

Foodpro begins tomorrow

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The 10th Bangladesh Agro-Processors' Association (BAPA) Foodpro International Expo 2025 is set to begin at the International Convention City Bashundhara in the capital on Tuesday.

Commerce Adviser Sk Bashir Uddin is expected to inaugurate the three-day international fair, organisers said at a press conference at the Economic Reporters' Forum (ERF) in Dhaka yesterday.

Over 200 leading food and beverage companies from 22 countries will showcase their products and services at the fair, which is being organised by BAPA and Rainbow Exhibition and Event Management Services (REEMS).

Alongside the main exhibition, the "12th Agro Bangladesh Expo 2025" and the "Food Ingredient Expo 2025" will also take place.

The fairs, which are open to all, will run daily from 10:00 am to 7:00 pm.

A panel discussion will also be held as part of the event.

Gold eases from record high

REUTERS

Gold prices eased on Friday as investors booked profits from the previous session's record high, but were set for an eighth straight weekly gain, driven by strong safe-haven demand amid concerns over US President Donald Trump's tariff plans.

Spot gold shed 0.1 percent to \$2,939.63 an ounce as of 02:24 a.m. ET (1924 GMT). Bullion has gained around 1.9 percent this week after rising to a record \$2,954.69 on Thursday.

US gold futures settled 0.1 percent lower at \$2,953.20.

"It's just a classical movement of new all-time highs and profit-taking... (but) the fundamentals for gold remain solid," said Alex Ebkarian, chief operating officer at Allegiance Gold.

Prices have shattered two record highs this week to trade above \$2,950 an oz, as uncertainties surrounding global economic growth and political instability have underscored investor appetite for bullion, which has risen 11.5 percent so far in 2025.

US business stalling, inflation expectations surge

REUTERS, Washington

US business activity nearly stalled in February amid mounting fears over tariffs on imports and deep cuts in federal government spending, erasing all the gains notched in the aftermath of President Donald Trump's election victory.

The tumble in activity to a 17-month low reported by S&P Global on Friday was the latest in a string of surveys to suggest that businesses and consumers were becoming increasingly rattled by the Trump administration's policies.

Business and consumer sentiment soared following the Republican's November 5 victory on hopes for a less stringent regulatory environment, tax cuts and low inflation.

"The Trump business honeymoon is over, it seems," said Kyle Chapman, FX markets analyst at Ballinger Group.

S&P Global's flash US Composite PMI Output Index, which tracks the manufacturing and services sectors, fell to 50.4 this month. That was the lowest reading since September 2023 and was down from 52.7

Economic zones (EZs) at a glance

Only 10 EZs have become operational since 2015
2 state-run and 8 are under private sector

EZs have created around 60,000 jobs

- » 7,000 in state-owned zones
- » 53,000 in private zones

Products worth \$14.47 billion were produced in the EZs in FY23



MASTER PLAN FOR INDUSTRIALISATION

First phase (2024-2030)

Developing and attracting investment in eight EZs

Second Phase (2030-2035)

Scaling up industrialisation in five EZs

Third Phase (2035-2045)

Focusing on competitiveness to compete globally & smart industrialisation in seven EZs

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The Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority (Beza) is developing a comprehensive three-phase implementation plan to develop economic zones across the country, ensuring balanced industrialisation, employment generation, and sustainable infrastructure development.

As part of a draft "National Master Plan of Economic Zones", Beza is prioritising establishing 20 economic zones by 2046, strategically phasing the implementation for resource optimisation and to attract local and foreign investment.

Beza disclosed this during a workshop on "Economic zone prioritisation and phasing, offsite infrastructure planning and development mechanism" at its office in Biniyog Bhaban at the capital's Agargaon yesterday.

According to the master plan, which is currently being formulated through financing from World Bank, the phased approach helps mitigate challenges related to land acquisition, infrastructure readiness, and investor confidence.

This in turn ensures that economic zones develop in a structured and sustainable manner, states the master plan.

Only 10 economic zones have become operational since Beza rolled out a massive industrialisation plan in 2015.

Of the 10 economic zones, two – the National Economic Zone in Chattogram and Srehatta Economic Zone in Sylhet – are government-run while eight are under private management.

The private ones are City Economic Zone, Meghna Industrial Economic Zone, Meghna Economic Zone, Hoshendi Economic Zone, Abdul Monem Economic Zone, Bay Economic Zone, Aman Economic Zone, and East West Economic Zone.

According to Beza report, the 10 economic zones employ around 60,000 people. Some 7,000 people are working in government-run zones and 53,000 in the private zones.

Products worth \$14.47 billion were produced in the 10 economic zones in the last fiscal year of 2022-23, it said.

Addressing the workshop, Ashik Chowdhury, executive chairman of Beza, reaffirmed his commitment to turning the master plan into a blueprint for success, driving growth, innovation, and sustainable industrialisation.

"Whenever I am given a big project, I know it is a huge responsibility. There are many challenges, but I see them as chances to learn and grow," he said.

Beza has grown because of hard work, good planning, and always aiming for the best."

The first phase, spanning from FY25 to FY30, will prioritise economic zones that are already under development or at an advanced planning stage

Speaking about Bangladesh's economic growth, Chowdhury said, "A long time ago, we chose Narayanganj as an important place for development. We made that decision after careful study, and now we see the results.

"We are creating a space where businesses can succeed, new ideas can grow, and young people can dream big," he added.

Beza is not just building economic zones, it is shaping the future of Bangladesh, he said.

