



Anwar-Ul-Alam Chowdhury

JAGARAN CHAKMA

Bangladesh is dealing with one of its most challenging political and economic shifts, and the US tariff hike to 37 percent on its exports could worsen the situation.

This could turn out to be a big problem for the economy, especially for the readymade garment (RMG) industry, which is Bangladesh's primary export item.

If this tariff rate ends up being imposed, it could badly hurt the industry and cause foreign investors to lose interest in the country.

"This tariff is not just a policy shift—it is a crisis," said Anwar-Ul-Alam Chowdhury (Parvez), president of the Bangladesh Chamber of Industries (BCI), in an interview with The Daily Star.

"It could trigger factory closures, massive job losses, and long-term damage to our export base," he said.

In his assessment, Chowdhury warned that unless six critical fault lines were urgently addressed, Bangladesh risks slipping into a cycle of stagnation—while regional competitors surge ahead.

Four of the six issues are the deterioration of law and order, growing challenges in compliance and labour regulation reforms, inadequate gas and power supplies, and vulnerabilities in the financial and banking sectors.

The remaining two are burdensome and inconsistent taxation policies and the need to safeguard the future of exports and manufacturing.

Chowdhury commented that rising crime and violence—often linked to elements of the past regime—along with politicised and demotivated law enforcement agencies and bureaucratic

inefficiencies, were undermining law and order.

This is also weakening governance and eroding public and investor confidence. "We are at a crossroads. Bangladesh must act boldly and decisively—or risk losing relevance," he said.

According to Chowdhury, the shifting geopolitical landscape—triggered by US-China trade tensions, war induced supply chain realignments, and evolving Indo-Pacific strategies—has opened a rare window for Bangladesh.

He warned that delays in reform would divert investment flows to better-prepared neighbours like Vietnam, India, and Indonesia. Industries in Bangladesh are under immense pressure, he said.

The RMG sector, which generates more than 80 percent of the country's export earnings, has reported over \$400 million in production losses due to factory shutdowns caused by labour unrest and compliance uncertainties, said the BCI president.

The textiles, ceramics, and leather sectors are also facing a severe energy crisis, with frequent power cuts and gas shortages forcing operations to be scaled down, he said.

Many manufacturers are struggling to stay afloat amid surging costs of imported liquefied natural gas (LNG) and delayed government response, he said.

"We are paying the price for years of underinvestment in energy and infrastructure. Insufficient energy supply is the single biggest threat to our industrial backbone," he added.

Rolling blackouts and erratic gas supply have disrupted production across sectors. The reliance on costly LNG imports has proven unsustainable. "If we don't secure energy, we can't grow. It's

that simple," he said.

In spite of recommendations made by policy experts for years, Bangladesh continues to rank poorly in the ease of doing business, bogged down by delays in tax refunds, customs clearance, and factory registration processes, he said.

Although Bangladesh has a young and growing labour force, employers struggle to find job ready graduates. "We are producing degrees, not skills," said Chowdhury.

He advocated for stronger links between universities and industries, reforms in technical education, and private sector-led training programmes. "Our demographic dividend is becoming a liability. That must change," he said.

The BCI president highlighted that overdependence on garments for foreign currency earnings is a critical vulnerability, especially in the post-least developed country (LDC) era when duty-free market access will be phased out.

He said Bangladesh's LDC graduation would revoke critical trade benefits, including waivers and preferential tariffs enabled by the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement, which establishes minimum standards for intellectual property protection.

"Graduation is irreversible. Without preparation, we will lose markets," he said.

The pharmaceutical industry remains heavily reliant on imported active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) and policy exemptions. Post-graduation, production costs will rise, and registering products in overseas markets will be more difficult, he said.

"If we do not prepare the sector, we risk being overtaken by Indian and Chinese

firms—both locally and globally," he cautioned.

Chowdhury also emphasised how Bangladesh was losing ground to regional peers.

He drew comparisons with India, where states like Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Andhra Pradesh were offering subsidies of 30 percent to 45 percent on capital machinery, power rebates, and low-interest loan support to exporters.

"Vietnam delivers a container to the US at \$1,100. We pay \$1,800 from Chattogram. It's a logistics nightmare—and disastrous for competitiveness," he added.

He called for deregulation in the energy sector, negotiations for free trade agreements (FTAs), digitalised customs processes, and incentives for new export sectors.

"The delay is costing us billions in lost orders, jobs, and reputation. You can't expect investors to commit when the political future is uncertain," added Chowdhury. The flow of foreign direct investment (FDI) has slowed as investors express concern over institutional unpredictability, contract enforcement, and rising political risk, he said.

