

MJL to sell aging oil tanker for \$22.7m

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

MJL Bangladesh PLC, popularly known as Mobil Bangladesh, has decided to sell a secondhand oil tanker for \$22.7 million, the company said yesterday.

The 20-year-old Aframax oil tanker MT Omera Legacy has a capacity of 107,091 tonnes, according to a disclosure filed by the company with the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) yesterday.

An Aframax oil tanker refers to a medium-sized oil tanker with a deadweight capacity typically ranging from 80,000 to 120,000 tonnes.

A senior MJL official said the company will pay a 3 percent commission to brokers involved in the sale.

Following the announcement, MJL's shares rose by 1.48 percent to close at Tk 96.20 on the DSE yesterday.

This move follows MJL's board decision in December last year to acquire another secondhand Aframax oil tanker, MT Nissos Delos, for \$45.3 million.

The 12-year-old vessel, with a carrying capacity of 115,690 tonnes, will replace MT Omera Legacy.

MJL reported a 30 percent year-on-year increase in profit during the first half of the financial year 2025, reaching Tk 217.46 crore.

However, the lubricant oil company saw a marginal decline in profit to Tk 276.63 crore in the financial year 2024, down from Tk 276.90 crore the previous year.

A joint venture between East Coast Group's EC Securities and state-owned Jamuna Oil Company, MJL has been a key player in lubricant blending in Bangladesh since its establishment in 1998.

Pioneer Ins declares 25% cash dividend

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Pioneer Insurance Company Ltd has recommended a 25 percent cash dividend for shareholders for the year that ended on December 31, 2024, according to a disclosure published on the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) website yesterday.

The company reported earnings per share (EPS) of Tk 4.79 after tax in 2024, slightly lower than Tk 4.97 in the previous year.

The net asset value per share stood at Tk 44.65 as of December 31, 2024, up from Tk 43.62 a year earlier.

Meanwhile, the net operating cash flow per share improved to negative Tk 0.91 in 2024 from negative Tk 2.09 in 2023, indicating a lower cash outflow from operating activities.

The company's dividend proposal is subject to approval at its annual general meeting, the date of which will be announced later.

Pioneer Insurance is listed on the Dhaka Stock Exchange and operates in the non-life insurance sector.

Trump exempts some automakers from tariffs for one month

REUTERS

US President Donald Trump will exempt automakers from his punishing 25 percent tariffs on Canada and Mexico for one month as long as they comply with existing free trade rules, the White House said on Wednesday, a development that halted at least for now Wall Street's steepest skid in nearly three months.

Trump is also open to hearing about other products that should be exempted from the tariffs, which took effect Tuesday, the White House said.

But Trump made clear he was not calling off his trade war with Canada and Mexico as he pressures both countries to deter fentanyl smuggling. After a phone call with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Trump said he was not convinced the situation had improved.

"He said that it's gotten better, but I said, 'That's not good enough,'" Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform. "The call ended in a 'somewhat' friendly manner!" Trudeau's office said discussions would continue. Official statistics show a small fraction of fentanyl in the US comes across the Canadian border.

The one-month reprieve sparked a rebound in auto stocks, but trade tensions have created uncertainty for US corporations and sapped consumer confidence, leading to a sell-off in stocks in recent days. General Motors shares were up 7.2 percent and Ford gained 5.8 percent on Wednesday, but both shares are still down on the year.

Trump's tariffs pose extreme difficulties for automakers, which produce vehicles in all three countries and often ship parts across North American borders multiple times as they get built into systems and finished vehicles.



The Pushpopara market in Pabna has been flooded by onions, with stocks doubling from 100 to 200 tonnes in the span of four days last week. This bumper supply, combined with weak demand, has caused a decline in prices, leaving farmers in a state of uncertainty.

PHOTO: AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU

New onions bring no smiles to farmers

Production costs outweigh current prices

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, Pabna

Onion farmers, who saw high profits last year, are now struggling due to a sharp drop in prices at the peak of the harvesting season.

With new onions entering markets, prices continue to decline, raising concerns over recovering production costs in major producing regions such as Pabna and greater Faridpur.

Md Rabiul Islam, a trader at the Pushpopara wholesale market in Pabna Sadar upazila, said prices have fallen drastically.

"Each maund (around 40 kilogrammes) was fetching Tk 1,400 to Tk 1,500 last week. By Monday, it dropped to Tk 1,200 to Tk 1,300, and on Thursday, it fell further to Tk 800 to Tk 1,100," he said.

The supply of new onions has surged in the district's wholesale markets, but demand remains weak.

