

Tax-free income limit may rise to Tk 3.75 lakh

Next budget may offer some additional tax relief for individuals, businesses

MD ASADUZ ZAMAN

The government is planning a series of measures in the upcoming national budget to alleviate the tax pressure on individuals and businesses, including raising the tax-free income threshold and relaxing certain compliance requirements.

The revenue authority is considering increasing the tax-free income limit for individual taxpayers to Tk 375,000, up from the current Tk 350,000, according to finance ministry officials familiar with the matter.

The proposal is expected to be presented to Finance Adviser Salehuddin Ahmed on May 15. Then it will be forwarded to Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus on May 19 as part of the national budget preparation for the fiscal year (FY) 2025-26. The finance adviser is likely to announce the budget on June 2.

"We are considering these measures to provide some relief at the individual level amid stubbornly high inflation over the past couple of years," said a senior finance ministry official, requesting anonymity.

Over 9 percent inflation has been weighing on Bangladesh for the past 26 months, significantly eroding real incomes.

In April, the inflation rate stood at 9.17 percent, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS).

In the fiscal year 2023-24, the government increased the tax-free income limit by Tk 50,000 from Tk 300,000.

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Stocks rise after CA's five-point directive

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Dhaka stocks rose yesterday after the chief adviser issued a five-point directive to strengthen the capital market, including plans to sell government stakes in state-run and multinational firms.

The benchmark DSEX index gained 19.27 points, or 0.39 percent, closing at 4,921.55. This marked the second consecutive session of gains, following Thursday's nearly 100-point rally.

The Shariah-compliant DSES index edged up 0.15 percent to 1,075.89, though the blue-chip DS30 index dipped 0.27 percent to 1,815.50.

During a meeting on market development on Sunday, Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus issued the five directives.

Those include offloading shares of well-performing state-owned companies and listing them on the stock market as part of efforts to revitalise the capital market.

The measures aim to improve liquidity by increasing the supply of high-quality shares.

Yesterday, turnover, a key indicator of market activity, dipped slightly to Tk 364.09 crore from Tk 366.06 crore in the previous session.

READ MORE ON B3

KEY POINTS

Bangladesh Bank granted new legal powers to take action	Bridge banks to be introduced to manage ailing banks	'Bank resolution fund' to be created under the ordinance
Previous govt was reluctant to bail out weak banks	BB governor signals tougher stance against scam-hit banks	Ordinance offers opportunity for structural reform

MD MEHEDI HASAN

In what is seen as a landmark step toward restoring financial discipline, Bangladesh's interim government recently granted the central bank sweeping new powers to intervene in the troubled banking sector.

The Bank Resolution Ordinance 2025, gazetted on Friday, gives the Bangladesh Bank broad authority to take action against any of the country's 61 scheduled banks, including private, state-owned, and foreign institutions.

At least a dozen banks are believed to be in bad shape, with some surviving only by availing emergency liquidity support from the central bank.

Under the new ordinance, the Bangladesh Bank can forcibly transfer ownership of a failing bank to a state entity. It also allows immediate intervention by triggering formal resolution proceedings in cases of fraud or gross mismanagement, such as when owners of banks divert funds for personal gain.

The ordinance also introduces "bridge banks", a powerful regulatory tool.

These are temporary, state-owned institutions set up to take control of a failing bank's viable operations, ensuring that banking services continue uninterrupted while a long-term solution, such as a sale, merger, or liquidation, is arranged.

However, analysts warn that the effectiveness of the framework hinges not on the strength of the law, but on

the willingness of the authorities to act. The ordinance is in place. Now the question is: will it be used?

The law mandates that a bridge bank must not operate beyond two years from the date of the final asset transfer. At the end of this period, Bangladesh Bank may dissolve the bridge bank, merge it with another institution, or sell its assets and legal rights to a third party.

This hard deadline is intended to avoid indefinite state ownership and ensure that bridge banks serve as temporary stabilisation mechanisms rather than long-term bailouts.

A Bank Restructuring and Resolution Fund will also be created to finance such interventions, drawing contributions from the government, international lenders, and risk-based levies on banks.

