

# star BUSINESS

Tk 3,000cr to be raised through sukuk for rural infrastructure

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The government has decided to issue Tk 3,000 crore worth of sukuk, a Shariah-compliant bond, in March to fund the construction of bridges to connect rural roads.

This move aims to boost agricultural production and improve socio-economic conditions at the grassroots level.

A sukuk is an Islamic financial certificate, similar to a treasury bond, structured to generate returns in compliance with Islamic finance principles.

This will be the fifth sukuk issued by the government, which has moved to raise funds through the Shariah-based bonds at a time when overall tax receipts witnessed a downturn, making it more reliant on borrowing to finance public expenditure.

In the July-October period of FY25, the government's net domestic borrowing from the banking system and from non-banking sources rose to Tk 39,218 crore. It stood at just Tk 2,295 crore a year ago.

The central bank said the government has so far raised Tk 19,000 crore through sukuk to finance various projects since launching the bond by raising Tk 8,000 crore to implement a safe water supply project in December 2020.

The government will float the bond in March this year, the Bangladesh Bank said in a press release yesterday.



The central bank's disclosure comes a day after it hiked sukuk subscription opportunities for individuals, provident funds, and deposit insurance to 20 percent from the previous 5 percent to attract high-net-worth individuals.

The BB said 70 percent of the sukuk will be allocated to Shariah-based banks, finance companies, and insurance companies, down from the previous 85 percent.

Islamic branches and windows of conventional banks will be able to subscribe to 10 percent of the sukuk bond.

The BB said part of the money raised will be used for a Tk 6,500 crore project titled 'Construction of Important Bridges on Rural Roads', taken by the previous government at the beginning of 2017. The project is scheduled to close in June of 2026.

The funds raised will also be used for social development projects, the central bank said.

"This project aims to ensure the development of rural road communication systems, improving socio-economic conditions and increasing agricultural production in rural areas," the central bank said.

"The rural road communication is also enabling transportation of agricultural and non-agricultural products, reducing costs, and ensuring employment opportunities."

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## BY THE NUMBERS

Revenue collection in Jul-Dec: Tk 156,442cr	Revenue shortfall in Jul-Dec: about Tk 58,000cr	Revenue target in FY25: Tk 480,000cr
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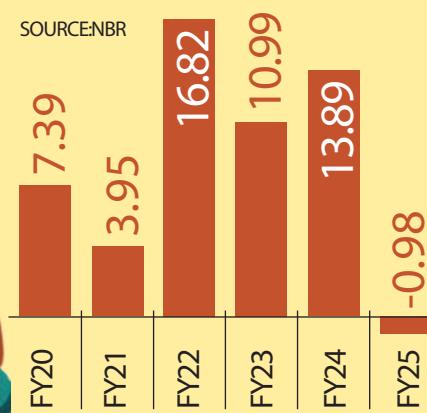
## REASONS BEHIND REVENUE SHORTFALL

- ④ Economic slowdown
- ④ Lower import
- ④ Higher inflation
- ④ Smaller tax net
- ④ Lower ADP spending



## TREND OF REVENUE GROWTH

July-December period; In %



MD ASADUZ ZAMAN

For Bangladesh, it is no longer the question of whether the economy is destined for a hard landing or a glide to a flat state; rather the question now is how deep the descent will be.

To fathom the crisis, let's take a look at the country's tax collection.

Roughly speaking, the collection turned negative in the first half of the current fiscal year (FY) 2024-25, which is a first since at least the pandemic era -- when markets shuttered, manufacturing units came to a grinding halt, supply chains collapsed, and life and livelihood endured unprecedented shockwaves.

But those days were long over.

Yet, in the July-December period of FY25, taxmen collected Tk 156,442 crore -- 0.98 percent down year-on-year, according to National Board of Revenue (NBR) data.

This negative growth in revenue collection itself is not the disease, according to economists and businesspeople. Rather, it is a symptom of a slowing economy and growing cracks on the macro frontier.

In FY25, major macro indicators like the growth of the gross domestic product (GDP) tumbled, high inflation continued its rampage without showing signs of stopping anytime soon, the exchange rate remained volatile, and development spending hit a four-year low.

All these fairly indicate a single message: the economy is slowing down, it is hurting and will continue to do so due to a lot of factors, including revenue mobilisation, according to economists.

They said NBR's struggle to mobilise revenue and meet targets is nothing new, but these newly emerged economic cracks have added to the collection inefficiency.

