

star BUSINESS



Govt to clear Beximco worker dues before Ramadan Labour adviser says

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The government will clear salary arrears and service benefits of over 27,000 laid-off workers of Beximco Group within this month, ahead of Ramadan, said Labour and Employment Adviser Brig Gen (retd) M Sakhawat Hussain yesterday.

However, the amount of funds required and its source are yet to be determined, he said, adding that it may come from government sources or from the sale of Beximco Group's companies.

The matter will be decided in a meeting scheduled for February 18, the adviser said at a press briefing after a meeting of advisers at the shipping ministry in Bangladesh Secretariat.

The meeting will be attended by managing directors of banks which had provided massive amounts of loans to the group, he said.

When asked about the government's promise of finding jobs for the workers, Hussain said the workers were skilled and would not face any hurdle in finding a job.

The monthly rate of internal migration involving garment factories in Bangladesh varies between 7 percent and 8 percent, he said.

The government has been trying to sell shares of Beximco Group's profitable units, but it may face difficulties in selling shares owned by the group's owners, the adviser said

Still, the government will try to find jobs for them, he added.

The government has been trying to sell shares of Beximco Group's profitable units, but it may face difficulties in selling shares owned by the group's owners, said Hussain.

The government will sell shares of two of the group's companies to pay worker salaries at 13 production units owned by the conglomerate, he said.

He said different banks provided more than Tk 40,000 crore in loans to Beximco Group, yet the value of all of its assets was not even close to it.

Of the loans, Tk 28,544 crore was taken by the group's 32 textile and apparel subsidiaries. Of those 32 factories, 16 exist only on paper.

Beximco owes Janata Bank Tk 23,285 crore, Sonali Bank Tk 1,424 crore, Agrani Bank Tk 420 crore, Rupali Bank Tk 987 crore, National Bank Tk 315 crore, and United Commercial Bank Tk 333 crore.

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Potato farmers in peril as prices fall below production costs

Average retail price of potato in Dhaka

In taka per kg; SOURCE: TCB



POTATO EXPORTS OVER THE YEARS

In tonnes; SOURCE: DAE



SUKANTA HALDER and KONGKON KARMAKER

Lured by high prices during the potato planting season in November last year, farmers expanded cultivation of the tuber at an unprecedented rate this season.

According to the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), potato growers cultivated the starchy vegetable on a record 5.24 lakh hectares this fiscal year, up 15 percent year-on-year, hoping to capitalise on record prices, which had soared to as high as Tk 80 per kilogramme (kg) last year.

As the harvesting season has now arrived, potato farmers in major producing hubs are no longer thinking about turning a profit.

Instead, they are wondering how to survive after being forced to sell their produce below production costs due to record cultivation and the prospect of ample supply.

In Dhaka yesterday, potatoes were at Tk 20 to Tk 30 per kg in retail, the same price as a week ago, according to the state-run Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB).

The situation is even bleaker elsewhere, with several farmers in Rangpur, Dinajpur, Thakurgaon, Bogura and Joypurhat reporting prices as low as Tk 11 per kg -- far below the production costs, which the DAE estimated at Tk 15 per kg this season.

This has left many farmers fearing they will be unable to recoup their initial investment. They are now pinning their hopes on rising prices in the coming months or government steps to support them.

"So much land has never been dedicated to potato farming before," Md Obaidur Rahman Mondol, director of the field service wing at the DAE, told The Daily Star.

This season, total production is expected to reach 1.20 crore tonnes, according to the

Bangladesh Cold Storage Association (BCSA), a major player in the local supply chain.

The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) has a more moderate estimate of 1.06 crore tonnes.

Both figures are close to the 1.09 crore tonnes produced last season, according to DAE data, and surpass the country's annual demand of around 90 lakh tonnes.

Although the government estimates that around 30 percent of total produce is lost due to shortcomings in storage facilities, this oversupply means there may be little relief for small farmers.

Anwar Hossain, a farmer from Uttar

The DAE's estimates support his claims, showing that potato production costs rose by Tk 2 per kg year-on-year, driven by higher expenses for pesticides, seeds, labour and land leasing.

Shariful Islam, a potato farmer from Sherpur upazila in Bogura, said his production costs amounted to Tk 16 to Tk 17 per kg. However, after failing to get a better offer, he had to settle for selling his produce at just Tk 11 per kg on Tuesday.