For years, economists and banking experts have urged a reduction in the number of banks, calling for mergers or the liquidation of weak institutions. But successive governments have been reluctant to act.

During the Awami League's tenure, officials argued that closing a bank, even in cases of severe capital shortfalls or poor governance, would destabilise the financial system.

Instead, insolvent banks were propped up by recurrent support from central bank, often involving printing money, a practice that economists say fuelled inflation and deferred necessary reforms.

READ MORE ON B3

CHANGES IN NEXT BUDGET

Tax-free income limit may rise to Tk 3.75 lakh

Govt may relax rules on corporate tax

Tax exemption may not be extended for various sectors

RMG sector may continue enjoying reduced tax rate

Proof of submission of return (PSR)

NBR may relax PSR requirements for at least 5 services

PSR may be needed for buying savings certificates worth over Tk 10 lakh



16 lakh online returns were submitted this year, two-thirds of them were zero returns

Given the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, economists and business groups have repeatedly called for a revision of the tax-free income threshold.

In March, the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) recommended increasing the cap by Tk 50,000, while the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) urged the government to raise it to Tk 450,000.

Other business associations have echoed

these calls, arguing that the current threshold no longer aligns with economic realities.

In addition to raising the tax-free income limit, the government is also considering easing the requirement to submit proof of income tax return filings for purchasing savings certificates.

Currently, individuals investing more than Tk 5 lakh in savings instruments must provide proof of the previous year's tax return.

READ MORE ON B3

Starlink gets 90-day waiver to operate without local gateway

MAHMUDUL HASAN

The internet regulator in Bangladesh has granted Starlink permission to supply bandwidth from outside the country for 90 days.

This decision comes after Starlink requested the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) to grant a temporary waiver, as the company's 90-day deadline to launch services in Bangladesh would expire before a local gateway could be established.

"We have allowed Starlink to supply bandwidth without a local gateway for 90 days," BTRC Chairman Md Emdadul Bari said yesterday.

He added that the waiver was granted since Starlink would be unable to make its local gateway operational within the government's targeted timeline for launching services.

In March, Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus directed authorities to ensure Starlink's commercial launch within 90 days.

According to the satellite internet guidelines in Bangladesh, providers must route their internet traffic through local gateways and connect to an International Internet Gateway (IIG) for data transmission.

As such, it remains unclear whether Starlink will be permitted to launch commercial services while supplying bandwidth from outside the country's gateway infrastructure.

On April 29, the BTRC granted Starlink a licence to operate satellite internet services in the country.

READ MORE ON B3

New powers, old questions: Can BB clean up the banking sector?

KEY POINTS

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KEY RESPONSIBILITIES:

- The incumbent will be responsible for strategic planning and development in the Retail Lending segment to ensure that the overall business target is achieved.
- The incumbent will be responsible to design new and innovative products to meet dynamic customer demands and increase the market share of the bank through an incremental increase in lending.
- The role holder will also be responsible for formulating new strategies to properly cater to existing and prospective retail customer base, execution of action plans to optimize business performance and take initiatives to improve productivity and efficiency of the entire team, while adhering to thorough due diligence, operational process, policies and control.

KEY QUALIFICATIONS:

- Graduation from a reputed university with a satisfactory academic track record.
- 10+ years of experience preferably in retail banking products / retail lending team with 3+ years of team handling experience preferably in any bank / financial institution.
- Thorough knowledge on banking fundamentals, banking products and industry insights.
- Excellent interpersonal, communication and collaboration skills to work with cross functional teams.
- Must be a team player, ability to lead a dynamic team independently and keen to develop others.

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Head of Retail Lending

Employment Type : Full-time

Job Location : Dhaka

Reporting to : Head of Retail Banking

Job Grade : Senior Vice President/Executive Vice President

Local RMG to remain competitive even if tariffs rise

Believe international backward linkage companies for denim

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Bangladesh should improve garment quality and delivery speed amidst intense competition in global supply chains arising from US President Donald Trump's recent reciprocal tariffs, said some international traders yesterday.