In the last 13 years, the revenue board has been consistent in failing to meet its collection targets.

Despite a 6.66 percent collection growth in December, the revenue administration's collection still fell short of its target by Tk 58,000 crore or 25 percent in the first half of FY25, with its end goal set at Tk 480,000 crore for the year.

Taxmen and policy analysts point the finger at the political and economic shakeup stemming from the ouster of the Awami League government following a mass uprising on August 5 last year.

"The lower revenue growth is closely linked to the current economic slowdown, which also expedites the NBR's inefficiencies," said MA Razzaque, research director of the Policy Research Institute (PRI) of Bangladesh, a local think tank.

Prolonged inefficiencies, reduced imports, higher exemptions and inflationary pressure also contributed

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WB to give another \$30m for power transmission

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The World Bank (WB) will provide Bangladesh with an additional \$30 million to help the country build up its power transmission network in eastern regions.

The funds will be used for an ongoing project that aims to enhance and strengthen power transmission in greater Cumilla, Chattogram and Noakhali, according to the Economic Relations Division (ERD).

ERD Secretary Md Shahriar Kader Siddiqi and WB Acting Country Director Gayle Martin yesterday signed an agreement to this end, said a press release from the finance ministry division tasked with boosting domestic socio-economic development.

Power Grid Bangladesh PLC is implementing the project aiming to ensure a reliable supply and meet the growing demand for electricity in Cumilla, Chattogram and Noakhali, it added.

The initial financing agreement for this project, amounting to \$450.64 million, was signed on April 10, 2018, under the Scale Up Facility of the WB.

However, \$50 million was subtracted from the total funds and repurposed



If potatoes continue to be imported, prices will fall further, creating a disastrous situation for farmers, according to the Bangladesh Cold Storage Association.

PHOTO: STAR

## Cold storage owners call to suspend potato imports

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Bangladesh Cold Storage Association (BCSA) has requested the government to suspend potato imports to protect the country's farmers from a financial disaster.

In a letter addressed to the commerce ministry dated January 22, BCSA President Mostofa Azad Chowdhury Babu said that land under potato

cultivation increased significantly in 2025, rising by approximately 50 percent year-on-year.

As such, it is anticipated that the production of potatoes will reach 1.20 crore tonnes in 2025.

The letter also mentioned that potatoes are being sold for Tk 13 to Tk 14 per kilogramme (kg) at present even though the production cost for farmers is Tk 18 to Tk 20 per kg.

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In this situation, if the tuber is imported, prices will fall further, creating a disastrous situation for potato farmers, the letter said, adding that it would also make farmers reluctant to cultivate potato in the future.

This follows a gazette issued on Monday, through which the National Board of Revenue decided to facilitate potato imports, specifically from Nepal

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BB to implement int'l reporting standards by 2027

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Bangladesh Bank issued a roadmap for scheduled banks to implement an expected credit loss (ECL) methodology-based provisioning system that aligns with international financial reporting standards by 2027.

Analysts had long called for the adoption of the latest 'IFRS 9' while the International Monetary Fund also attached the adoption of the latest standards as a condition for its \$4.7 billion loan programme to the country.

Analysts opined that following the latest standards would ensure that banks' financial reports provide a clearer picture of their health, adding that some may initially see a plunge in profits.

The central bank issued the circular yesterday, adding that banks are presently following a rule-based loan classification and provisioning system.

"As a part of our ongoing efforts to enhance the risk management capabilities of banks and increase the transparency of the financial reporting, the Bangladesh Bank decided to adopt an ECL-based loan classification and provisioning system for banks."

This move means that banks will be required to analyse how current and future economic conditions impact the amount of loss.

Within the IFRS 9 framework, credit risk assessments must follow a forward-looking approach, which is primarily designed to mitigate procyclicality, the central bank said. When evaluating ECLs, it is essential to consider macroeconomic and financial factors, anticipated risks, and associated dynamics.

Procyclicality refers to the tendency of risk measurements to overestimate risk during a crisis and underestimate it during stable times.

Anis A Khan, a veteran of the banking industry, said it is necessary to adopt international standards although it may reduce the profits of some banks.

"Their profits will definitely fall since they will have to keep a higher amount of provision under the new system. Alongside that, they will have to keep more capital."