"If the losses continue to pile up, I am unsure whether I will cultivate potatoes next season," he lamented, blaming the government for failing to control the prices of fertilisers and seeds.

Another concern is that cold storage facilities are charging around Tk 4 more per kg than last season to store potatoes.

Mazharul Islam, a potato farmer in Joypurhat, one of the country's largest potato-producing districts, was luckier than many others.

He said he managed to break even by selling his produce at Tk 10 per kg.

"Honestly, we continue farming because we have no shame," he said in frustration.

Md Sawkat Osman, director of the crops wing at the DAE, said production was very good this season due to favourable weather and the absence of late blight disease, leading to an oversupply. As a result, farmers are not getting their desired prices.

He believes that the drop in potato prices is temporary.

However, cold storage owners at a press conference recently claimed that retail prices of potatoes will not cross Tk 40 per kilogramme this year, citing this year's potato production is set to surpass local demand.

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Gosaipur village in Dinajpur, recently sold potatoes at Tk 13 per kg, though his production costs reached Tk 16.60 per kg.

"My production costs rose by Tk 3 to Tk 4 per kg this year due to the excessive prices of potato seeds," he said.

Potato seeds were at Tk 35 to Tk 40 per kg last season, but the rates increased to Tk 80 per kg during the planting period this season, which spans October to November, Hossain said.

Besides, labour costs and other agri inputs also increased, he added.

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READ MORE ON B3

VAT hike reflects govt's failure in negotiation with IMF

Economists say at roundtable

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Reaz made the remarks during a roundtable discussion titled "The burden of additional taxes on consumers: Ways to overcome it", organised by jagonews24.com, an online news portal, at the premises of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) in the capital.

The speakers said the government raised VAT in line with IMF conditions to generate an additional Tk 12,000 crore in revenue.

Citing a study, Reaz pointed out that reducing the tax burden by 20 percent could lead to a 14-fold increase in private investment amid natural GDP growth, while revenue collection could rise by 6.5 times.

"We often change tax policies without conducting proper impact assessments, which creates uncertainty and hinders economic growth," he

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Pharma industry has a bright future

Foreign participants say at Asia Pharma Expo

JAGARAN CHAKMA

Foreign participants at the 16th Asia Pharma Expo foresee a bright future for Bangladesh's pharmaceutical industry, given its continuous product development and expanding global footprint.

"Bangladesh's pharmaceutical sector has shown really impressive development. The country manufactures medicines of global standard and has developed a highly skilled workforce," said Lashimikant Enganti, assistant general manager of Smilax Laboratories Limited, India.

He was speaking to The Daily Star at the venue of the 16th Asia Pharma Expo and Asia Lab Expo, organised by the Bangladesh Association of Pharmaceutical Industries at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Exhibition Centre in Purbachal.

Enganti praised Bangladesh's progress, highlighting its high-quality medicine production and skilled workforce. His company, which produces 60 types of active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs),

exports to 10 leading Bangladeshi pharmaceutical firms. He sees this growth as mutually beneficial for both countries.

Deepak Shah, director at Mumbai-based Titan Laboratories Pvt Ltd, echoed this observation. His company, a supplier of 20 types of APIs, has been exporting to Bangladesh for over two decades and has witnessed the sector's significant progress.

"Our export volume to Bangladesh is increasing," he added.

Monjurul Alam, CEO of Beacon Medicare Limited, said that Bangladesh imports around \$1.2 billion worth of APIs annually. He emphasised that events like the Asia Pharma Expo help local companies source new ingredients and advanced machinery, supporting industry expansion.

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BY THE NUMBERS

- Bangladesh imports \$1.7b worth of APIs and machinery each year
- Exports reached \$205.48m in FY24
- The country exports pharma products to 157 countries

