected, a good number of customers come every day," he added.

He informed that they have been offering discounts ranging from 20 to 30 percent since mid-October.

"Products that were marked 50 percent off have sold out. Discounts are currently available on winter products," he added.

Mohammad Emdadul Haque, manager of an Infinity outlet at the same mall, said they are offering 50 to 60 percent discounts on kid's shirts and jackets.

He added that there are a good number of customers present at his shop each day and sales will only increase as the weather gets cooler.

Gazi Mahub Roni, branch manager of an Artisan outlet at Mirpur-1, said they had offered 20 to 30 percent discounts on all products for three days since last Thursday on the occasion of Black Friday.

"It is an international culture. That's why we implemented it too. But although sales have been good, it is not as expected because it is not that cold yet in Dhaka," he added.

An official of a MICLO outlet in the Science Lab area of Dhanmondi said different types of discounts and offers, including free gifts for multiple purchases, have been offered since November 23.

"Considering the overall situation in the country, the response from customers is quite good. Because in this situation, the consumer confidence is quite low," the official added.

Raihan Kabir, head of marketing and e-commerce at Apex Footwear, said discount offers are running at limited outlets on select items of shoes and apparel.

"Business was lost due to recent political unrest. So, discounts have been offered to compensate for the loss," he added.

Kabir further said that although the response from customers has been good, it is still not enough to recover the losses stemming from the recent political unrest.

Mahmudur Rahman, manager of Focallure Bangladesh, a retailer that sells branded cosmetics through seven outlets across Dhaka, said they have been offering discounts ranging from 20 to 70 percent since the second week of November.

"However, sales are down by about 25 percent year-on-year," he added.

## Accountants and accountability

MAHTAB UDDIN AHMED

South Asia relies heavily on professional accountants for governance, financial transparency, and regulatory compliance and yet the availability of these experts is scarce. Countries like India have over 400,000 professional accountants, followed by Pakistan with approximately 50,000, and Sri Lanka with around 20,000. In stark contrast, Bangladesh has only 3,500 to 4,000 unique professionals across all certifications, including CAs, and CMAs. This shortfall raises serious concerns about the country's capacity to support its growing economy effectively.

In Bangladesh, two primary bodies represent the accounting profession: the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Bangladesh (ICAB) and the Institute of Cost and Management Accountants of Bangladesh (ICMAB). ICAB primarily focuses on statutory audits supported by over 500 practising members. ICMAB has a notable representation in managerial positions, with approximately 100 general managers/CEOs and 300 CFOs. However, their combined contribution still falls far short of the demands of the country's SME driven economy, which includes 7.9 million entities. This shortage highlights the limited capacity of the profession to serve businesses, ensure compliance, and maintain financial transparency.

The scarcity of these professionals in Bangladesh may be attributed to several factors. One common issue is the frequent disputes between ICAB and ICMAB over practising rights, hindering the profession's overall development. Additionally, there are limited institutions and training facilities to meet the rising demand for skilled professionals. The rapid economic expansion further exacerbates this gap as growth outpaces the availability of qualified accountants.

A related issue is the independence and accountability of Chief Financial Officers (CFOs). While auditors face stringent regulations under the Financial Reporting Council (FRC) and Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission



(BSEC), CFOs remain vulnerable to board-level pressures. Many CFOs are unable to challenge unfair practices for fear of losing their jobs. Protecting CFOs through reforms, such as joint appointments by companies and FRC and requiring FRC consent for termination or transfer, could strengthen their position and ensure greater fairness in financial reporting.

One significant concern is the absence of mandatory cost audits for large organisations. This gap allows for financial manipulation, particularly in critical sectors, where accurate cost calculations are essential. Introducing mandatory cost audits would enhance transparency, ensure pricing accuracy, and improve tax compliance, thereby strengthening economic governance.

Cost and Management Accountants (CMAs), with their specialised knowledge of cost structures and operational efficiency, should be given prominence in conducting cost audits and other certification forms. This alignment of expertise with responsibilities would optimise audit quality and ensure a more balanced and effective financial oversight system.

The focus could be prioritising statutory audits by CA for Public Interest Entities (PIEs) only considering the scarcity of resources, ensuring that organisations with significant public impact adhere to rigorous financial scrutiny. Accounting and certifications by CMAs should suffice for tax, accounts and other audit purposes. Transparent financial reporting is crucial for effective revenue collection, complemented by a dual-audit system for large entities to enhance accountability. Revolutionary reforms in accounting and auditing practices are essential to combat malpractice, optimise resources, and build a more robust financial oversight framework.

