

NBR halves VAT hike on biscuits

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The National Board of Revenue (NBR) has halved the amount of value added tax (VAT) it had initially decided to impose on biscuit sales, according to a government notification issued yesterday.

Consumers pay a 5 percent VAT on the popular snack.

In early January, the NBR had decided to impose a 15 percent VAT on biscuits and nearly 100 other items.

The revenue authority yesterday said it would levy a 7.5 percent VAT instead.

The hike had sparked criticism from various quarters, with concerns that it could fuel inflation, which has remained above 9 percent since March 2023.

On January 22, the NBR revised the VAT and supplementary duty (SD) on nine goods and services, including mobile phone usage, internet services, and medicines.

Agro and food processors had been urging the government to reverse the VAT increase on food products, including biscuits.

Gold scales new high

REUTERS

Gold prices rose to a record high on Thursday as investors turned to bullion for safety on fears US President Donald Trump's tariff plans would stoke inflation and a global trade war.

Spot gold was up 0.5 percent at \$2,945.83 an ounce, as of 0621 GMT, after hitting a record high of \$2,947.11 earlier in the session.

Bullion has risen 12 percent so far this year and hit a fresh peak for the tenth time on Trump tariff fears.

US gold futures gained 0.9 percent to \$2,963.80 on Thursday.

Stocks rebound, post slight gains

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The stock market in Bangladesh rebounded from a two-day losing streak, with turnover surging in the closing session of the week.

The DSEX, the benchmark index of the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE), rose by 7.93 points, or 0.15 percent, closing at 5,200 points.

The other two indices of the country's premier bourse showed mixed performance. The Sharia-based stock index, DSES, increased by 0.43 percent to 1,162 points, while the blue-chip index, DS30, decreased by 0.16 percent to 1,909 points.

Among the traded securities, 167 READ MORE ON B2

Elon Musk is not India's ideal foreign investor

REUTERS, Mumbai

India may get more than it bargained for when it comes to Elon Musk. The Tesla boss' role in the White House might make it easier for him to set the terms of his entry into the world's third-largest car market. But President Donald Trump's aim of cutting the US trade deficit will leave India less leverage to wrangle coveted factory jobs it wants from Musk.

The electric vehicle maker has identified locations for two stores in India, Reuters reported citing unnamed sources, and is hiring for customer-facing and back-end

roles in the country. That has fuelled speculation that Musk's meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi last week may pave the road for Tesla to finally sell cars in the country.

The biggest deterrence is India's high tariffs on imported vehicles, which New Delhi once hoped would persuade foreign brands to manufacture locally. But the Tesla boss has resisted, probably because local demand for luxury EVs has yet to catch up to China, the company's second most important country by revenue after the United States.