STRENGTH

• Bangladesh manufactures global-standard medicines and has a skilled workforce

THE EXPO

• Foreign participants see a bright future for Bangladesh's pharma industry

• Expo aims to foster innovation, collaboration and technological advancement

• The show features 800 companies from home and abroad

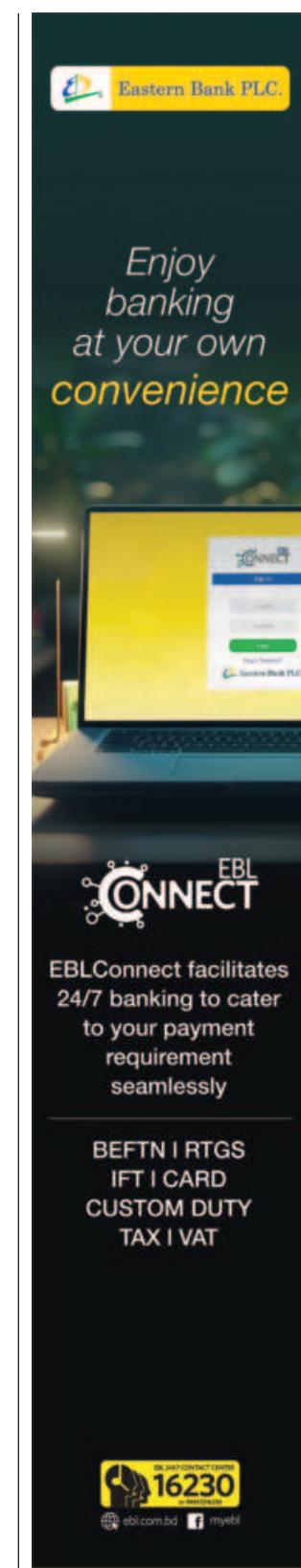
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Prime Bank signs cash management deal with Healthcare Pharma

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Prime Bank PLC recently signed an agreement with Healthcare Pharmaceuticals Limited to provide comprehensive cash management solutions.

Sajid Rahman, senior executive vice-president of the bank, and Muhammad Halimuzzaman, chief executive officer of the pharmaceutical company, signed the deal at the bank's corporate office in Dhaka, according to a press release.

Healthcare Pharmaceuticals will use PrimePay, the bank's omni-digital channel, for all types of domestic disbursements.

The drugmaker will also utilise the bank's countrywide branch network to manage its sales collections, coupled with robust MIS reporting.

PrimePay enables clients to initiate all types of payments with ease, ensuring a high standard of security.

This omni-digital channel facilitates both electronic and paper-based payments, including RTGS, BEFTN, intra-bank fund transfers, NPSB, transfers to MFS wallets, and the issuance of corporate cheques and pay orders with digital signatures.



Muhammad Halimuzzaman, chief executive officer of Healthcare Pharmaceuticals, and Sajid Rahman, senior executive vice-president of Prime Bank, pose for photographs after signing an agreement at the bank's corporate office in Dhaka recently.

PHOTO: PRIME BANK



Sharif Zahir, chairman of United Commercial Bank, poses for photographs along with other officials of the bank at the board meeting.

PHOTO: UCB

Tropical Homes unveils 45-storey TA Tower on 30th anniversary

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Tropical Homes, a leading real estate company in Bangladesh, has celebrated its 30-year journey while unveiling the country's first 45-storey commercial tower, TA Tower, at an event in Dhaka's Pan Pacific Sonargaon hotel recently.

The event was attended by key industry figures, including Capital Development Authority (Rajuk) Chairman Md Siddiqur Rahman Sarker and Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh (REHAB) President Md Wahiduzzaman, alongside senior executives, banking professionals, and corporate leaders, according to a press release.

TA Tower, Tropical Homes' latest project, is designed to accommodate an international standard hospital, a luxury boutique hotel, a conference hall, restaurants, and a rooftop helipad.

The facility will also include a play area, a 3D movie theatre, and a VR room for children, along with a gym, sauna, and jacuzzi.

Security measures will feature a modern fire-fighting system, 24/7 CCTV surveillance, and a central security system.

At the event, Tropical Homes Chairman Tanveer Reza and Managing Director Sheikh Rabiul Haque highlighted the company's commitment to sustainable and modern architecture.

STAR BUSINESS DESK

United Commercial Bank PLC (UCB) held its 506th board meeting on Tuesday.

Sharif Zahir, chairman of UCB, presided over the meeting at its corporate office, according to a press release.

The UCB board praised the effective monetary policy announced by the Bangladesh Bank and emphasised the proper practice of banking rules and

regulations.