Although the banking sector remains in a fragile state,

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## STOCKS

DSEX ▼	CASPI ▼
0.21% 5,166.53	0.48% 14,449.05

## COMMODITIES

Gold ▼	Oil ▼
\$2,754.04 (per ounce)	\$75.36 (per barrel)

## ASIAN MARKETS

MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI
▲ 0.15% 76,520.38	▲ 0.79% 39,958.87	▲ 0.67% 3,806.57	▲ 0.51% 3,230.16

**Denmark's IFU to invest \$12.5m in local pharmacy chain**

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Denmark's IFU will invest \$12.5 million in pharmacy chain AKS Khan Pharmaceuticals for the expansion of the latter's network, targeting to cater to 8 million patients annually within three years.

The investment into this concern of AK Khan Holdings will come through the Investment Fund for Developing Countries (IFU), a development finance institution of the Danish government.

AK Shamsuddin Khan, director of AK Khan & Company Limited, and Lars Bo Bertram, chief executive officer of the IFU, signed an agreement in this regard at Radisson Blu Water Garden Hotel, Dhaka, on Wednesday night.

Addressing the signing, Christian Brix Møller, Danish ambassador to Bangladesh, said the investment, made during a transitional period in Bangladesh, signals confidence in the country's progress and the interim government's efforts.

Samanzar S Khan, managing director of AKS Khan Holdings, said they aim to establish a network of 100 pharmacies and diagnostic centres.

"Through this expansion, we aspire to reach 8 million people annually in the coming years, a significant leap from the 1.5 million lives we currently touch each year," she said.

Since 1990, the IFU has invested €300 million in different projects, such as a fertiliser company and a water treatment facility in Dhaka, said Lars Bo Bertram, CEO of the IFU.

Bertram said the IFU focuses on impact investments that drive economic and social development while ensuring financial returns.

"Access to quality, authentic medicine is crucial to treating and curing diseases and ensuring quality of life for millions of people suffering from chronic diseases across Bangladesh," said AK Shamsuddin Khan, director of AK Khan & Company Limited.

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## Refiners shelve plan to hike edible oil prices

### STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Edible oil refiners have withdrawn a decision to increase prices of soybean and palm oil before Ramadan.

On January 21, the Bangladesh Vegetable Oil Refiners and Vanaspati Manufacturers Association wrote a letter to the commerce secretary, informing that they would not be increasing the prices.

After analysing the current stock and import prices of crude soybean and palm oil, the association had requested the government, for the first time on January 6 and then for a second time on January 15, to adjust the prices, according to the letter.

There has been no response and the existing rates are making it difficult to manage business costs and, in some aspects, even leading to huge losses, said the letter.

Therefore, the refiners have decided to adjust the prices from January 25, said the latter, which also informed of the new rates.

In another letter yesterday, the association informed the Ministry of Commerce that they had withdrawn their decision to increase the prices.

An official of an edible oil company, speaking on condition of anonymity, told The Daily Star, "In a meeting yesterday, the government told us that edible oil prices will not be reviewed again before upcoming Ramadan and Eid-ul-Fitr."

Bangladesh meets more than 90 percent of its edible oil requirement through imports, according to the commerce ministry data.

## Oil extends losses

REUTERS, Singapore

Oil prices dipped in Asian trade on Thursday, extending losses amid uncertainty over how US President Donald Trump's proposed tariffs and energy policies would impact global economic growth and energy demand.

Brent crude futures fell 38 cents, or 0.5 percent, to \$78.62 a barrel by 0716 GMT in a sixth straight day of losses, while US West Texas Intermediate crude (WTI) fell for a fifth day, easing 39 cents, or 0.5 percent, to \$75.05.

## BB to implement int'l reporting

FROM PAGE B1  
the long-term roadmap may make implementation more feasible, hoped Khan, also a former chairman of the Association of Bankers of Bangladesh Limited.

**TIMELINE OF THE SHIFT**  
The central bank's roadmap features specified timelines, with the first phase set to begin in March this year.

This initial phase will involve the formation of an 'IFRS 9 Implementation Team' at each bank, led by the managing director or CEO. The teams will be responsible for creating action plans for the transition, which must be approved by the banks' boards of directors.

By June 2025, banks will be required to develop a comprehensive database that will track key borrower information, including sector-wise classifications, loan defaults, and recovery rates since January 2022.

By September of this year, banks must submit a pre-assessment report to the BB as part of preparatory work. This report will detail transition plans, challenges, and necessary actions to implement the ECL model.