At Pushpopara market, around 80-100 tonnes of onions were available last Monday, rising to over 200 tonnes by Thursday. Given the weak demand, supply is expected to increase further in the coming weeks.

Md Kamruzzaman, a farmer from Durgapur village in Sujanagar upazila, said he sold onions for Tk 2,500 to Tk 3,000 per maund last year but is getting less than half that this year.

"This year, I was getting Tk

1,200 to Tk 1,300 per maund last week. The price is so low that I have stopped selling onions for now," he said.

Kamruzzaman cultivated onions on 80 bighas (one bigha = 33 decimals) this year, including 30 bighas of leased land, contributing to higher production costs.

"It costs Tk 25,000 to Tk 30,000 to cultivate one bigha

to increased production," he added.

According to DAE data, onion cultivation expanded by 10 percent year-on-year to 2.93 lakh hectares in FY25.

Mafikul Islam, a farmer from Khoa village in Saltha upazila of Faridpur, said his production costs have risen compared to last year.

"Last year, I made a profit

of Tk 1 lakh, but this year, prices are very low, which is worrying," he said.

Moshirul Islam, another farmer, added, "For us to make a profit, onions need to sell for at least Tk 2,200 per maund."

Tempted by last year's high returns, many farmers expanded cultivation, with some even taking loans.

Md Montu Khan, an onion farmer from Ulat village in Sujanagar upazila, cultivated onions on 10 bighas this season, investing Tk 2.8 lakh.

He borrowed Tk 80,000 and purchased fertiliser worth Tk 70,000 on credit.

"Last year's high prices encouraged more farmers to grow onions this year, leading

to Tk 1 lakh, but this year, prices are very low, which is worrying," he said.

Moshirul Islam, another farmer, added, "For us to make a profit, onions need to sell for at least Tk 2,200 per maund."

Md Montu Khan, an onion farmer from Ulat village in Sujanagar upazila, cultivated onions on 10 bighas this season, investing Tk 2.8 lakh.

He borrowed Tk 80,000 and purchased fertiliser worth Tk 70,000 on credit.

"I need to sell my onions to repay these debts, but

the current prices are concerning," he said.

"If prices reach Tk 1,400-1,500 per maund in the wholesale market, we might avoid losses."

Despite the increase in supply, demand remains weak in major wholesale markets, traders said.

"At least 10-12 truckloads of onions are being sent to Dhaka, Mymensingh, Tangail, and nearby districts, but we are unable to sell in Chattogram and Sylhet," said trader Rabiul Islam.

He attributed this to large stocks of imported onions in Chattogram and Sylhet, making it difficult to supply locally grown onions to those regions.

According to DAE Pabna, onion cultivation covered 53,150 hectares in the district this year, with an expected production of 7.9 lakh tonnes.

Md Rokonuzzaman, additional deputy director of DAE in Pabna, urged farmers not to panic over the low prices.

"A bumper harvest has increased supply, pushing prices down. We have advised farmers to store onions, as prices are expected to rise once the harvesting period ends," he said.

Farmers are currently storing onions manually at home, but the government is working to improve storage facilities, given Pabna's significance as the country's largest onion-producing region, he added.



of onions on owned land, but on leased land, the cost exceeds Tk 50,000 due to lease payments," he said.

His estimated production cost is over Tk 40 per kg, making it difficult to break even at current prices.

However, Md Ashikur Rahman, deputy assistant agriculture officer of the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) in Pabna, said that after factoring in high seed prices, fertiliser costs, and lease expenses, this year's production cost per kg is Tk 38.

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Trump's trade tactics have a timing problem



REUTERS, Washington

The annual winter address to Congress is usually a US president's chance to urge legislators to pass his agenda. Donald Trump, appearing before lawmakers on Tuesday for the first time since returning to the White House, instead explained how he planned to ignore lawmaking in favor of executive action. His theory of how best to nurture an industrial renaissance is exemplified by the rare legislation that did warrant mention: \$53 billion in semiconductor funding that he wants scrapped. Instead, Trump pushes tariffs as the means to force supply chains back onshore. CEOs can make plans based on settled law. They can't depend on an agenda that's all short-term pain without the stability to notch long-term gains.

Trump's Republican party controls the legislature. Yet his speech mostly focused on executive action. The president said that his tariffs, wielded without congressional restraint, would "make America rich again." He admitted that a

"little disturbance" should be expected in the near-term. That's perhaps a nod to the S&P 500 Index's 6 percent tumble from its mid-February high as 25 percent tariffs on Canada and Mexico take effect.

