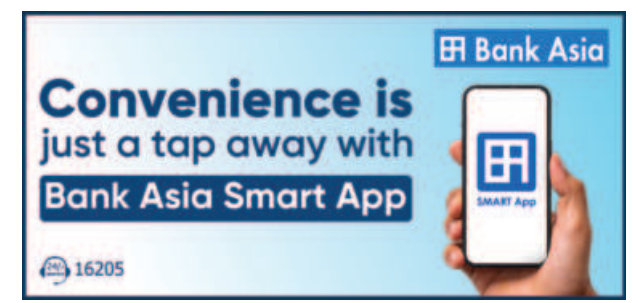


Star BUSINESS



Forex market volatile again on Ramadan import rush, overdue LCs

BB seeks explanation from MDs of 13 banks

MD MEHEDI HASAN

After a five-month pause, dollar rates have started to rise, prompting the central bank to question the managing directors of 13 banks about the fresh volatility of the greenback.

In their response to the Bangladesh Bank (BB) yesterday, several bankers said the foreign exchange market is currently under pressure due to the opening of letters of credit (LC) for essential Ramadan commodities and the settlement of overdue LCs.

They further cited the central bank's dollar purchasing spree to safeguard dwindling forex reserves and market manipulation by certain exchange houses as contributing factors to the recent dollar hikes.

The BB accused the 13 banks of quoting unusually high rates for collecting remittances from foreign exchange houses compared to the official rate, according to Bangladesh Bank Executive Director and Spokesperson Husne Ara Shikha.

The 13 banks are: BRAC Bank, Islami Bank Bangladesh, Shahjalal Islami Bank, Jamuna Bank, Trust Bank, Rupali Bank, Eastern Bank, Janata Bank, United Commercial Bank, NCC Bank, Mercantile Bank, City Bank and Al Arafah Islami Bank.

A senior central bank official said the foreign exchange market has become unstable this month due to some banks offering dollar rates higher than the official rate.

Currently, a crawling peg exchange rate system is in place, allowing banks to buy and sell US dollars freely within a mid-range of Tk 117.

While banks are permitted to quote a maximum of Tk 120 per dollar for remittance collection, some banks are reportedly quoting as high as Tk 128 per dollar.

Central bank officials have warned that banks may face consequences if their explanations are deemed unsatisfactory.

"We submitted our explanation to the central bank on Sunday and will follow the BB instructions regarding US dollar purchases from foreign exchange houses," said Mirza Elias Uddin Ahmed, managing director and CEO of Jamuna Bank.

He said there is pressure on the foreign exchange market as letter of credit (LC) openings for commodities have increased ahead of Ramadan.

"We are unable to collect enough foreign exchange at the current official rate," he said, adding that in some cases, foreign exchange houses

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3.5 lakh people seek treatment in India per year

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Shortage of skilled specialists, technicians & nurses

INDIA'S VISA CURBS

A wake-up call for Bangladesh to reform its healthcare

JAGARAN CHAKMA

India's visa restrictions on Bangladeshi nationals, while initially perceived as a barrier, could serve as a wake-up call for Bangladesh to strengthen its healthcare system and regain the confidence of its patients. With as many as 3.5 lakh Bangladeshis seeking medical treatment in India annually, the restrictions offer a unique chance for local providers to address systemic issues and retain patients who would otherwise travel abroad. Experts urge Bangladesh's health authorities to rise to the occasion and rebuild trust among its citizens.

This systemic overhaul is especially urgent given the personal struggles of individuals like Sanjida (not a real name), a Mirpur resident, who faced a critical health challenge in 2020. After undergoing surgery at Dhaka's Green Life Hospital to remove an ovarian cyst, her biopsy reports delivered devastating news: she had cancer. Advised to start chemotherapy, she followed her oncologist's recommendation for additional tests, only to realise that the tests she had completed earlier had been overlooked. It became apparent that her doctor's approach was perfunctory at best. Terrified and disillusioned, her family decided to seek treatment abroad.

Sanjida travelled to Mumbai's Tata Memorial Hospital, where doctors reviewed her medical history and conducted fresh diagnostics. They concluded that the surgery in Dhaka had been incorrect. With an appropriate operation, her cancer could have been addressed earlier. After another surgery and three rounds of chemotherapy in Mumbai, she returned to Dhaka. Today, she takes regular medication and visits India every six months for follow-ups. Reflecting on her ordeal, Sanjida laments the inattentiveness and unprofessionalism she experienced in Bangladesh's medical system, contrasting it

with the care she received in India.

"Even with the high cost of living and transportation, Indian hospitals are more affordable and trustworthy than those in Dhaka," she said.