Some company leaders may resist on the grounds of costs, but the increase is minimal compared to overall expenses, making it a worthwhile investment for improved governance, accountability, and sustainability.

Bangladesh's accounting bodies must collaborate with the commerce ministry and other stakeholders to address these challenges and create a unified strategy. A rational segmentation of the scope of the statutory audit could allow CMAs to focus on SMEs with revenues below Tk 5 crore or non-PIEs. This division would improve resource efficiency and selective audit coverage.

Collaborative reforms, greater independence for CFOs, and mandatory cost audits are essential steps to address the critical shortage of professional accountants.

The author is president of the Institute of Cost and Management Accountants of Bangladesh and founder of BuildCon Consultancies Ltd

## Mystery, volatility, Trump: the Bitcoin phenomenon

AFP, Hong Kong

Despite being the world's most famous cryptocurrency, Bitcoin — whose value on Thursday passed \$100,000 for the first time — has always been surrounded by mystery and controversy.

Here are some things to know about the volatile digital unit, which has soared since Donald Trump won the US election promising to make the country the "bitcoin and cryptocurrency capital of the world".

In the 16 years since Bitcoin was invented, no one has been able to name its founder.

It all started in October 2008, when a nine-page "white paper" attributed to Satoshi Nakamoto theorised "a purely peer-to-peer version of electronic cash (that) would allow online payments to be sent directly from one party to another".

The idea was to break free from the control of central banks, traditionally the only institutions who can create money. But is Satoshi Nakamoto a real name, a pseudonym, or a team of people? Despite various theories, the mystery endures. An Australian computer scientist called Craig Wright claimed to have written the white paper, but the High Court in London ruled this year that he was not the mythical Nakamoto.

Since its creation, bitcoin has been accused of being the currency of choice on the dark web for illegal payments that leave no trace. It is also the currency that hackers usually demand to be paid in during ransomware attacks.

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## Bitcoin hits \$100,000 for first time

AFP, Hong Kong

Bitcoin broke \$100,000 for the first time Thursday as traders cheered Donald Trump's decision to pick a crypto fan to head the US securities regulator, reinforcing optimism the new president will push through measures to deregulate the sector.

The cryptocurrency soared through the mark to a peak of \$103,800, having enjoyed a blistering rally since the November 5 election of Trump, who pledged on the campaign trail to make the United States the "bitcoin and cryptocurrency capital of the world".

The digital unit has jumped more than 50 percent since the tycoon's poll win — and around 140 percent since the turn of the year. However, the unit's advance stalled in recent weeks, sitting just below \$100,000 as traders awaited new catalysts to buy in.

That came with news that Trump has fingered major crypto proponent Paul Atkins to take over as chair of the Securities & Exchange Commission.

Atkins, an SEC commissioner from 2002 to 2008, founded risk consultancy firm Patomak Global Partners in 2009, whose clients include companies in the banking, trading and cryptocurrency industries.

An announcement from the Trump transition team noted that Atkins had been co-chairman of the Digital Chamber of Commerce, which promotes the use of digital assets, since 2017.

"Paul is a proven leader for common sense regulations," Trump said in a statement that emphasised Atkins' commitment to "robust, innovative" capital markets.

"He also recognises that digital assets and other innovations are crucial to Making America Greater than Ever Before," Trump added.

He would replace Gary Gensler, who led a crackdown on the sector after a

2022 market rout.

Even so, the SEC this year authorised the trading on the American market of two new financial products allowing a wider public to buy cryptocurrencies, called ETFs.

One is backed by the price of bitcoin and the other by ether, the second most popular unit by capitalisation.

"Atkins, a conservative legal eagle with a track record of critiquing the SEC's tough stance on cryptocurrency firms, is expected to steer a more crypto-friendly course," said Stephen Innes at SPI Asset Management.

"This strategic move has electrified the crypto community, fueling investor optimism about a potentially more accommodating regulatory landscape under Atkins' watch, aligning with broader Republican advocacy for a lenient approach to the flourishing digital asset market."

Despite having once branded cryptocurrencies a "scam", Trump changed his stance and has been a major advocate of the unit during his election campaign.

In September, he announced that he, along with his sons and entrepreneurs, would launch a digital currency platform named World Liberty Financial.



This illustration shows physical banknotes and coin imitations of the Bitcoin cryptocurrency.

PHOTO: AFP/FILE