Bangladesh has the opportunity to retain its competitive edge due to its large-scale production capacity, something international clothing retailers and brands always take into consideration, they said.

China and Vietnam are facing higher tariffs than Bangladesh in the US market, but there are others facing far less, such as India, Pakistan, Kenya, Jordan and Egypt, they said.

The latter do not have high production capacities, for which they cannot cater to large-volume work orders, they added.

"There is no way to replace Bangladesh because of its production capacity... It is not a matter of tariffs only," said Matteo A Urbini, managing director of Italy-based Soko Chemicals.

He was talking to The Daily Star while attending the 18th edition of Bangladesh Denim Expo at the International Convention City Bashundhara in Dhaka.

Urbini supplies a technology based on a chemical called "hydrogel" for washing denim fabrics to 60 companies in Bangladesh.

The technology is said to require just eight litres of water to wash one kilogram of denim fabric, whereas conventionally 80 litres are required.

Bangladesh is still competitive, said Herve Denoyelle, a representative of



The 18th edition of Bangladesh Denim Expo at the International Convention City Bashundhara in Dhaka will come to a close today.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

French hemp and flax fibre manufacturer The Flax Company, when asked about alternative clothing sourcing destinations to Bangladesh.

Bangladesh and China will remain competitive for mass consumption. Once the final rates of US tariffs are decided after the ongoing 90-day pause, business will grow again, he said.

Products from China and Vietnam will become more expensive because of their higher tariff rates, and Bangladesh should focus on recycled and sustainable products, he said.

His company produces 8,000 tonnes of fibre a year and supplies nearly 100

tonnes to 10 companies in Bangladesh for the manufacture of denim fabrics.

Robert Deakin, sales director of China-based Deyao Textile, which manufactures denim fabrics, said he was cautiously optimistic about Bangladesh.

The final tariff rates are yet to be decided, and business will prevail even if a 37 percent tariff is imposed on Bangladeshi products, he said.

The two-day exposition has brought 57 exhibitors from 13 countries, including India, Pakistan, China, Turkey, Spain, Italy, Vietnam, the United Arab Emirates, Germany, Switzerland and the USA, according to a statement from the

organiser.

"Bangladesh has emerged as the fastest-growing apparel exporter to the United States in the first quarter of 2025, posting the highest year-on-year growth of 26.64 percent," said Mostafiz Uddin, founder and CEO of Bangladesh Denim Expo.

This placed Bangladesh ahead of other major exporters such as India (24.04 percent), Pakistan (17.49 percent), Vietnam (13.96 percent) and China (4.18 percent), he said.

Bangladesh is the largest denim exporter to both the US and Europe, he added.

Prime Bank holds training programme for farmers in Birol

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Prime Bank PLC organised an open agricultural credit disbursement and training programme in Birol upazila of Dinajpur yesterday.

A total of 150 farmers, including both existing borrowers and prospective clients from surrounding areas, participated in the event, according to a press release.

The programme was designed to facilitate easier access to agricultural credit and to enhance farmers' capacity in maize cultivation, one of the region's principal crops.

Mustafizur Rahman Shah, senior scientific officer of the Bangladesh Wheat and Maize Research Institute, attended the event as a resource person.

M Nazeem A Choudhury, deputy managing director and head of retail and SME banking at Prime Bank PLC, poses for photographs with participants of an open agricultural credit disbursement and training programme in Birol upazila of Dinajpur yesterday.



PHOTO: PRIME BANK

Tax-free income limit may rise

FROM PAGE B1

According to officials, the investment threshold could be doubled to Tk 10 lakh to facilitate investments.

Currently, proof of return filings is required to avail of as many as 45 public and private services.

The National Board of Revenue (NBR) introduced the provision of submitting return filing documents for those services to increase tax compliance.

However, under the proposed changes, the NBR may relax the proof of return requirement for businesses obtaining licences for the first time, although it could still be mandatory for renewals.

Meanwhile, the government is unlikely to extend tax exemptions and reduced rates for businesses in the upcoming budget, as part of conditions tied to the ongoing \$4.7 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and efforts to boost revenue collection.