Among others, Vice-Chairman of the board Md Shazzad Hossain, Executive Committee Chairman of the board Md Tanvir Khan, Audit Committee Chairman of the board Obaidur Rahman, Risk Management Committee of the board Md Yusuf Ali and Managing Director & CEO Mohammad Mamduur Rashid, along with other senior officials were present at the meeting.



Md Siddiqur Rahman Sarker, chairman of Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakha (Rajuk), and Md Wahiduzzaman, president of Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh, along with other officials, are seen at the anniversary celebration of Tropical Homes at the Pan Pacific Sonargaon Dhaka recently.

PHOTO: TROPICAL HOMES



Md Ahsan-uz Zaman, managing director and CEO of Midland Bank, attends the opening of the bank's Gazipur branch yesterday along with other officials.

PHOTO: MIDLAND BANK

Midland Bank opens branch in Gazipur

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Midland Bank PLC (MDB) inaugurated its Gazipur branch at Smart Plaza, Joydebpur Bazar Road, on Wednesday, aiming to expand its banking services in the region.

Md Ahsan-uz Zaman, managing director and CEO of the bank, inaugurated the branch as the chief guest, according to a press release.

Senior officials, including Javed Tarek

Khan, head of Institutional Banking, Md Rashed Akter, head of Retail Distribution, and Md Abdullah, branch manager of Gazipur Branch, attended the event alongside local businessmen and dignitaries.

Speaking at the ceremony, Md Ahsan-uz Zaman urged customers to establish banking relationships with MDB and encouraged them to use Midland Online, the bank's free Internet banking service.

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Southeast Bank Training Institute organised a daylong workshop titled "Meet with the Trade Leaders" recently to enhance the professional knowledge of bank officials on cross-border transactions and regulatory compliance.

The workshop focused on key areas, including the bank's commitments in foreign payments and acceptances, turnaround time (TAT), export credit agency (ECA) facilities, and operational efficiency in foreign exchange transactions, according to a press release.

It also addressed correct data incorporation in letters of credit (LCs), purpose codes, country codes, HS codes, and IMP reporting.

While inaugurating the workshop, Southeast Bank Managing Director Nuruddin Md Sadeque Hossain emphasised the importance of timely execution of foreign payments, accurate reporting, and regulatory compliance.

Md Jahangir Kabir, head of International Division, along with senior officials from the FI, Offshore Banking, and Central Trade Services Department, also attended the session.

STAR BUSINESS DESK

bKash launches 'Digital Union' to enhance financial literacy

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Mobile financial service provider bKash has launched "Digital Union", a year-long pilot initiative in two unions of Cumilla-Jagannathpur and Panchthibi—to promote safe and easy digital transactions at the grassroots level. The initiative aims to expand nationwide.

The launch event featured Baul music, a colourful procession, and courtyard meetings (Uthan Boithok), engaging people from all segments of the community, according to a press release.

Representatives from utility companies and senior bKash officials attended the event, encouraging residents to embrace digital transactions for greater financial security and convenience.

Through its Digital Union, bKash will conduct door-to-door visits, educational sessions, and awareness campaigns using announcements, videos, folk songs, and interactive games.



People are seen at a courtyard meeting on digital transactions organised by bKash in Cumilla recently.

PHOTO: BKASH

Chinese exporters cautiously confident despite Trump trade threats

AFP, Yiwu

Chinese merchants at one of the world's largest wholesale markets said on Tuesday they were cautiously confident of weathering a potential trade war triggered by US President Donald Trump.

Trump imposed fresh 10 percent tariffs on Chinese goods last week, on top of levies that were already in place against Washington's biggest economic competitor.

The newly inaugurated president also cancelled a duty-free exemption for low-value packages, a move that could disrupt shipping for major Chinese-founded online retailers Shein and Temu.

But vendors at the sprawling Yiwu International Trade City market complex told AFP that China's well developed supply chain would help them hold onto American clients and warned that Trump's tariffs on Chinese goods would hurt US consumers.

"There won't be a big impact," said Gong Licun, who sells cat toys and decorative plates and whose US clients account for up to 30 percent of her orders annually.

Trump imposed fresh 10 percent tariffs on Chinese goods last week, on top of levies that were already in place against Washington's biggest economic competitor

"In other countries... factories' order fulfilment speed might not be fast enough, and they are not as experienced as us in designing products," Gong said.