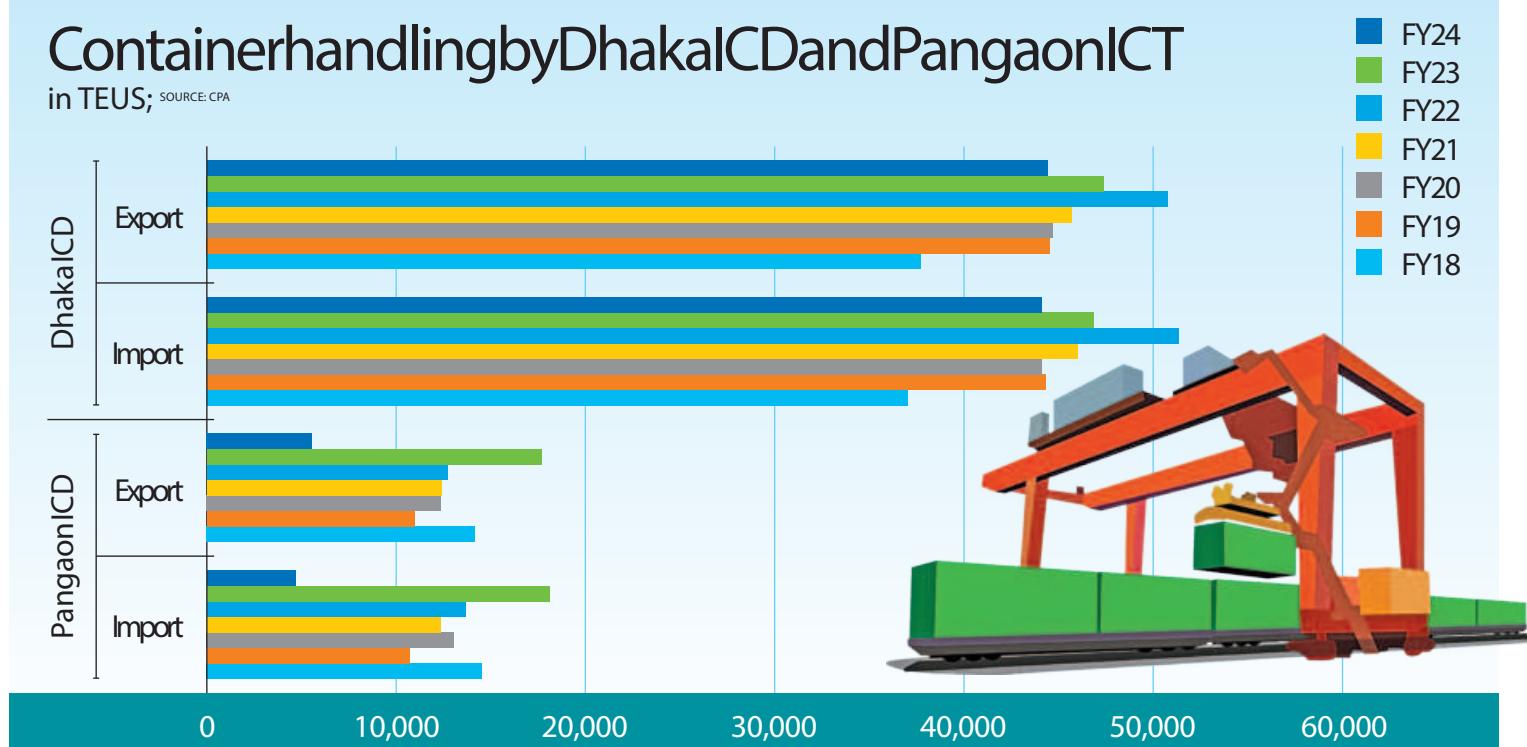
It's possible that Modi may now READ MORE ON B2

Kamalapur-bound containers can be delivered from Pangaon

NBR makes decision to clear pile-up at port yard

Container handling by Dhaka ICD and Pangaon ICT

in TEUs; SOURCE: CPA



STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

In a bid to clear a pile-up of containers, the National Board of Revenue (NBR) has approved the delivery of import-laden containers bound for the Dhaka inland container depot (ICD) to consignees from the Pangaon Inland Container Terminal (ICT) in Keraniganj.

Such containers will be delivered from the Chattogram port yard as well, a decision welcomed by businesses.

Import containers destined for the Kamalapur ICD in Dhaka have been piling up at the Chattogram Goods Port Yard (CGPY) as a shortage of locomotives led to slow transportation over railways.

At a tripartite emergency meeting on Tuesday, Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) requested Custom House Chattogram to allow the transfer of these containers to the Pangaon ICT via river route for duty assessment and delivery to consignees.

Such containers would also be delivered from the CGPY, the CPA said.

The NBR approved the request on Wednesday evening. The NBR sent a directive in this regard, signed by Second Secretary (Customs Policy) Mokitul Hasan.

Typically, imported cargo is delivered to recipients from the destination mentioned in import documents.

Confirming the development, CPA Secretary Md Omar Faruk said the permission was granted for two years under several

conditions.

According to the directive, clearing and forwarding (C&F) agents must submit a list of Dhaka-bound import containers to respective shipping lines for transportation to Pangaon ICT.

A copy of the list must be shared with the respective customs commissioner for facilitation.

The transportation must strictly be along the river route and the Pangaon ICT authority will handle duty assessment and examination of import consignments within the terminal before delivery to consignees.

The Pangaon ICT authority will also be responsible for ensuring the security of the consignments until delivery to consignees.

For over a month, the railway authorities have been running only one or two freight trains daily to carry the Dhaka-bound containers from the port whereas port authorities say they require at least four trains daily.