Revenue officials suggest the rollback of exemptions will be

phased, with some being allowed to expire and others curtailed through statutory orders.

For instance, a tax break granted to textile exporters in 2022 is set to expire this June and is unlikely to be renewed.

However, the readymade garment sector is expected to retain its reduced corporate tax rate until 2028 under a sunset clause.

Other sectors currently enjoying lower tax rates, such as jute, small textile mills, poultry and fisheries, could face gradual increases, with rates currently ranging between 5-15 percent.

Fahmida Khatun, executive director at CPD, welcomed the proposal to raise the tax-free income threshold and increase the savings certificate investment limit.

"Although we recommended raising the ceiling to Tk 4 lakh, this is at least a positive step amid the ongoing high inflation," she said.

However, she acknowledged the government's fiscal constraints and

emphasised widening the tax net and reducing tax evasion. According to the NBR, around 16 lakh taxpayers filed their returns online this year.

Yet, nearly two-thirds of them submitted zero returns, while about 65 percent of the 1.13 crore Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN) holders did not file returns.

"Many people avoid paying taxes, either due to apathy or a tendency to evade taxes," Fahmida said. "Some are concerned about how their money is spent or whether it's being wasted."

"In this context, it is the government's responsibility to address taxpayers' apathy by ensuring the efficient use of public funds and delivering visible, quality services in return," she added.

He has also urged the next elected government to maintain the momentum for structural reforms.

Experts have cautiously welcomed the ordinance as a step forward. The tools are now on paper, but Bangladesh's track record shows that enforcement, not legislation, is the real test.

Whether the ordinance leads to a genuine clean-up of the banking

Only 2 out of 6 troubled life insurers share revival plans

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Only two out of six life insurance companies have complied with directives of the Insurance Development and Regulatory Authority (Idra) by submitting plans to address prolonged failures in settling claims, as policyholders continue to suffer due to corruption and irregularities.

The companies facing regulatory scrutiny are Baira Life Insurance Company Limited, Farest Islami Life Insurance Company Limited, Sunlife Insurance Company Limited, Sunflower Life Insurance Company Limited, Padma Islami Life Insurance Limited, and Golden Life Insurance Limited.

Among them, only Farest and Sunflower have complied. The deadline passed over two weeks ago.

Golden has sought two months, and a meeting is scheduled to be held today with Idra, Saifunnahar Sumi, consultant for media and communication of the regulator, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Letters have been sent to Sunlife and Padma reminding them of the directive, she said.

The plans were sought by the Idra through letters sent at the end of March this year.

The regulator's move aims to ensure greater accountability and protect consumer rights in the sector.

Data from the Idra showed that the six life insurers need to settle more than 9 lakh policyholders' claims worth Tk 2,887 crore.

The unsettled claims accumulated over five years until the third quarter of 2024 are 98.37 percent of the total claims during this period.

According to the latest Idra data, except for Sunlife, the remaining five companies have a claim settlement ratio of less than 5 percent.

At present, Bangladesh has 36 life insurance companies and 46 non-life insurers.

Starlink gets 90-day waiver

FROM PAGE B1

On March 25, the BTRC issued the "Licensing Guidelines for Non-Geostationary Orbit (NGSO) Satellite Services Operator in Bangladesh".

Under these guidelines, Starlink Services Bangladesh applied to the BTRC for an NGSO Satellite Services Operator License, submitting the applicable fees and necessary documents.

The company's local office is registered at a building in the capital's Karwan Bazar.

After receiving the application, the telecom regulator formed a seven-member committee to

evaluate it. The committee verified all submitted documents and found them to be authentic and complete, recommending Starlink for the licence.

"This is the swiftest recommendation BTRC has ever made for such a licence," an official of the commission said.

Subsequently, a two-member team from the BTRC visited Starlink's Bangladesh office and also recommended granting the licence.

Starlink officials could not be reached for comment at the time of filing this report.

New powers, old questions

FROM PAGE B1

The current central bank governor, Ahsan H Mansur, has indicated a break with the past, consistently stating that troubled banks will be shut down or consolidated under the new law.