Ideally, this pain would be the price for a more self-sufficient America, where farmers rely on local markets and manufacturers set

up US facilities to avoid levies. But factories require billions of dollars of spending coupled with years of careful planning, negotiations, and investor acquisitiveness. CEOs need to know that the conditions pushing them towards this investment won't suddenly disappear.

Trump's trade policy promises no such



US President Donald Trump addresses a joint session of Congress at the US Capitol in Washington, DC on March 4.

Leadership: Dealing with idiots

MAHTAB UDDIN AHMED

Molla Nasiruddin took his donkey to the roof, but it refused to come down. Despite his efforts, the stubborn donkey resisted, kicking relentlessly. Worried the straw roof might collapse, Molla tried pushing the donkey, only to find himself kicked off the roof with a sore back. The roof eventually collapsed with an injured donkey looking least remorseful. But at least it taught Molla a valuable lesson: placing someone unworthy in a high position harms everything and everyone concerned.

Some recent events involving Donald Trump reminded me of my former boss, DI, the dangers of elevating unfit individuals to power. Donald Trump, the leader of a mighty nation, built his reputation on bullying and manipulation rather than genuine leadership, with his sycophants cheering him on. Similarly, many of us found ourselves being led by DI, who was utterly incompetent and lacked knowledge of the industry, MNC culture, and basic skills to run a large corporation. His poor decisions cost him his own job while taking the job of others. The short-lived leader left the organisation in chaos and declining performance. But what is noteworthy here is that such leaders can also turn capable individuals into blind followers. Their legacies prove that unqualified leaders inevitably leave destruction in their wake.

Donald Trump's antics sparked financial chaos—capital markets dipped, Bitcoin crashed, and allies lost trust. Similarly, DI, backed by his sidekick TH and a group of converted donkeys, turned his company into a circus, leaving employees and stakeholders in shambles. Both leaders mastered the art of humiliation and firing, putting their egos above everyone else. Their legacies?

This is a stark reminder that putting unqualified people in power destroys institutions, erodes trust, and ruins lives. While Trump's fate hangs in the balance, history suggests it will likely mirror DI's fate—proof that unworthy leaders are walking disasters. Comedy or tragedy? You decide!

In the first place, we may ask how such idiots are nominated for leadership positions. The Dunning Kruger effect explains that people who know little often overestimate their skills or political influence, appearing bold and confident—even if they are not truly skilled. In politics and business, a loud and flashy personality can triumph over groups that prefer simple rather than dramatic messages. This is enhanced by groupthink and confirmation bias, where people choose leaders who echo their own ideas, even if they lack true expertise. In short, these so-called "donkeys" may be selected because their overconfidence and strong showmanship resonate with voters or corporate insiders, proving that sometimes, style beats substance in the selection process.

Apart from Donald Trump, there are other real-life examples where leaders with flashy yet questionable styles caused trouble. In politics, take Boris Johnson as an example. His humorous and charismatic style won him many supporters, but critics argue that his loose approach during Brexit led to confusion and complex negotiations, harming the UK's global standing.

Dealing with leaders who rely on style over substance starts with strengthening our checks on power through independent media, judicial oversight, and strong regulatory bodies. It is imperative to support ethical leaders by voting and investing in those with proven track records. Educate yourself and others with critical thinking to cut through misinformation and shallow rhetoric. On a personal level, get involved in community discussions, peaceful protests, or shareholder activism to demand clear policies and responsible actions. This collective effort helps build an environment where only leaders with genuine skills and integrity are rewarded, limiting the influence of overconfident, ineffective leadership.

So, how do we deal with idiots in power? Simple: stop putting donkeys on the roof! Strengthen checks, demand accountability, and vote for competence over chaos to prevent getting kicked off the roof by overconfident fools. Remember—style fades, but it leaves behind a mess for us to clear. Choose wisely!

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thing. It was unclear whether the latest tariffs would happen until just hours beforehand. Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick continues to say that they may be altered. Sure, companies will scramble to build an immediate buffer—the trade deficit in goods surged to \$153 billion in January, an all-time high according to the Commerce Department. But transforming this into the confidence to make new, long-term investments seems, for now, a remote possibility.

Legislation promises more stability—not just from one president's whims, but between administrations. The CHIPS Act, passed by members of both parties, has supported \$380 billion of projects, the Semiconductor Industry Association reckons. Yet Trump is undermining that, too. Many of the staff managing the program have been fired, and funds now could be yanked away. Non-binding commitments from chipmakers like Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing seem a meager recompence.

Despite total control, Trump might have reason to distrust the legislative process: Republicans' majorities are slim and ideologically unwieldy. If so, though, he's traded inertia for self-defeating chaos.