By December, banks must conduct training and capacity-building programmes to ensure their staff are equipped to handle the new system.

By January 2026, the BB will issue official guidelines on ECL-based loan classification. By June of the same year, banks must finalise their automated systems.

## WB to give

FROM PAGE B1  
for initiatives aimed at combatting the fallouts of Covid-19.

Now, Bangladesh needs another \$30 million from the multilateral lender to successfully complete its efforts to improve power delivery in eastern regions, the ERD said.

With a grace period of five years, the country was given a repayment period of 30 years for the loan.

The loan's annual interest rate has been set at 1.25 percent while its service charge is 0.75 percent and maximum commitment charge is 0.5 percent.

However, the World Bank has decided to waive the commitment charge this year, it added.

## Withdraw increased VAT, duties on processed food

Agro-processors urge govt



PHOTO: COLLECTED

### STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Bangladesh Agro Processors' Association (BAPA) has urged the National Board of Revenue (NBR) to withdraw the increased value-added tax and duties on processed food products and restore them to their previous rates. The association submitted a memorandum to the NBR in this regard yesterday.

The memorandum highlighted that BAPA's members have continued to expand export markets, now reaching 145 countries worldwide. With the inclusion of this sector in the government's priority list, the production and export of processed agricultural products have surpassed \$1 billion in annual export earnings. The memorandum further noted a

10 percent growth in the sector over the last six months under the current government.

The BAPA projected that export earnings could reach \$2 billion by 2027. However, the association expressed its disappointment over the NBR's January 9 decision to increase VAT and supplementary duties on various products and services in the sector. Taxes on food processing industry products like biscuits, cakes, pickles, chutney, tomato ketchup, and fruit pulps have been raised from 5 percent to 15 percent. Supplementary duties on fruit juices and baby food increased from 10 percent to 15 percent, while flavored drinks and electrolyte drinks saw a jump from zero to 15 percent. Additionally,

at the merchant level, VAT has increased from the previous 5 percent to 7.5 percent.

"We are very saddened by this decision of the government," BAPA said, expressing its concerns over the increased VAT and duties. The organisation argued that imposing such a burden on processed food products would directly affect poor farmers and low-income households.

"If the increased VAT and additional duties lead to higher product prices, many people will refrain from buying these items," BAPA warned. It added that basic breakfast items like biscuits, cakes, juices, and other processed foods could become unaffordable for ordinary consumers.

## Cold storage owners

FROM PAGE B1  
and Bhutan, through nine more customs stations.

Previously, potato imports were allowed through only four customs stations.

This facility will remain in effect till March.

Traders pleaded for such an initiative last December,

when prices of the tuber reached a record high of Tk 80 per kilogramme amid the usual drop in stockpiles ahead of the harvest between February and April.

But as potato prices have plunged across the country since then, farmers fear this facility being implemented now will lead to massive

losses amid bumper harvests.

The country's annual demand for potatoes stands between 85 lakh tonnes to 90 lakh tonnes whereas harvests amount to around 106 lakh tonnes.

In FY24, 1.5 lakh tonnes of the tuber were imported from India.

## Economy slowing

FROM PAGE B1  
to the overall shortfall, the economist added.

The World Bank slashed its forecast for Bangladesh's economic growth by 1.7 percentage points to 4 percent for FY25 due to "significant uncertainties following recent political turmoil" and "data unavailability".

But Razzaque said the country's actual GDP growth this year could be lower than the World Bank projection.

The country's US dollar stocks have been depleting fast since 2022, prompting the authorities to tighten the belt and restrict imports.

As per the BPM-6 method by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Bangladesh forex reserves now hover around \$20 billion, according to the latest Bangladesh Bank data.

Furthermore, the country's total imports decreased from \$90 billion in 2021 to \$70 billion in 2023.

"So, the NBR is not going to get enough tariffs from imports," Razzaque added.

Besides, inflationary pressure is also hurting revenue growth as people have been slashing their consumption for a couple of years.

Echoing similar views, Anwar ul Alam Chowdhury (Parvez), president of the Bangladesh Chamber of Industries (BCI), said lower imports contributed to lower revenue collection.

The BB added that all conventional banks, financial institutions, and insurance companies can participate in the auction, subject to conditions.

If the required subscription is not met in the three categories, the remaining sukuk will be proportionately allocated among them.