The mood was festive on Tuesday as traders freshly returned from the long Lunar New Year holiday demonstrated product functions to foreign buyers and played with their children in the indoor market's long, alley-like corridors.

Hat seller Lu, who asked to be identified only by his surname, told AFP that he was not worried about the latest conflict after surviving the trade war that marked the previous Trump administration.

"They also raised tariffs (at the time), and costs rose for some time, but that was all digested within one quarter and basically didn't have much impact," Lu said.

Some of the Yiwu vendors told AFP they would adopt a wait-and-see attitude during what they expected to be a volatile Trump presidency.

"If (Trump's) tariffs are too much, the public there will feel that prices are too high, so he might end up reducing tariffs," said Wei Xueping, who sells battery-operated dancing toys.

Wei said US orders only made up a small percentage of her exports because it was too expensive to comply with the product standards required by American buyers.

Other small businesses who were already struggling to enter the US market might be completely dissuaded from doing so by Trump's latest moves, she said.

Southeast Bank organises workshop on trade compliance

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Southeast Bank Managing Director Nuruddin Md Sadeque Hossain poses for photographs with other officials of the bank at the Southeast Bank Training Institute in the capital recently.

PHOTO: SOUTHEAST BANK

National Bank holds 40th, 41st AGMs

STAR BUSINESS DESK

National Bank held its 40th and 41st annual general meetings (AGMs) on Wednesday at a convention centre in Dhaka. Abdul Awal Mintoo, chairman and sponsor director of the bank, presided over the meetings.

The event was attended by Vice Chairman Moazzam Hossain, Executive Committee Chairman Muklesur Rahman, Risk Management Committee Chairman Zakaria Taher, Audit Committee

Chairman Md Abdus Satter Sarkar, and other board members, along with Managing Director (Current Charge) Sheikh Akther Uddin Ahmed, senior officials, and shareholders, according to a press release.

The AGMs approved the financial statements for 2022 and 2023, the appointment of auditors, and other scheduled agendas.

Shareholders appreciated the bank's decision to hold a physical AGM and expressed hope for the bank's revival and future dividend declarations.



Abdul Awal Mintoo, chairman and sponsor director of National Bank, attends an annual general meeting of the bank in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: NATIONAL BANK

Plastic industry can help diversify exports: commerce adviser

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Plastic products have a lot of potential in diversifying Bangladesh's export basket, said Sk Bashir Uddin, adviser to the commerce and jute and textile ministries, yesterday.

State policies on the production, use, and disposal of plastics must be formulated based on ground realities alongside global practices, he said.

It is essential to promote ways to responsibly deal with plastic, such as a lifecycle approach to identify and consider all potential impacts at each stage of the value chain, he added.

The adviser was addressing the inauguration of the four-day 17th International Plastic, Packaging, and Printing Industrial Fair at International Convention City Bashundhara in Dhaka.

Bangladesh is set to graduate from a least developed country (LDC) to a developing one in November 2026, said Sk Bashir Uddin.

This will lead to the loss of preferential access to export markets for the country, while exporters will no longer be eligible for government incentives, he said.

The nation must enhance its capabilities in export competitiveness by improving productivity and reducing production costs to navigate this transition, he cautioned.

Following the inauguration, the commerce adviser toured the fair, which has been jointly organised by the Bangladesh Plastic Manufacturers and



Visitors are seen in front of a stall at the International Plastic, Packaging and Printing Industrial Fair at International Convention City Bashundhara in Dhaka yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Exporters Association (BPGMEA) and Hong Kong-based Yorkers Trade and Marketing Service Company Limited.

This year, the fair is featuring over 800 stalls, with more than 390 brands from 18 countries, including China, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Vietnam, the United

Arab Emirates, Turkey, and the UK.

The fair will remain open to visitors from 11:00am to 7:00pm.

The inauguration ceremony was presided over by KM Iqbal Hossain, senior vice president of the BPGMEA.

Sheikh Md Abdur Rahman, deputy

project director of the government's Export Competitiveness for Jobs Project, Akai Lin, overseas director of Yorkers, Md Jashim Uddin, president of the SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and Shamim Ahmed, president of the BPGMEA, also spoke.

US inflation fight to take time: Fed official

AFP, Washington

The US Federal Reserve is in a strong position to weather the "highly uncertain" economic outlook, but its inflation fight will take time to win, a senior US central bank official said Tuesday.

