

# Bangladesh set to remain world's top cotton importer in MY26

JAGARAN CHAKMA

Bangladesh is on track to retain its status as the world's biggest cotton importer in the marketing year (MY) 2025-26, with imports projected to reach 8.5 million bales, according to a record setting forecast by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Vietnam is set to follow closely with 8 million bales, marking an all-time high for both countries, as per the USDA's latest Cotton: World Markets and Trade report.

The report highlights a modest rebound in global cotton consumption, which is expected to hit a five-year high of 118.1 million bales. This resurgence is attributed to stable economic activity, particularly in major textile-exporting countries such as Bangladesh and Vietnam.

For Bangladesh, the surge in cotton imports reflects the continued expansion of its ready-made garment (RMG) industry — the backbone of its export economy.

In the first 10 months of FY25, Bangladesh's RMG exports grew 10.86 percent year-on-year to \$30.25 billion, according to Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) data.

Mohammad Hatem, president of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA), said Bangladesh's decision to import more cotton from the US is part of a broader strategy to reduce the trade gap between the two countries.

He noted that the record volume of cotton imports would also strengthen Bangladesh's case for securing duty-free access for its RMG products in the US market.

"The government has already taken necessary initiatives in this regard," Hatem said.



## KEY POINTS

- Bangladesh will import **8.5m bales of cotton in marketing year 2025-26**
- Vietnam will import **8m bales this marketing year**
- Global cotton use to hit **five-year high in 2025-26**
- Bangladesh's RMG exports rose **10.84% to \$30.25b in Jul-Apr**
- More import of US cotton to **reduce trade gap**
- Import of more US cotton **boosts duty-free access hopes**

He further stated that US cotton is considered the best in the world in terms of quality and consistency, making it the preferred choice for local spinners and manufacturers.

"With global buyers increasingly prioritising sustainable sourcing and natural fibres, cotton remains a vital raw material for Bangladesh's spinners and knitwear producers," Hatem added.

He viewed the USDA's import forecast as a strong endorsement of Bangladesh's capability to maintain and expand its leadership in the global apparel value chain.

The global cotton trade is also forecast to rise by 2.3 million bales to 44.8 million bales in MY26, indicating a broader uptick in demand across textile-producing economies.

China, which imported 15 million bales

in MY24, is projected to import only 7 million bales in MY26. The country's shift away has left space for Bangladesh to rise to the top, which analysts say marks a notable structural shift in global cotton trade flows.

The USDA also anticipates stable cotton prices globally, aided by adequate supply, a weakening US dollar, and declining energy costs. These trends may ease cost pressures for Bangladeshi millers, who have grappled with high input costs over the past two years.

On March 17 this year, Foreign Affairs Adviser Md Touhid Hossain said Bangladesh intends to import more cotton from the US, creating mutual benefits for US suppliers and local businesses.

He added that such trade ties could offer Bangladesh protection amid former

US President Donald Trump's tariff-centric policies.

Although the Trump administration has levied high tariffs on many countries, Bangladeshi goods have so far remained outside the purview of such punitive measures.

Hossain argued that sourcing more US cotton could further dissuade the administration from targeting Bangladesh, whose products face an average tariff of 15.62 percent in the US market.

He also stressed the need to boost domestic cotton production to meet at least 20 percent of the country's annual demand, amounting to about 9 million bales.

Currently, local production covers just 2 percent of that requirement.

## Making meetings matter

MD TAJDIN HASSAN

Meetings are a staple of corporate culture. From corner offices to startup lounges, professionals gather every day with an agenda — or at least the hope of one. Yet, in reality, many meetings fail to deliver results, often consuming precious time without driving outcomes. As businesses across Bangladesh strive to boost productivity and innovation, it's time we ask: are our meetings truly effective, or are they just habitual routines dressed in formal attire?

In my journey across multinational companies, media houses, and startups, one consistent complaint I have encountered is about unproductive meetings. Employees sigh at back-to-back calendar blocks, where real work is postponed and energy drained. Yet meetings, when done right, can be the engine room of collaboration, decision-making, and alignment. The gap between potential and reality, however, lies in how we plan, conduct, and follow up on these sessions.

An effective meeting begins long before people walk into the room — or log in to Zoom. It starts with clarity of purpose. What are we trying to achieve? A meeting should not be a default response to uncertainty. If an email can do the job, there's no need to assemble five people in a meeting room for 45 minutes. A clear agenda, shared in advance, signals respect for others' time and prepares participants to contribute meaningfully.

Time discipline is another often overlooked yet critical element. In our context, meetings frequently start late, stretch indefinitely, and leave participants wondering what was actually decided. Starting and ending on time isn't just about punctuality — it's about professionalism and focus. A well-facilitated meeting respects the clock and delivers on its objectives within the allocated window.