He has also urged the next elected government to maintain the momentum for structural reforms.

Experts have cautiously welcomed the ordinance as a step forward. The tools are now on paper, but Bangladesh's track record shows that enforcement, not legislation, is the real test.

Whether the ordinance leads to a genuine clean-up of the banking

sector or simply adds another chapter to the country's dense regulatory playbook will depend on the actions taken in the coming months.

Stocks rise after CA's five-point

FROM PAGE B1

Of 395 traded stocks, 189 advanced, 160 fell, and 46 held steady.

Northern Islami Insurance led gainers with a 10 percent surge, while Baraka Power dropped 6 percent to become the session's worst performer.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Office of the Executive Engineer, RHD

Munshiganj Road Division

Dashkani, Panchasar (Mukterpur), Munshiganj.

Phone # 02-998847019

E-mail: eemunrhd@gmail.com

e-Tender Cancellation Notice

It is notified for all concerned that the following Tender ID 1091824, 03/e-GP/PMP-Road/Mundiv/2024-2025, notice published vide memo 35.01.5900.447.04.008.23-933 date. 13/04/2025 is hereby cancelled due to unavoidable circumstances.

SL No	Tender ID & Package No	e-Tender Description	Last Selling Date & Time	Closing Date & Time	Opening Date & Time
1	1091824, 03/e-GP/PMP-Road/Mundiv/2024-2025	Periodic Maintenance Program (PMP) of Existing Pavement by Potholes Repair, Aggregate Base Type-I, DBS Base Course & Wearing Course with Construction of Cross Drain, Saucer Drain and RCC Retaining Wall at Ch: 00+000 (Hatimara) to Ch: 20+300 (Sonbari) of Munshiganj (Hatimara)-Kunderbazar-Sreenagar (Sonbari) Road (Z-8004) under Munshiganj Road Division during the year 2024 - 2025.	13-05-2025 17:00	14-05-2025 12:00	14-05-2025 12:00

বাংলাদেশ কৃষি গবেষণা ইনসিটিউট
Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute
সংঘর্ষ ও ভার্তাৰ শাখা
গাজীপুর-১৭০১।

Memo No: 12.21.0000.007.02.191.24.4479
Date: 07 May 2025

e-GP: Tender Notice No. 36 (2024-2025)

e-Tender is invited in the e-GP system Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of the following goods. Details are given below :

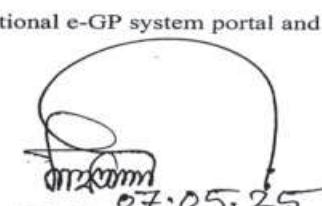
SL. No.	Package No.	Tender ID & Ref No	Description of goods	Tender Documents Last selling (Date & Time)	Tender Closing date & Time	Tender Opening date & Time
01.	PN-24	1108683 & IRN : 191	Field Equipment 08 (Eight) Items.	22.05.2025 10:30	22.05.2025 11:30	22.05.2025 11:30

The interested persons/firm may visit the website www.eprocure.gov.bd to get the details of the tender.

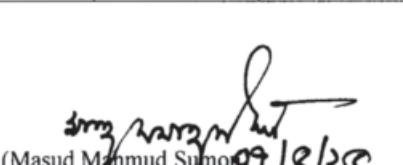
This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the national e-GP portal and no offline/hard copy will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, Registration in the National e-GP system portal is required.

Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP system portal and e-GP Help Desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

Budget Type: Revenue.


07.05.25
(Md. Younus Ali)
(BARI-0663)
Deputy Director (In-Charge)
On behalf of Director General

GD-1132


Masud Mahmud Sumon
ID No-602165
Executive Engineer, RHD
Munshiganj Road Division.

IDLC Finance's Q1 profit rises 43%

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

IDLC Finance PLC, one of the leading non bank financial institutions (NBFI), saw a rise in profit in the first quarter of 2025.

The NBFI's consolidated profit rose 43 percent year-on-year to Tk 50.71 crore in Q1.

IDLC had earlier reported a 32 percent annual rise in profit to Tk 200.36 crore in 2024.