This has led to a pileup of over 1,800 TEUs (twenty foot equivalent units) of Dhaka-bound containers at the CGPY, far exceeding the allotted capacity of 876 TEUs.

Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association President Mohammad Hatem welcomed the NBR's decision, saying it would widen options for businesses to get their imports.

He said business leaders in Dhaka recently met with the NBR officials, who assured

them of expediting the release of cargo from the Pangaon ICT as well as regular vessel movement between the ICT and Chattogram port.

Vessels have been plying the route between the ICT and Chattogram port once a week or even longer due to a low volume of containers for a long time. However, vessel operators, said they would increase the frequency if there were enough containers to carry.

According to clearing and forwarding agents in Dhaka, it currently takes three to four days to get import consignments released from both the Kamalapur ICD and Pangaon ICT.

A number of containers loaded with consumer items imported ahead of Ramadan have been lying at the CGPY for over 20 days now, said Md Faruk Alam, general secretary of the Dhaka Customs Agents Association.

He said the challenge of taking delivery of Kamalapur ICD-bound containers from the Pangaon ICT was that it required changing the destination in the import general manifest (IGM), which is a time-consuming process.

Moreover, importers have to bear extra costs as vessel freight charges are higher than that for railway freight, he said.

BKMEA leader Hatem, however, said since there is the option, importers could take their deliveries from the Chattogram port instead of Pangaon.

Beat the trap of procrastination

MAHTAB UDDIN AHMED

How common is it in our daily life when a teacher or boss sets a deadline, and we all think, "Oh, I'll start in ten days!" Suddenly, time shrinks, and it's panic mode: emergency declared, day-and-night sprints commence, and the assignment emerges from chaos. Now, in the Gen Z era, the twist is that although we, the "old timers," allot ten days based on our past snail-like speed, these whiz kids can finish it in a day! Yet, they deliver on day ten—almost as if they are saying, "We saved our brilliance for the grand finale!" Is procrastination just a well-choreographed dance with time?

One memorable remark from Bengali wisdom goes, "Time flows like a river, never to return." This timeless metaphor urges us to seize every moment, reminding us that delaying action only lets precious life slip away. Global research reveals that 20 percent of adults chronically procrastinate, impacting productivity and well-being. Nearly 95 percent of college students procrastinate, leading to stress and lower grades. In the workplace, procrastination can reduce productivity by 20-25 percent, costing billions. This habit is linked to 30-50 percent higher stress, anxiety, and depression, making effective planning utterly essential globally.

In the whirlwind of life in Bangladesh—from the hectic corridors of Dhaka University to the buzzing offices in Chattogram—procrastination is a familiar, if not constant, companion. We have all planned our work in perfect, neat sequences, only to find that reality takes a humorous detour. Picture this: you plan your assignment with the best intentions, gradually build momentum, and then happily submit the report! The days slip away until the deadline looms like a thunderstorm.

Tim Urban explains this struggle well in his talk. At the heart of this struggle lies a peculiar internal tug-of-war. On one side is the Rational Decision-Maker, the part of you that meticulously maps out plans, envisions a successful future, and insists that work comes first. On the other side is the mischievous Instant Gratification Monkey. This cheeky character lives solely in the present, urging you to indulge in whatever's fun at the moment—be it rewatching cricket highlights, scrolling through endless social media feeds, or catching up on the latest Bangladeshi drama.

The comedy of this internal battle is best illustrated by those moments when plans go awry. Imagine preparing for a major project by pacing yourself, only to scramble at the last minute. The panic sets in, and suddenly, the Panic Monster—that wild burst of urgency triggered by an impending deadline—takes charge. It might push you into action, compelling you to pull all-nighters and finish a 100-page assignment in a frenzied 72 hours. While these last-minute heroics might save the day, they also leave behind a trail of stress, exhaustion, and a lingering sense of regret.

Yet, a more deceptive form of procrastination haunts many of us. Unlike the dramatic rush induced by deadlines, this type creeps into daily life without warning. It's the quiet delay that prevents us from pursuing our long-term dreams—whether launching a business in Sylhet, nurturing personal relationships, or even taking proper care of our health. Over time, these unfulfilled ambitions can become a constant companion of guilt and self-doubt.