"Resident individual investors can invest in the sukuk through their own bank accounts. Non-resident individuals or institutional investors can invest through non-resident foreign currency accounts or non-resident taka accounts maintained in any bank operating in Bangladesh."

"The reduction of the overall import volume has contributed to the lower revenue growth and lack of business expansion," he said.

Besides, sluggish implementation of the development budget, officially known as the annual development programme (ADP), is another reason for the lacklustre revenue collection.

The NBR is not getting value added tax (VAT) and supplementary duties (SDs) from construction works, according to the business leader.

"The projects automatically generate revenue for the NBR," he said.

The implementation of the Annual Development Programme (ADP) in the first six months of fiscal year 2024-25 was down 19 percent year on year.

Development spending in the July-December period amounted to Tk 50,002 crore, according to the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED) under the planning ministry.

"There is an interrelation between the reduction of development spending and lower manufacturing growth," said Parvez.

For example, he said, if there is an ongoing project, there would be demand for construction items and services.

When government spending slows, it badly hits production, including

and principal received at maturity will be repatriated in foreign currency after deducting applicable fees and taxes," said the BB.

The government has plans to borrow Tk 160,900 crore from domestic sources in the current fiscal year out of its total borrowing plan of Tk 251,600 crore.

## Tk 3,000cr to be raised

FROM PAGE B1

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"Profits, sale proceeds,

## Runner Automobiles' Q2 profit up 600%

### STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Runner Automobiles witnessed impressive profit growth in the second quarter of fiscal year 2024-25, driven by higher sales of its three-wheelers.

The company's profit went up a robust 600 percent year-on-year in the October-December quarter of FY25, reaching Tk 3.97 crore.

Its consolidated earnings per share (EPS) rose to Tk 0.35, compared to Tk 0.05 in the same period last year, according to a disclosure on the Dhaka Stock Exchange.

The company attributed the growth to impressive sales performance in its three-wheeler business, which significantly boosted revenue.

Shares of the company declined 1.28 percent to Tk 30.8 as of mid-day trading at the country's premier bourse yesterday.

## Malek Spinning Mills' profit rises 21%

### STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Profits of Malek Spinning Mills grew 21 percent year-on-year in the second quarter of fiscal 2024-25 thanks to strong sales.

The company reported a profit of Tk 50.72 crore in the October-December quarter.

The company's consolidated earnings per share (EPS) rose to Tk 2.62 in the period, up from Tk 2.16 in the same quarter of 2023, according to a disclosure on the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) website.

"Significant sales volume growth during the reporting period led to an increase in gross profit, net profit and EPS," the company said.

Share prices of Malek Spinning surged 9.66 percent to Tk 26.1 during mid-day trading on the DSE yesterday.

## Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Ministry of Social Welfare  
Department of Social Services  
**Inclusive Service Opportunities (ISO) Component 05: Socio-economic Development of the Host Community and FDMN through Capacity Enhancement Project.**  
21/1 & 21/2 Bir Uttam A.N.M. Nuruzzaman Sarak, Shyamoli Square (9th Floor), Shyamoli, Dhaka-1207.