Its consolidated earnings per share stood at Tk 1.22 for January-March 2025, up from Tk 0.85 a year ago, according to a disclosure on the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE).

Its consolidated net operating cash flow per share stood at Tk 2.54 in Q1 of 2025, up from a negative Tk 17.53 in the same period of 2024.

DSE data showed sponsor directors held 56.66 percent of the company's shares as of March 31 this year, followed by institutions at 28.12 percent, the public at 14.85 percent, and foreign investors at 0.37 percent.

Established in 1985, IDLC operates across 20 districts through 40 branches and booths in Bangladesh, as per its website.

United Power resumes operation of DEPZ plant

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

United Power Generation & Distribution Company Ltd (UPGCL) has resumed operations at its 82-megawatt power plant in Dhaka Export Processing Zone after the restoration of the gas supply.

The gas supply to the facility was suspended on April 28 due to a pricing dispute with the supplier, the company said in a disclosure on the Dhaka Stock Exchange yesterday.

The company said the issue stemmed from a 2018 government directive that reclassified the plant under the captive power category instead of as an Independent Power Producer, resulting in higher gas tariffs.

UPGCL, which signed power supply agreements with the Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority in 2007, said this classification contradicts the terms of its gas supply agreements with Titan and Karnaphuli.

Despite multiple attempts to resolve the disagreement, the conflict led to the disconnection of the gas supply.

The company said it had been working to restore operations and has now brought the plant back to full capacity.

United Power's total generation capacity currently stands at 895 megawatts.

Gold slides 3%

REUTERS

Gold dropped 3 percent to a more than one-week low on Monday after the US and China said they have agreed to a deal to slash reciprocal tariffs, sending the dollar higher and denting the safe-haven metal's appeal.

Spot gold was down 3 percent at \$3,224.34 an ounce, as of 0812 GMT, its lowest since May 1. US gold futures slipped 3.5 percent to \$3,228.10.

"The de-escalation of tensions between China and the US, with tariffs being reduced for 90 days, is reducing the demand for safe haven assets like gold," said UBS analyst Giovanni Staunovo.

"Near term prices are likely to stay volatile. But higher tariffs are still weighing on economic growth and likely force central banks to cut further interest rates later this year. Also central banks might use this price setback to add exposure."

In a substantial de-escalation of a potentially damaging trade war, the US and China said they have agreed a deal to slash reciprocal tariffs as Washington and Beijing seek to end a trade war that has disrupted the global economy.

Speaking after talks with Chinese officials in Geneva, US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent told reporters the two sides had reached a deal for a 90-day pause on measures and that reciprocal tariffs would come down by 115 percent.

The US and China imposed tit-for-tat tariffs on each other last month, triggering a trade war that fuelled fears of global recession.

Despite April decline, pharma exports maintain upward trend

EXPORTS AT A GLANCE

TOP MARKETS

Sri Lanka, Nepal, Myanmar, Cambodia and Vietnam

EXPORT EARNINGS

Jul-Apr of FY25 | In April
\$177.42m (+3.46% YoY) | \$11.94m (-34.25% YoY)

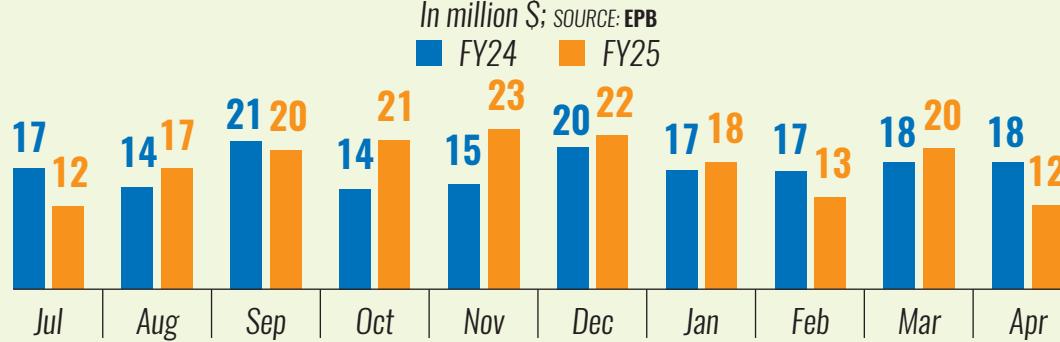
OUTLOOK

Exports expected to rebound in upcoming months

REASONS FOR DECLINE IN APRIL

- cuts in US foreign aid
- Delayed shipment clearance
- Temporary halt in shipments to Vietnam, Cambodia
- Weaker demand in markets across Africa, Latin America