So, what's the remedy? First, it is essential to acknowledge that procrastination is a universal human trait, not a personal failing. Breaking tasks into small, manageable goals, creating a "life calendar" to visualise precious weeks, and finding a balance between work and leisure can help tame that unruly Monkey. Ultimately, every Bangladeshi has the power to reclaim control of their time—starting today, not tomorrow.

In busy Bangladesh, let's give procrastination a proper kick. We can turn panic into progress with simple planning and a good laugh at our own delays. Embrace the day, chase dreams, and show that cheeky monkey who's really in charge!

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

Microfinance presence lowers rural interest rates

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

When a formal microfinance institution (MFI) enters a village and joins the existing rural lending ecosystem, the influence of both informal moneylenders and exorbitant interest rates declines significantly, according to a study.

The research, titled "Microfinance Competition in the Presence of Moneylenders: Theory and Evidence," found that a village

has five MFIs or NGOs on average. In such cases, the entry of an additional MFI into a village reduces reliance on traditional moneylenders, colloquially known as mohajons, by 33 percent.

Additionally, the arrival of a new non-governmental organisation (NGO) brings down interest rates by 25 percent, the study noted.

Prof Shyamal Chowdhury, director of the Australia South Asia Research Centre, unveiled the

findings at a seminar organised by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) at its office in the capital's Agargaon yesterday.

The study was based on a survey of 150 villages across four districts in Bangladesh.

It found that while 50 percent of rural borrowers take loans from NGOs, nearly 20 to 30 percent still rely on moneylenders.

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Trump says trade deal with China 'possible'

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump suggested on Wednesday that a trade deal was "possible" with China—a key target in the US leader's tariff's policy.

In 2020, the United States had already agreed to "a great trade deal with China" and a new deal was "possible," Trump told reporters.

Asked about the comments, Beijing's foreign ministry said Thursday the two countries should handle trade tensions with "mutual respect."

One month into his second term in office, Trump has threatened sweeping tariffs on allies and adversaries alike—targeting China as well as neighbors Canada and Mexico, and the European Union—and using levies as his main policy tool for lowering the massive US trade deficit.

At the beginning of February, he slapped additional customs duties of 10 percent on all products imported from China.

Beijing's foreign ministry said Thursday that China and the US "should resolve their concerns through dialogue and consultation based on equality and mutual respect."

"Trade and tariff wars have no winners and only serve to damage the interests

of people all over the world," ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun said at a regular press briefing.

At a separate news conference, China's commerce ministry said Beijing "urges the US side not to wield the big stick of tariffs at every turn, using tariffs as a tool to engage in coercion all around."

Trump is also threatening to impose 25 percent tariffs on all imported

cars, and similar or higher duties on pharmaceuticals and semiconductors as he turns up the heat on some of the biggest US trading partners.

He also told journalists aboard Air Force One on Wednesday that his administration was considering lumber tariffs of "maybe 25 percent" in the coming months.

The president also initially announced



This photo shows workers producing bags that will be exported at a textile factory in Huabei in China's eastern Anhui province.

tariffs of 25 percent on all Canadian and Mexican imports, before U-turning hours before they were due to come into effect, granting a one-month reprieve in principle until March 1.

And he signed executive orders last week imposing new 25 percent tariffs on steel and aluminum imports, due to come into effect on March 12.

Experts have warned it is often Americans who pay the tariffs on US imports—not the foreign exporter.

Beijing has responded to the US tariffs with customs duties of 15 percent on coal and liquefied natural gas and 10 percent on oil and other goods, such as agricultural machinery and vehicles.

China is the country with the largest trade surplus with the United States in goods—\$295.4 billion in 2024, according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, which reports to the US Department of Commerce.

US ally Japan last week said it had asked the United States to be exempt from Trump's tariffs on steel and aluminum exports, and has underlined the importance of its auto industry.

Tokyo's trade minister is arranging a visit to the United States in the coming weeks to further push for exemptions, Japanese media reported Thursday.

ANALYSIS

roles in the country. That has fuelled speculation that Musk's meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi last week may pave the road for Tesla to finally sell cars in the country.

The biggest deterrence is India's high tariffs on imported vehicles, which New Delhi once hoped would persuade foreign brands to manufacture locally. But the Tesla boss has resisted, probably because local demand for luxury EVs has yet to catch up to China, the company's second most important country by revenue after the United States.

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