Memo no.41.01.0000.124.07.01.2025-40

Date: 22 January, 2025

### Invitation for Tenders

#### GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH

1	Ministry/Division	Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW)
2	Agency	Department of Social Services (DSS)
3	Procuring Entity Name	Project Director ISO Component 05: Socio-economic Development of the Host Community and FDMN through Capacity Enhancement (ISO-SDHC & FDMN)
4	Procuring Entity Code	224404000
5	Procuring Entity District	Dhaka
6	Invitation for	Non Consultancy Service <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NCT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTM <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
7	Invitation Ref No	41.01.0000.124.07.01.2025-40
8	Date	22 January, 2025
9	Procurement Method	Open Tendering Method (OTM)
10	Budget and Source of Funds	Development Budget
11	Development Partners (if applicable)	Government of Bangladesh
12	Project / Programme Code (if applicable)	224404000
13	Project / Programme Name (if applicable)	ISO-Component 05: Socio-economic Development of the Host Community and FDMN through Capacity Enhancement (ISO-SDHC & FDMN)
14	Tender Package No.	SD-10
15	Tender Package Name	Selection of Outsourcing firm for Recruitment of Project Staff
16	Tender Publication Date	26 January, 2025
17	Tender Last Selling Date	19 February, 2025 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 5:00pm
18	Tender Closing Date and Time	20 February, 2025 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2:00pm
19	Tender Opening Date and Time	20 February, 2025 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2:00pm
20	Name & Address of the office(s)	Office of the Project Director ISO-Component 05: Socio-economic Development of the Host Community and FDMN through Capacity Enhancement (ISO-SDHC & FDMN) 21/1 & 21/2 Bir Uttam A.N.M. Nuruzzaman Sarak, Shyamoli Square (9th Floor), Shyamoli, Dhaka-1207.
	- Selling Tender Document (Principal)	-Do-
	- Selling Tender Document (Others)	Not Applicable
21	Pre-Tender Meeting will not be held	-Do-
22	Brief Eligibility and Qualification of Tenderer	As mentioned in the Tender Data Sheet.
23	Brief Description of Goods	Selection of Outsourcing firm for recruitment of Project Staff
24	Brief Description of Related Services	Not applicable
25	Price of Tender Document (Tk.)	Tk.1500.00 (Fifteen Hundred only) in the form of Pay Order in favour of Project Director, ISO-SEDHC & FDMN through Capacity Enhancement Project
26	Lot No	Identification of Lot
26	1	PMU Office of ISO-SDHC & FDMN, Dhaka
26	Location	Tender Security Amount (Tk)
26		Completion Time in Weeks / Months
26		Tk.200,000.00 (Taka Two Lac only)
26		48 months
27	Name of Official Inviting Tender	Golam Mostafa
28		

## Bangladesh losing over 2,500 hectares of arable land annually: expert

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Around 2,500 to 3,000 hectares of cultivable land are converted and used for non-agricultural purposes every year in Bangladesh, raising serious concerns about future food security, according to experts and stakeholders.

The population is increasing day by day while the amount of land under cultivation is decreasing, Md Sawkat Osman, director for the crops wing at the Department of Agricultural Extension, said at a seminar yesterday.

"Many people are constructing houses, brick kilns and other structures on cultivable land. This could have a significant impact on the nation's ability to meet its growing food demand."

The seminar was jointly organised by the Consumers Association of Bangladesh and Friends in Village Development Bangladesh at the Bangladesh Food Safety Authority office.

Osman said the DAE has undertaken a new plan to produce safe food.



PHOTO: MD QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT

According to tulip growers and agricultural officials, the country's weather and soil are not suitable for the cultivation of this flower, which mainly grows in southern Europe and central Asia.

## Except for tourism, tulip in Tetulia shows little prospect

MD QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT,  
Thakurgaon

In addition to its lush tea gardens and the breathtaking view of the majestic Kanchenjunga, blooming tulips have emerged as another jewel in Panchagarh's winter landscape – but only as a tourist attraction, as farmers struggle to maintain cultivation and earn a profit.

According to tulip growers and agricultural officials, the country's weather and soil are not suitable for the cultivation of this flower, which mainly grows in southern Europe and central Asia.

Besides, tulip bulbs are scarce in Bangladesh, often requiring imports and careful preservation in controlled temperatures before planting.

This season, 13 female farmers from Tetulia's Darjeepara and Sharialjot villages planted 20,000 tulip bulbs on a collectively contributed 70 decimal plot. This is half of the 40,000 bulbs planted in 2022.

In that year, eight farmers in Tetulia first cultivated the flower in the upazila under a pilot project of the Eco-Social Development Organisation (ESDO), a non-governmental organisation.

ESDO initially imported the bulbs from the Netherlands. However, some of the bulbs planted this season were preserved from the previous year's yield.

"After consulting with an agro-expert from the Netherlands, we experimentally preserved 3,000 locally produced bulbs in a cold storage facility, maintaining a temperature of 4 degrees Celsius. These bulbs were taken out at the beginning of the current winter season and planted in the field," said Aynul Haque, project supervisor and head of inclusive microfinance

at ESDO.

However, Haque told The Daily Star that the locally preserved bulbs failed to bloom properly or exhibit adequate growth.

Tamanna Ferdous, upazila agriculture officer of Tetulia, said that Bangladesh's weather is generally not conducive to tulip cultivation, but Tetulia's winter temperature, which hovers around 20 degrees Celsius during the

more closely tied to tourism.

"People prefer to purchase tulips before they bloom, but locally cultivated tulips tend to bloom prematurely due to higher-than-required temperatures," she explained.