BANGLADESH'S MONTHLY DRUG EXPORT



JAGARAN CHAKMA

trend is still positive," said Mohammad Ali Nawaz, chief financial officer of Beximco Pharmaceuticals.

"Our export growth remains steady," he added.

Although unable to identify the exact cause of the April drop, Nawaz ruled out any link to recent US tariffs imposed under the Trump administration.

Other exporters cited supply chain delays, deferred donor-funded purchases, and weaker demand in African and Latin American markets.

Incepta Pharmaceuticals was among the hardest hit after USAID suspended medicine procurement following a funding cut to the US aid agency.

"Since February, the funding cuts have severely disrupted our supply chain. We had to cancel two major vaccine shipments," said Incepta's Executive Director Arefin Ahmed.

He noted that USAID previously bought medicines worth at least Tk 10 crore per month.

"They were a consistent and reliable buyer," he said, expressing frustration over the sudden loss of a key client.

The disruption has not only affected revenues but also hampered Incepta's ability to meet its commitments to

supply essential medicines to several countries, including Bangladesh, he added.

Despite the sector's decline in April, Square Pharmaceuticals reported strong overseas demand.

"Our export orders are holding up well. We are seeing good traction internationally," said Zahangir Alam, chief financial officer of Square Pharmaceuticals.

However, he admitted he was unsure why the wider industry saw a downturn in April. "I have no idea why the industry saw a decline."

Monjurul Alam, CEO of Beacon Medicare, a subsidiary of Beacon Pharmaceuticals, urged caution in interpreting the April data.

"Exports often slow early in the year, especially when ASEAN markets halt orders during holidays," he said. "Shipments are actually increasing. This is just a seasonal dip."

He predicted a rebound as paused markets resume orders. "One or two months of lower shipments shouldn't be a cause for concern."

While Bangladesh's pharmaceutical export volumes are meagre in global terms, Alam emphasised the sector's value in enhancing the country's international image and industrial reputation.

The road from cheap labour to a skilled workforce

SALEKEEN IBRAHIM

Our country has long been recognised for its abundant labour force. In addition, this abundance has often been labelled as "cheap labour", a term that underscores a missed opportunity for a prospective nation.

Some try to establish the label as an advantage to bring investment, but in the end, it is, of course, an intention to hide the vast opportunity ahead. A substantial portion of our workforce lacks the necessary skills and education to command higher wages both domestically and internationally. As a result, individual earnings remain low, and the remittance earnings from overseas are insignificant despite the large number working abroad.

As we stand to cross the line to graduate from LDC, it is imperative to shift the narrative and invest in transforming our labour force into a skilled and productive asset.

Bangladesh received a record-breaking \$26.89 billion in remittances in 2024, with nearly 1.01 million workers going abroad for employment. It is a matter of great distress that the majority of these workers are engaged in low-skilled jobs, limiting their earning potential.

To unleash the true potential of our labour force, we need both short-term impact and long-term sustainable strategies. These strategies, followed by the desired transformation, will boost our economy and improve the lifestyle of thousands of our people. As an example, we can talk about the Philippines, as they became the largest exporter of nurses globally, supplying 25 percent of all overseas nurses. We, as a nation, have yet to tap into such types of high-skilled labour markets, where excellence matters.

Short-term strategies will include plenty of training programmes focusing on high-demand sectors like caregiving, hospitality, tailoring, driving, basic electronics, or information technology. These programmes should be accessible across all districts to ensure widespread participation. To accommodate such modern needs, we need to upgrade our training centres, technical support, and vocational education system.