Sanjida's story is not unique. Retired government officer Shahidur Rahman, 69, sought cardiac care in 2019 after experiencing chest pain. Diagnosed with three heart blockages at two leading hospitals in Dhaka, he was advised to undergo stent placement. Sceptical, Shahidur travelled to Bengaluru to consult Dr Devi Shetty, a renowned cardiologist. Additional tests revealed no blockages, and he was prescribed medication instead. Since then, Shahidur has lived without chest pain and has lost faith in Bangladeshi healthcare providers.

A CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE
The healthcare industry in Bangladesh is dominated by the private sector, which has seen significant growth in tertiary hospitals and diagnostic centres.

The stories of Sanjida and Shahidur are emblematic of a deeper issue – a healthcare system grappling with a crisis of trust. On the surface, Bangladesh's healthcare infrastructure appears robust. The country boasts 566 public hospitals, which include 37

state-run medical colleges providing hospital services, and around 5,000 private medical facilities. Private sector investment has led to the growth of tertiary hospitals and diagnostic centres, creating an illusion of progress. Yet, beneath the numbers lies a stark reality: many Bangladeshis still feel compelled to seek treatment abroad, believing that local facilities cannot meet their needs.

The reasons for this exodus are manifold. Experts point to rushed consultations, diagnostic errors, steep treatment costs, and a perceived indifference from medical professionals. Many patients complain of being treated like mere numbers – hurried through appointments with little to no time for questions, clarification, or reassurance. This lack of a personal touch often proves just as alienating as the more tangible deficiencies. In contrast, some patients argue, India has built a reputation for offering not only medical expertise but also a level of care that feels holistic and humane.

Bangladeshis primarily travel to India for cardiology (14 percent), oncology (13 percent), gastroenterology (11 percent) and other complex issues, according to a 2023 study published by the National Library of Medicine. The same report found that India's healthcare infrastructure – including skilled specialists and comprehensive follow-up care – attracts an estimated 3 lakh to 3.5 lakh Bangladeshi patients annually. Kolkata, Chennai, Vellore, and Mumbai are the most frequented destinations.

"Bangladesh's healthcare system lacks sufficient skilled physicians and technologists, especially for complex diseases like cancer and organ transplants," said Rumana Huque, a health economist and professor at Dhaka University. "While we have capable doctors, they are overstretched and unable to provide the level of care patients expect."

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5,196.41	14,468.06

COMMODITIES		AS OF FRIDAY
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\$2,623.18	\$72.98	
(per ounce)	(per barrel)	

ASIAN MARKETS				FRIDAY CLOSINGS
MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI	
▼ 1.49%	▼ 0.29%	▼ 1.14%	▼ 0.06%	
78,041.59	38,701.90	3,719.93	3,368.07	

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Japan's Mitsui buys 18.5% stake in ACI Motors for \$22.75m

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Mitsui & Company, one of the largest general trading companies in Japan, has bought an 18.5 percent stake in ACI Motors Limited for \$22.75 million.

The purchase was made from two investors of the Bangladeshi company through a Singaporean subsidiary on November 29.

The sale proceeds will be received as foreign direct investment, according to Subrata Ranjan Das, executive director of ACI Motors Limited.

Mitsui says it generates an annual revenue of over \$100 billion from operations spanning trading, logistics and financing, infrastructure, energy, mobility, chemicals, iron and steel products, food and retail management, wellness, IT and communication, and corporate development.

Launched in 2007 focusing on agricultural mechanisation, ACI Motors now assembles and sells, among others, agricultural and construction machinery, commercial vehicles, motorcycles, and marines diesel engines of brands Yamaha, Yanmar, Sonalika, and Foton.

ACI Group is one of the largest conglomerates in Bangladesh with diverse interests in the fields of mobility, pharmaceuticals, nutrition and agriculture, food, consumer products and retail.

Two senior executives from Mitsui will now join ACI Motors as a part of efforts to grow the business in the global market by using the worldwide connections of the Japanese company, said Das.

ACI Motors, a subsidiary

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Automation replaced 31% of garment workers: study

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Automation has reduced the need for human labour in the production process of the garment sector by nearly 31 percent by mostly replacing helpers, according to a study.

Sweater factories saw the highest decline of 37 percent, while woven factories 27 percent per production line, it said.

Automation in the cutting process led to the highest reduction of 48 percent, while sewing 26.57 percent, it added.

Solidaridad Network Asia, Bangladesh Labour Foundation, and BRAC University jointly conducted the study titled "Assessment of Technological Transition in the Apparel Sector of Bangladesh and Its Impact on Workers".

The findings were made public through a programme at Amari Dhaka yesterday.

Automation does bring several positive impacts on workers, said Shahidur Rahman, a professor of the economics and social sciences department of BRAC University, at the programme.

It also poses significant challenges to workers, especially women and



Worker efficiency in the garment sector has been affected by external inefficiencies, such as power shortages and port and road congestion, industry insiders said.

PHOTO: STAR/FILE