Moreover, there is no viable way to reuse locally preserved bulbs because of weather constraints. "After blooming, the bulbs require at least a month under optimal



day, allows the flowers to bloom successfully.

She said that acidic, sandy-loamy soil with a pH between six and seven is ideal for growing tulips, which require daytime temperatures below 20 degrees Celsius and nighttime temperatures between 5 and 12 degrees Celsius.

She added that soil preparation involves limited use of chemical fertilisers and sufficient organic manure.

Farjana Nasrin Khan, head of the Floriculture Division at the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute, told The Daily Star that tulip cultivation in the country faces several challenges.

Unlike traditional cut flowers, the potential of tulip cultivation here is

temperature conditions to mature properly for preservation, which is not feasible in the local climate," she added.

Md Shahid Uz Zaman, executive director of ESDO, said that in recent years, many visitors from different parts of the country have come to Tetulia to catch a glimpse of Kanchenjunga, the world's third-highest mountain peak.

"If tulip cultivation proceeds in Tetulia as planned, it could become an additional attraction for tourists and boost the northern region's tourism sector, ultimately improving the lives of the locals," he said.

As winter lasts for about four months in Tetulia, the temperature is almost ideal for tulip cultivation, he added.

In the first phase, 2 crore farmers will be given smart cards, which will be used to organise agricultural production by region. The initial phase targets the production of eight specific crops, with a focus on increasing agricultural output through the use of organic fertilisers, he added.

Muhammad Nazim Uddin, senior scientific officer of the Horticulture Research Center at the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute, said: "The organic nature or fertility of our soil has drastically decreased."

"There is no guarantee that the food being consumed is completely safe. Although these issues have been discussed for a long time and some initiatives have been taken, there has not been any significant development so far," he added.

Uddin added that adopting sustainable and environmentally friendly agricultural technologies at the production level in Bangladesh is crucial to ensuring food security and combating the challenges of climate change.

He also said the formulation and implementation of policies to ensure a balance between demand and supply for the consumers in the country were essential.

Fakir Muhammad Munawar Hossain, director for the operations and laboratories department of the Directorate of National Consumers' Right Protection, said proper enforcement of laws must be ensured alongside social awareness to ensure safe food for consumers.

Raising social awareness requires creating a social movement, which in turn necessitates political commitment, he added.

Zakaria, chairman of the BFSA, said it was essential for people involved in food production to have proper knowledge and training. Online training programmes alongside training centres need to be established for restaurant staff and owners, he added.

He also cited the need to increase manpower at the BFSA, pointing out that there is only one official designated for the whole Mymensingh region, which has a population of 60 lakh.

As of 2023, there were 88.29 lakh hectares of cultivable land in the country, according to data from the Ministry of Agriculture.

## Trump's tariff threats are 'leverage'

Says informal economic adviser

AFP, Washington

Donald Trump's recent threat to impose 25 percent tariffs on Canada and Mexico is a negotiating tactic, the president's long-time informal economic advisor argued Wednesday.

"Donald Trump is doing exactly what any

**In order for that leverage to be true, in order for that leverage to really work, you have to be convinced that you will put those tariffs on," said Arthur Laffer, one of the godfathers of supply-side economics.**

two close US allies starting February 1, accusing them of failing to tackle illegal immigration and drug trafficking.

"I think President Trump believes that they could easily solve the immigration problem for the US, and they could make a big dent in the lentil problem," Laffer said.

Trump also threatened to impose a 10 percent tariff on China which, he said, had not done enough to tackle the flow of the synthetic opioid to Canada and Mexico, from where it is trafficked into the United States.

Trump's comments drew condemnation from Beijing and Ottawa, while Mexico's President Claudia

Sheinbaum said it was important to "keep a cool head and refer to signed agreements, beyond actual speeches."

Trump's tariff and immigration proposals -- which include the mass deportation of millions of undocumented workers -- have been criticized as inflationary by many economists, who see these policies putting pressure on the Fed to pause interest rate cuts.

"In order for that leverage to be true, in order for that leverage to really work, you have to be convinced that you will put those tariffs on," he added.

Shortly after taking the oath of office on Monday, Trump said he was mulling new tariffs of 25 percent against the

## MBA: Evolve or expire

MAHTAB UDDIN AHMED

During a job interview, Hassan, an MBA graduate, confidently highlighted his unique strengths as being his versatile skills and strategic thinking. However, when asked about specific skills like coding, data analytics, or AI, he conceded that he had not mastered any. The interviewer jokingly called him a "Jack of all trades but master of none", to which Hassan gingerly added that he was working on becoming a "Jack of all trades but master of one" but had not chosen which one yet. Everyone present laughed, realising, at least for now, humour remained beyond the scope of AI automation.