Our training institutions should be equipped with modern facilities, and curricula should be aligned with contemporary industry trends and global requirements. Introducing digital skill passports or digital certification that records workers' skills and training will make it easier for employers, both locally and internationally, to verify their qualifications.

Gender-inclusive training programmes should be tailored for women in occupations such as healthcare and education. Along with this initiative, an attached childcare support service will encourage participation. We must collaborate with the private sector to design and implement training programmes that meet current industry requirements and also ensure ready jobs for skilled graduates.

A sustainable long-term roadmap is a must to ensure a skilled labour force. Incorporating vocational subjects into the national curriculum from secondary education onwards, allowing students to accrue hands-on skills alongside educational knowledge, is a practical way forward. Countries like Vietnam have successfully transformed their labour force from low skilled to high skilled markets by investing heavily in education and vocational training.

Establishing sector/cluster-specific skill hubs might be a game changer. For example, maritime training centres in Chattogram, leather-related training centres in Savar, and advanced tailoring training centres in Gazipur and its surroundings might be effective initiatives.

Encouraging international companies to invest in training facilities by offering incentives is essential. Joint collaboration with them can help our resources develop adequate skillsets and make them fit for international standards.

The government should also initiate a national skill development fund to support long-term initiatives, particularly for marginalised groups, to ensure inclusivity.

The government should also implement policies that promote equal opportunities for all genders in skill development programmes, addressing barriers that hinder women's participation in the workforce.

The journey from "cheap" to "skilled" labour is not just an economic imperative but a national one. We must change our status from exporting labour to exporting skills. Our country will not be a haven for cheap labour anymore; rather, we will transform and render ourselves into a labour excellence republic. This transformation will not only increase individual earning potential but also boost national economic growth through higher remittances and enhanced national productivity.

The author is a senior banker.

Markets rally after China and US slash tariffs for 90 days

Trump's "Liberation Day" announcement.

"We've made substantial progress between the United States and China in the very important trade talks," Bessent told reporters, while the White House has hailed what it called a new "trade deal".

China on Monday also hailed "substantial progress", with the commerce ministry saying the move "is in the interest of the two countries and the common interest of the world".

Hong Kong led Asian markets higher, jumping three percent, while Shanghai also enjoyed healthy buying interest. Tokyo, Sydney, Seoul, Taipei and Wellington were all in the green

Tai Hui, Asia-Pacific chief market strategist at JP Morgan Asset Management, said: "The magnitude of this tariff reduction is larger than expected. This reflects both sides recognising the economic reality that tariffs will hit global growth and negotiation is a better option going forward. The 90-day period may not be sufficient for the two sides to reach a detailed agreement, but it keeps the pressure on the negotiation process."

Hong Kong led Asian markets higher, jumping three percent, while Shanghai

-- which closed before the tariff cuts were announced -- also enjoyed healthy buying interest. Tokyo, Sydney, Seoul, Taipei and Wellington were all in the green. Paris and Frankfurt rose more than one percent, while London was also higher.

US futures surged more than one percent.

Mumbai jumped more than three percent after India and Pakistan agreed a ceasefire at the weekend following four days of missile, drone and artillery attacks between the two countries which killed at least 60 people and sent thousands fleeing.

Pakistan's stock exchange rocketed more than nine percent. Oil prices, meanwhile, jumped more than two percent on speculation that the easing of China-US tensions would help demand.

The dollar also advanced one percent against the euro and yen. Gold, which rallied last month over a rush to safe havens, extended losses. "The initial reaction to the weekend US-China talks is predictably encouraging," said Chris Weston at Pepperstone.

However, Karsten Junius at Bank J. Safra Sarasin was cautious.

"We expect financial markets to remain volatile over the coming months, as they have almost fully priced out negative economic surprises and could once again be disrupted by more serious obstacles in trade negotiations," he said in a commentary.



Traders work on the New York Stock Exchange floor in New York City. Investors have been on a rollercoaster ride since Donald Trump unveiled eye-watering tolls on trading partners on April 2, with the heftiest saved for Beijing.

PHOTO: AFP/FILE