"We must create more jobs, grow our economy, and make Bangladesh even stronger. Let us work together for a better future," Chowdhury said.

Gayle Martin, country director of World Bank, emphasised the importance of rationalising economic policies to foster sustainable growth.

From the international financial institution's perspective, a well-functioning private sector is crucial for innovation, entrepreneurship, job creation, and

sustainable management of natural resources, she said.

World Bank has been supporting Bangladesh in its economic progress, analysing growth trends, and enhancing policy frameworks, she said.

In collaboration with the International Finance Corporation, World Bank is preparing a private sector diagnostic, set to launch in the coming weeks, Martin informed.

According to her, another critical area is tax policy and administration. Bangladesh has one of the lowest tax-to-GDP ratios in the world and tax exemptions account for 6 percent to 7 percent of the GDP.

Rationalising these policies is essential for fiscal sustainability, she emphasised.

While the strong growth trend of the past has lost steam, strategic private sector investment can revitalise the momentum, said Martin, adding, "The World Bank remains committed to supporting structural reforms that maximise economic zones' impact."

According to a presentation on the master plan, the first phase, spanning from FY25 to FY30, will prioritise economic zones that are already under development or at an advanced planning stage.

Beza is focusing on the construction of roads, power supply, water management, and telecommunications to attract investors.

It is also offering incentives and ensuring a "favourable" business environment by focusing on select industrial sectors such as agro-processing, textiles, and light engineering due to their low capital requirement and high employment potential.

These zones being prioritised have already been provided land, face minimal legal disputes, and have high investor interest, making them ideal for early implementation.

By 2030, these zones are projected to generate over 300,000 jobs and contribute significantly to export earnings, thereby strengthening Bangladesh's position in global trade.

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Combating financial scams in banking system

SALEKEEN IBRAHIM

Remarkably, the pandemic has acted as a blessing for digital services and dramatically transformed our financial setting, steering it in a nature where digital banking has renewed as an easy solution in our everyday lives.

In terms of cost savings, time management and overall comfort, digital platforms managed by different banks have given us a quantum leap considering customer satisfaction. It has empowered more individuals than ever to engage with financial institutions online. The supreme aim for financial inclusion has also received a significant push here.

However, this accelerated shift has also unlocked a sluicegate for financial scams and digital frauds. But as we navigate into this new reality, it becomes necessary to explore effective measures for financial institutions to reinforce their digital platforms against such threats.

The most effective way to counter digital fraud is to implement strong authentication measures. Banks should adopt a multi-factor authentication system (MFA) requiring users to provide different information before accessing their accounts. This could include a combination of passwords, biometric data (fingerprints or facial recognition), and one-time codes sent via email or SMS.

Banks should use modern technology, and employ advanced analytics and artificial intelligence to monitor transactions in real time, identifying any unusual pattern that can indicate fraud. By evaluating risk constantly, banks can respond swiftly to prospective threats and prevent significant financial damage. A group of skilful employees or departments will have a close look at the digital ecosystem of the bank on a regular basis.

Customer education and learning about potential scams are important. Banks should invest in awareness programmes that enlighten clients about common fraud approaches and encourage safe online banking practices.

Regular updates through customer newsletters, workshops, and social media can help users to identify and report suspicious happenings. Bank employees must also be trained to distinguish potential threats and respond appropriately.

Conducting regular vulnerability assessments, stress testing and penetration testing is important to understand the bank's current strength against evolving threats. Third-party audit experts can be deployed periodically to ensure an impartial appraisal of prevailing processes and propose improvements to keep it robust.

The government and the central bank also have some crucial role in creating a secure financial environment. They should establish complete security regulations and provide proper guidelines.

The Bangladesh Bank can introduce a unified regulatory framework only for digital platforms that guide minimum security standards across the board, ensuring a baseline of defence for all.

Collaboration between the government, central bank, and private banks can also lead to joint initiatives focused on combating financial scams. Strengthening customer protection law is also important to safeguard customer rights against any fraud. We must ensure that victims get timely assistance and needful compensation for genuine cases.

With the escalation of digital banking in our country, a culture of security must be reinforced at all levels of financial institutions. This encompasses not only technology and processes but also the people who are engaged with these systems.

As Bangladesh continues to embrace digital banking, it is imperative for our banks to proactively adopt solutions that reduce the risks of financial scams. Through a combination of enhanced cybersecurity, employee and customer education, rigorous internal controls, and strong regulatory support from governmental bodies, the financial sector can secure itself against digital threats.

The writer is a banker.

Fed remaining on hold for a while," said Stephen Stanley, chief US economist, Santander US Capital Markets.

"The question is whether President Trump and the administration are paying attention to the souring of consumer moods due to the threat of tariffs."

In financial markets, though, concern about a weakening economy appeared to outweigh fear of resurgent inflation, with futures contracts that settle to the Fed's policy rate pricing in a firmer chance of two interest rate cuts this year, rather than just one. Market bets put the first cut as likely by June, and the second as soon as October.

Inflation concerns, meanwhile, dominated in the S&P Global's survey. Its measure of prices paid by businesses for inputs increased to 58.5 this month from 57.4 in January. It was boosted by the manufacturing gauge, which jumped to 63.5 from 57.4 last month, "overwhelmingly blamed by purchasing managers on tariffs and related supplier-driven price hikes."

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People carry shopping bags as they walk through SoHo in New York City. Business and consumer sentiment soared following Donald Trump's November 5 victory on hopes for tax cuts and low inflation.

PHOTO: AFP/FILE