In developed markets, students rarely pursue an MBA immediately after a BBA or graduation because employers are not keen to hire MBAs without work experience. In my 30+ years of corporate life, I am yet to see a fresh MBA magically lead up to a promotion or extra increment. More commonly, MBA is a degree that people earn while working. That said, there is one market where an MBA consistently outshines a regular graduate: the matrimonial market!

For decades, an MBA was considered a ticket to a lucrative career. Graduates from top business schools like Harvard and Stanford earned six-figure salaries and easily climbed the corporate ladder. However, a recent report shows that 23 percent of Harvard MBA graduates in 2024 were jobless even three months after graduation -- a stark increase from the 10 percent in 2022.

The scenario is similar in elite institutions in Bangladesh, signalling a global trend. According to the Graduate Management Admission Council's (GMAC) 2024 Application Trends Survey, there is a resurgence in interest in full-time MBA programs, with 80 percent of two-year and 64 percent of one-year MBA programs -- the highest in a decade.

One of the key factors driving this shift is the growing influence of artificial intelligence across industries. In Bangladesh, the finance, telecom and retail sectors are adopting AI-driven platforms to improve efficiency, reducing the need for large workforces. While management roles remain somewhat shielded, the impact of AI is becoming evident at other levels.

Another significant challenge is the oversupply of MBAs in the Bangladeshi job market. Over the last decade, there has been a boom in business schools offering MBA programs. As a result, the market is saturated with graduates, making competition intense for limited positions.

In Bangladesh, employers, like their global peers, are prioritising general management skills. Proficiencies in areas such as digital marketing, data analytics and artificial intelligence are increasingly getting sought after as companies value specific technical skills that often come at a lower cost than an MBA. This shift reflects a growing demand for professionals that are not just versatile, but highly skilled in a given area -- a concept I previously explored in my article, "Jack of All Trades but Master of One."

For aspiring MBA students in Bangladesh, this changing landscape requires careful consideration. An MBA alone may no longer guarantee career success. Supplementary training in specialised fields is becoming essential to stand out in a crowded market. Furthermore, financial investment in an MBA -- often a significant expense in Bangladesh or abroad -- demands a thorough evaluation of its potential return.

In today's job market, where AI is taking over spreadsheets and undergrads are mastering niche skills, being an MBA without specialisation might just be the most expensive way to wake up to being overqualified and unemployed. A word of caution to future MBAs: choose your skills wisely for versatility without mastery is now just a fancy way of saying "replaceable".

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

## Solar power surpasses coal in EU for first time

AFP, PARIS

Solar overtook coal in the European Union's electricity production in 2024, with the share of renewables rising to almost half the bloc's power sector, according to a report released Thursday.

Gas generation, meanwhile, declined for the fifth year in a row and fossil-fuelled power dipped to a "historic low", climate think tank Ember said in its European Electricity Review 2025.

"The European Green Deal has delivered a deep and rapid transformation of the EU power sector," the think tank said.

"Solar remained the EU's fastest-growing power source in 2024, rising above coal for the first time. Wind power remained the EU's second-largest power source, above gas and below nuclear."

Overall, strong growth in solar and wind have boosted the share of renewables to 47 percent, up from 34 percent in 2019.

Fossil fuels have fallen from 39 to 29 percent.

"A surge in wind and solar generation is the main reason for declining fossil generation. Without wind and solar capacity added since 2019, the EU would have imported 92 billion cubic metres more of fossil gas and 55 million tonnes more of hard coal, costing €59 billion," the report said.

According to Ember, these trends are



The photo shows a solar field in Moers, western Germany. Strong growth in solar and wind have boosted the share of renewables in the EU to 47 percent, up from 34 percent in 2019.

widespread across Europe, with solar power progressing in all EU countries.

More than half have now either eliminated coal, the most polluting fossil fuel, or reduced its share to less than five percent of their energy mix.

Fossil fuels are losing their grip on EU

energy," said Chris Rosslowe, lead author of the report.

"At the start of the European Green Deal in 2019, few thought the EU's energy transition would be where it is today: wind and solar are relegating coal to the margins and pushing gas into decline."