"As we enter 2025, the economy is in a good place," New York Fed President John Williams told a conference in New York, according to prepared remarks. "Growth has remained solid, supported by robust consumer spending."

"From where we are now, a number of signs indicate that inflation will continue to move toward our two percent longer-run goal," added Williams, a permanent voting member of the US central bank's rate-setting committee, referring to the Fed's long-term

inflation target.

But, he noted, "it will take time before we can achieve that target on a sustained basis," adding he did not expect inflation to reach the Fed's two percent target this year.

Williams joined his colleagues last month to vote for a pause in cuts after three straight rate reductions, holding the Fed's key lending rate between 4.25 and 4.50 percent.

The Fed's short-term federal funds rate influences borrowing costs for consumers and businesses, affecting the price of everything from mortgages to car loans.

Williams warned that, despite the strong fundamentals, "the economic outlook remains highly uncertain, particularly around potential fiscal, trade, immigration, and regulatory policies," a passing reference to some

of US President Donald Trump's policies.

Since taking office last month, Trump has threatened to impose tariffs on US allies and top trading partners including Mexico, Canada, and the European Union, and imposed a sweeping 10 percent duty on goods from China -- the world's second-largest economy.

He has also said he wants to carry out the largest program of mass deportation of illegal immigrants in American history, something many economists have said could hurt growth.

People in Trump's orbit insist that, properly implemented, any negative impact from his tariff and immigration plans should be more than offset by a deregulation and tax-cutting agenda, which they see as pro-growth and anti-inflation.

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of US President Donald Trump's policies.

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Patenga Container Terminal to get four new cranes at \$30m

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *ctg*

Red Sea Gateway Terminal (RSGT) Bangladesh, the operator of Patenga Container Terminal (PCT) at Chattogram port, is set to invest around \$30 million in purchasing four state-of-the-art ship-to-shore (STS) cranes in order to boost the terminal's operational capacity.

The company has recently signed an agreement with Chinese firm SANY Marine Heavy Industry for the purchase, according to a press release issued by the terminal operator.

The investment comes after the recent acquisition of 14 rubber-tired gantry cranes (RTGs) for \$26 million, according to the statement.

RSGT Bangladesh, a subsidiary of the Saudi company RSGTI and Bangladesh's first international terminal operator, expects to receive all equipment by the first quarter of next year, said an official of the company.

The new STS cranes, which will be custom-built for the PCT, will enable the handling of larger vessels at Chattogram port, according to the statement.



Scheduled for deployment in early 2026, the cranes are expected to enhance PCT's annual container handling capacity from 250,000 twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) to 600,000 TEUs, significantly improving efficiency and reducing logistics costs, it added.

"Following the recent acquisition of 14 RTGs, the investment in these new STS cranes marks another important step in our ongoing efforts to enhance terminal operations in Bangladesh," said RSGT Bangladesh CEO Erwin Haaze.

"This upgrade is expected to further improve efficiency and contribute to a more cost-effective supply chain for Bangladeshi trade," the CEO added.

Haaze said that RSGT is working closely with the Chittagong Port Authority and other key stakeholders, including the planning ministry, the National Board of Revenue, customs, and industry associations, to align operations and ensure efficiency.

"As the first private terminal in the country, we are committed to contributing to the advancement of Bangladesh's maritime and logistics infrastructure," he said.

Earlier, RSGT Bangladesh signed a 22-year concession agreement with Chattogram port in December 2023 to operate the new Patenga Container Terminal.

Since the commencement of partial operations in June last year, geared vessels equipped with onboard cranes have been berthing at the terminal, with only export containers being handled.

EU to invest €200b in AI

AFP, *Paris*

EU chief Ursula von der Leyen Tuesday announced a push to channel 200 billion euros in public and private investments into Europe's nascent artificial intelligence industry.

"We aim to mobilise a total of 200 billion euros for AI investments in Europe," the European Commission president told a Paris AI summit, saying the EU would contribute 50 billion euros with the rest pledged by "providers, investors and industry."

Europe faces an uphill challenge as the United States and China charge ahead in the AI field, but von der Leyen insisted "the AI race is far from over".

"We want to accelerate innovation," she told the gathering of leaders and tech executives, declaring that "global leadership is still up for grabs".