The role of the moderator or meeting leader is pivotal. This person must ensure everyone is heard, discussions don't go off track, and key points are captured. In hierarchical cultures, junior members often hesitate to speak up. A good leader creates psychological safety, encouraging diverse perspectives while managing time and tone. Meetings should not be monologues by the most senior person in the room; they should be dialogues that leverage collective intelligence.

In our increasingly digital and hybrid work environments, engagement becomes even more vital. Online meetings suffer from multitasking, distractions, and reduced attention spans. To counter this, ground rules such as keeping cameras on, limiting meeting size, or using collaborative tools can keep energy and accountability high.

Perhaps the most underutilised part of any meeting is the follow-up. Great discussions without action points are like blueprints never turned into buildings. Assigning responsibilities, setting deadlines, and sharing minutes within 24 hours ensure that talk leads to tangible outcomes. Bangladesh's corporate culture is evolving rapidly. We are embracing agility, cross-functional teams, and remote work. But our meeting practices are yet to catch up. It's time to move from a "meeting-heavy" to a "meeting-smart" culture. Organisations should train managers and team leads in meeting facilitation, audit time spent in meetings monthly, and actively challenge the necessity of each scheduled session.

In conclusion, effective meetings are not just a matter of protocol — they are a strategic imperative. They reflect a company's respect for time, clarity of thought, and collaborative spirit. If we want to build high-performing teams and agile organisations, we must start by reclaiming our calendars and making every meeting count.

*The writer is the chief business officer of The Daily Star and the chief operating officer of Keeron, an upskilling platform in Bangladesh*



# Gold prices fall China, US slash sweeping tariffs in trade war climbdown

REUTERS

Gold prices fell on Wednesday as easing US-China trade tensions soothed fears of a potential global recession, boosting investor risk appetite and weighing on bullion's safe haven appeal.

Spot gold fell 0.4 percent to \$3,233.69 an ounce, as of 0828 GMT. Prices scaled a record high of \$3,500.05 last month amid elevated trade war fears.

US gold futures eased 0.3 percent to \$3,238.10.

The US and China agreed to a 90-day suspension of reciprocal tariffs following discussions in Geneva over the weekend, with the US planning to reduce the "de minimus" tariff for low-value shipments from China to 30 percent, as per a White House executive order and industry experts.

"After the tariff truce announced over the weekend, we've seen stock markets surge higher, and at least in the short term, this has removed some of the safe haven focus that has helped propel gold to record highs in recent months," said Ole Hansen, head of commodity strategy at Saxo Bank.

"There's a risk of further downside if we take out that \$3,200 level, then we could fairly quickly test \$3,165."

Global shares have rallied amid easing Sino-US trade war concerns, while also taking support from a relatively benign US inflation data.

Traders now await US producer price index data, due on Thursday, for cues on the Federal Reserve's interest rate trajectory after cooler-than-expected April consumer price index data fuelled speculations of possible rate cuts later this year.

The market is expecting 53 basis points of rate cuts by the Fed this year, starting in September.

While gold is traditionally viewed as a hedge against inflation, it also tends to thrive in a low-interest rate environment as it yields no interest.

AFP, Beijing

The United States and China slashed sweeping tariffs on each others' goods for 90 days on Wednesday, after a temporary ceasefire in a brutal trade war that roiled global markets and international supply chains.

Washington and Beijing agreed to drastically lower sky-high tariffs in a deal that emerged from pivotal talks at the weekend in Geneva.

US President Donald Trump said Washington now had the blueprint for a "very, very strong" trade deal with China that would see Beijing's economy "open up" to US businesses, in an interview broadcast Tuesday on Fox News.

"We have the confines of a very, very strong deal with China. But the most exciting part of the deal... that's the opening up of China to US business," he told the US broadcaster while aboard Air Force One on the way to the start of his Gulf tour.

"One of the things I think that could be most exciting for us and also for China, is that we're trying to open up China," he added, without elaborating on details.

Trump had upended

international commerce with his sweeping tariffs across economies, with China hit hardest.

Unwilling to budge, Beijing had responded with retaliatory levies that brought tariffs on both sides well over 100 percent.



After billions were wiped off equities and with businesses ailing, negotiations finally got underway at the weekend in Geneva between the world's trade superpowers to find a way out of the impasse.

Under the deal, the United States agreed to lower its tariffs on Chinese goods to 30 percent while China will reduce its own to 10 percent — down by over 100 percentage points.

The reductions came into effect just after midnight Washington time (0401 GMT) on Wednesday,

a major de-escalation in trade tensions that saw US tariffs on Chinese imports soar to up to 145 percent and even as high as 245 percent on some products.