The EU investment push would include 20 billion euros to finance four AI gigafactories, "to allow open, collaborative development of the most complex AI models," a commission statement said.

The initial EU funding will be drawn from existing programmes with a digital component.

Von der Leyen said the European funds would "top up" pledges announced Monday by a group of more than 60 European companies such as Airbus, Volkswagen and Mistral AI.

The firms said they aimed to stimulate the emergence of new companies, with 150 billion euros "earmarked" by international investors for AI-related opportunities in Europe over five years as part of the "EU AI Champions Initiative".



The Bangladesh Land Port Authority and customs officials said 80 percent of businesses at the Burimari land port depend on stone imports while the trade of other products accounts for the rest.

PHOTO: S DILIP ROY

Boulder rate row slows external trade through Burimari land port

25,000 labourers left without work

S DILIP ROY

Stone and boulder imports from India and Bhutan through Burimari land port in Lalmonirhat, the second-largest land port in Bangladesh, have been halted since February 1 due to price disputes.

However, the import-export trade of other goods, including fruits, dolomite powder, and gypsum from India and Bhutan, as well as jhut, garments, and biscuits from Bangladesh, is ongoing, albeit at a slower pace.

As stone and boulder imports have stopped, around 25,000 workers engaged in loading and unloading stones and crushing boulders have been plunged into unemployment.

Additionally, around 500 stone-crushing machines remain idle.

The Bangladesh Land Port Authority and customs officials said 80 percent of businesses at the Burimari land port depend on stone imports while the trade of other products accounts for only 20 percent.

Due to the halt in stone imports from India and Bhutan, the once-bustling land port now appears largely inactive, costing the government revenue worth around Tk 1.5 crore each day.

Mehedi Hasan, assistant director of the Bangladesh Land Port Authority at Burimari, told The Daily Star that an average

100-120 goods-laden trucks arrived from India and Bhutan daily, but the figure has now decreased to 50-60.

"Due to the price dispute, importers at Burimari land port are not importing stones, which is negatively affecting trade," he said. "Importers and exporters from both countries have been holding discussions daily, but no solution has been reached yet."

Anisur Rahman, a stone worker at Burimari land port, said that 20-30 workers are

employed for each stone-crushing machine, with each worker earning Tk 500 per day.

"We have become unemployed as the grinding machines remain idle due to the lack of boulders," he said, adding that around 13,000 workers are engaged in stone crushing.



100-120 goods-laden trucks arrived from India and Bhutan daily, but the figure has now decreased to 50-60.

"We are in great trouble due to unemployment. We have to borrow money to survive," he added.

Noor Islam, a stone trader at Burimari land port, said there is a daily demand for 2.6 lakh to 2.8 lakh cubic feet of stones. Contractors and traders from different parts of the country buy stones from them.

Mamunur Islam, a loading and unloading worker at Burimari, said about 12,000 workers are engaged in handling goods, especially stones.

"We are in great trouble due to the price, exporters from India and Bhutan have not taken any action. This led to the halt in boulder imports," he said.

"As we are not importing stones, some Indian importers have also lost interest in importing goods from Bangladesh," he added. "We are continuing discussions to resolve the issue."

He added that each tonne of a boulder produces 24 cubic feet of crushed stone. Every day, 15-20 tonnes of boulders are processed in each crushing machine.

"I have four stone-crushing machines, but they have been shut down since February 1 due to the halt in imports," he added. "We are unable to supply stones to contractors and traders."

Shah Alam, an LGED contractor in Lalmonirhat, said the price of stone has increased by Tk 20-25 per cubic foot at Burimari land port due to the import halt.

"Before February 1, I used to buy stone at Tk 110-115 per cubic foot. Since I need stone for construction, I am now forced to buy it at a higher rate."

Faruk Hossain, president of the C&F Agents Association at Burimari land port, said that stone exporters from India and Bhutan were charging Tk 2 more per tonne of boulders, making it unprofitable for Bangladeshi importers.

"Despite requests to lower the price, exporters from India and Bhutan have not taken any action. This led to the halt in boulder imports," he said.

"As we are not importing stones, some Indian importers have also lost interest in importing goods from Bangladesh," he added. "We are continuing discussions to resolve the issue."

EU due diligence rules and local apparel industry

MD MOHIUDDIN RUBEL

The European Union's Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) is set to transform global trade and corporate practices, marking a watershed moment for industries worldwide. Slated to take full effect by 2026, this landmark legislation represents the EU's boldest move yet to integrate sustainability and accountability into business operations.

For the global apparel industry -- long associated with environmental challenges and labour rights concerns -- the directive signals a monumental shift. It is not merely a policy but a call to action for a sector notorious for intricate supply chains and sustainability hurdles.

At its heart, the CSDDD requires companies operating within or engaging with the EU to identify, mitigate, and prevent adverse human rights and environmental impacts throughout their value chains. This involves tackling issues like forced labour, unsafe working conditions, and ecological harm. Businesses must perform comprehensive due diligence, implement preventative measures, monitor progress, and publicly report findings. Moreover, the directive emphasises meaningful engagement with stakeholders, including workers, local communities, and civil society, to foster sustainable solutions. Non-compliance will result in severe penalties, ranging from hefty fines to exclusion from the EU market.

For the global apparel sector, the directive's implications are profound. It enforces unprecedented levels of transparency, compelling brands to trace and map their supply chains to the raw material level. What was once voluntary now becomes a legal requirement, demanding substantial investments in digital technologies, audits, and certifications.

Companies that fail to comply risk losing access to one of the largest consumer markets in the world, while those that embrace the directive's ethos may gain a competitive edge. However, the financial burden of compliance will ripple down to suppliers, many of whom operate in resource-constrained developing countries.

For Bangladesh, the world's second-largest exporter of ready-made garments (RMG), the stakes are especially high. The EU remains a crucial market for its apparel exports, making the CSDDD impossible to overlook.

However, the challenges are formidable. Many of Bangladesh's small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which dominate the sector, lack the financial and technical capacity to meet the directive's stringent requirements. The fragmented and informal nature of the supply chain further complicates efforts to achieve transparency and traceability. Compliance will demand investments in sustainable practices, digitalisation, and certifications, adding strain to already tight profit margins.

Yet, this directive also presents a unique opportunity for Bangladesh's RMG sector to cement its position as a global leader in sustainable manufacturing. With the highest number of LEED-certified green factories globally, Bangladesh has already shown its commitment to environmental stewardship. The CSDDD could act as a catalyst for further innovation, encouraging factories to adopt circular economy principles, minimise waste, and invest in energy-efficient technologies. Factories that achieve compliance will not only retain access to EU markets but also enhance their reputation as ethical, sustainable suppliers, attracting additional business opportunities.

To adapt to the CSDDD, Bangladesh's RMG sector must act decisively. Investments in capacity-building initiatives are critical to equipping factory owners and workers with the tools to meet compliance requirements. Digital transformation will play a pivotal role, with technologies like blockchain and AI providing solutions for supply chain transparency and risk management. Collaboration will be equally important, with brands, suppliers, and governments needing to share the costs and benefits of compliance. Policy support, such as financial incentives and infrastructure development, can help SMEs navigate this transition.

The CSDDD is more than a directive; it marks the dawn of a new era of accountability and transparency. For Bangladesh's RMG sector, it is both a challenge and an opportunity to lead the way in ethical and sustainable manufacturing.

The author is a former director of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association

Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva having vowed

reciprocation if Trump imposed tariffs.

South Korea, the fourth-biggest steel exporter to the United States, also vowed to protect its companies' interests.

Acting President Choi Sang-mok said Seoul would seek to reduce uncertainties "by building a close relationship with the Trump administration and expanding diplomatic options".

A spokesman for British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said London was "engaging with our US counterparts to work through the detail" of the tariffs.

Britain's steel industry body called the tariff plan a "devastating blow", while its European counterpart said it would worsen "an already dire market environment".

In Monday's executive order, Trump said "all imports of aluminium articles and derivative aluminium articles from Argentina, Australia, Canada, Mexico, EU countries, and the UK" will be subject to additional tariffs.

The same countries are named in his executive order on steel, along with Brazil, Japan and South Korea.

Trump said he was "simplifying" US tariffs, adding: "It's 25 percent without exceptions or exemptions."



A worker moves steel products at North York Iron, a steel supplier in Toronto, on Tuesday. Donald Trump signed executive orders to impose 25 percent tariffs on imports of the metal starting on March 12.

PHOTO: AFP