Markets have rallied in the glow of the China-US tariff suspension.

Chinese officials have kept their cards closer to their chests, pitching themselves at a summit in Beijing with Latin American leaders this week as a stable partner and defender of globalisation.

"There are no winners in tariff wars or trade wars," Xi told leaders including Brazil's Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, while his top diplomat Wang Yi swiped at a "major power" that believed "might makes right".

Deep sources of tension remain, too — the US additional tariff rate remains higher than China's because it includes a 20 percent levy over Trump's complaints about Chinese exports of chemicals used to make fentanyl.

Washington has long accused Beijing of turning a blind eye to the fentanyl trade, something China denies. And while the US said it sees room for progress on the issue, Beijing on Tuesday warned Washington to "stop smearing and shifting blame" onto it.

## Boeing April deliveries hit by US-China trade war

AFP, New York

Boeing commercial plane deliveries rose slightly in April despite a hit from the US trade war with China, according to figures released Tuesday.

The American aviation giant delivered 45 commercial aircraft, up from 41 in March, the data showed. Yet only two planes went to Chinese customers during the month as the company's commercial ties to Beijing became a political hot potato between the world's two largest economies.

Last month Boeing's CEO Kelly Ortberg said plane deliveries to China had been halted due to the trade dispute. Subsequent criticism of China from US President Donald Trump over Boeing prompted a sharp response from Beijing.

But on Monday, the United States and China agreed to significantly scale back tariffs on each other after weekend negotiations in Switzerland.

Chinese officials have taken steps to immediately lift the ban, but the exact timing of deliveries has yet to be determined, a person familiar with the matter told AFP.

Of Boeing's commercial deliveries in April, 30 came from the 737 family and eight from the 787 Dreamliner. The rest were split between the 777 and 767.

The two planes that went to Chinese customers, China Southern and CES Leasing, were likely delivered at the start of April. Separately, Boeing announced Tuesday its first order from Av Lease, a global plane leasing company owned by Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund.

The order includes a firm purchase for 20 737 MAX 8 jets and options for 10 more. Deliveries are scheduled through 2032, Av Lease said in a statement.

AFP, Washington

President Donald Trump's rollercoaster tariff row with Beijing has wreaked havoc on US companies that rely on Chinese manufacturing, with a temporary de-escalation only expected to partially calm the storm, analysts and business owners say.

"The only option is to try to keep your head above water and be tossed by the waves, or to go out of business," said Anna Barker, whose Mississippi-based firm Glo sells luminous toys designed in the United States and made in China.

She told AFP that the 90-day reprieve beginning Wednesday is just a mere "blip on the radar." Placing orders, manufacturing products and shipping them to the United States takes much longer.

Trump's escalating trade war since his return to office saw US duties on Chinese goods — including toys — reach a whopping 145 percent, while Beijing's countermeasures hit 125 percent.

The world's two biggest economies however agreed at talks last weekend in Switzerland to temporarily lower the levies, bringing US tariffs down to 30 percent and China's corresponding duties to 10 percent.

While cautiously optimistic about the ongoing negotiations, Barker warned the

30 percent rate remains "massive for a small company."

Trump has argued that companies will enjoy zero tariffs if they manufacture in the United States, overlooking costs for any machinery or raw materials that would still need to be imported.



**A customer shops for toys at a big box retailer in Chicago, Illinois on May 12. US President Donald Trump has argued that companies will enjoy zero tariffs if they manufacture in the United States.**

PHOTO: AFP

# US companies fret despite China tariff reprieve

"We're an American company," Barker said. "Our biggest priority, if it was just up to us, will always be the US market. But it simply can't be right now."

To stay afloat, she is looking abroad for growth. The pause "may temporarily help unstuck" an effective trade embargo since

April 9, when steep levies forced many firms to halt imports, said Steve Lamar, president of the American Apparel & Footwear Association (AAFA).

He warned, however, that the residual 30 percent tariff, stacking on duties from past administrations, will "make for an expensive back to school and holiday season."

"The tariffs are still so large that you can't help but pass them along," said KPMG chief economist Diane Swonk. This means producers, retailers and consumers could all bear some burden, with small businesses hit particularly hard due to their narrower margins.

Freight rates could also surge due to shipping disruptions from the tariffs.

"There's a lot of inventory piling up in factories in China that now need to hit the water," said Josh Staph, chief executive of Ohio-based Duncan Toys Company.

Barker said her company was hurrying to join an "already very clogged pipeline of people racing to shipping ports." Policy shifts have "triggered both panic and paralysis" among companies, said Swonk.

"Every time they see a window like what we have for 90 days now, they've got to rush," she said. "In that rush, you have a self-fulfilling prophecy that shipping costs are going to go up."