"We need rule-based governance, timely justice, and a clear anti-corruption framework. Only then will capital flow back," he stressed.

The BCI president warned that the current uncoordinated approach was pushing global buyers to opt for other countries having smoother compliance regimes.

Urgent government action is needed to negotiate relief, expand into new markets, and restore investor confidence. "Reform is no longer optional—it's our only way forward," said Chowdhury.

Bangladesh's go-to app: Why millions rely on bKash

Samia Huda

In a country like Bangladesh, where time, access, and trust often define the difference between using financial services and avoiding them altogether, the bKash app has become more than just a mobile application—it's an essential tool in daily life for millions of Bangladeshis. With 80 million verified users, bKash serves roughly 1 percent of the global population—a staggering statistic that raises an important question: How did a single app become such an indispensable part of everyday transactions in Bangladesh?

The answer lies in how thoughtfully every feature is built—functionality that speaks to real needs, user-friendliness that requires no tech expertise, and trust earned through consistency.

A user interface built for everyday life

The success of the bKash app perhaps lies in how easily anyone can use it, whether it's a grandmother in a village or a university student managing tuition fees in Dhaka. From the start, the user interface (UI) has been built for maximum clarity and minimum confusion. Big icons, intuitive placement of key features, and Bangla language support make it usable even for those who aren't tech-savvy.

Then there's the mobile recharge feature, used daily by millions. Beyond topping up balance, users can now activate internet packs, bundles or special offers for themselves or their family—all within seconds. In short, bKash isn't just designed for smartphone users. It's designed for real-life users with varying needs, skills, and routines.

Uncompromising security

The most notable hurdle for digital finance is fear. What if I send money to the wrong number? What if someone hacks my phone? These are not rare concerns. The bKash app is designed to respond to this anxiety by embedding multiple layers of security, without making users feel overwhelmed.

PIN-based access, one-time password (OTP) verification,

Address banking, energy issues to restore BUSINESS CONFIDENCE

BCI President Anwar-Ul-Alam Chowdhury recommends focusing on six key issues amidst probable US tariff hike

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Mutual Trust Bank's Q1 profit rises 11%

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Mutual Trust Bank PLC reported higher profits in the first quarter of 2025 as its operating profit rose.

The private commercial lender made a profit of Tk 85 crore in the January-March quarter, up 11 percent year-on-year, according to its financial statement.

The increase follows a 10 percent year-on-year growth in consolidated profit in 2024, when the bank made Tk 569.84 crore.

Its earnings per share (EPS) rose to Tk 0.87 in the January-March quarter, up from Tk 0.78 in the same period a year ago.

The bank said that its EPS increased compared to the same period last year due to an increase in profit before provision (operating profit).

However, the bank's net interest income, or profit on investments, dropped 71 percent year-on-year to Tk 51.40 crore, mainly due to a 61 percent rise in interest paid or profit shared on deposits and borrowings, which stood at Tk 659.77 crore.

Jamuna Bank's profit goes up 9% in Q1

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Jamuna Bank PLC reported higher profits in the first quarter of the 2025 financial year.

The private lender posted a consolidated profit of Tk 191.62 crore, up 9 percent year-on-year.

The bank's profit grew 18 percent year-on-year to Tk 279.59 crore in 2024.

For the January-March quarter of 2025, the bank's consolidated earnings per share (EPS) stood at Tk 2.04, up from Tk 1.86 (restated) in the same period a year earlier, according to a recent disclosure on the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) website.

Its consolidated net operating cash flow per share (NOCFPS) rose to Tk 35.47 from Tk 28.87 (restated).

Jamuna Bank attributed the rise in NOCFPS to increased income from interest, fees, commission, and investments.

It also noted an increase in net asset value due to higher retained earnings and a revaluation reserve.

and real-time alerts keep the platform secure. At the same time, bKash constantly educates users through pop-up tips and in-app reminders never to share their PIN or OTP with anyone. In the background, state-of-the-art systems monitor transactions across millions of accounts without latency, ensuring real-time protection at scale.

That said, managing money is difficult when you're not sure where it's going. bKash addresses this through a clean, searchable account statement section. Every expense, transfer, and bill payment is logged and viewable at any time.

One app, countless solutions

bKash began its journey with simple services like sending money, cashing in and cashing out. Now, the bKash app has transformed into a one-stop financial solution for everyday life.

Take bill payments, for example. Whether you live in an apartment in Dhaka or a remote village in Sylhet, paying your electricity, gas, or water bill used to mean hours lost in queues or finding the right payment centre. Now, these tasks can be completed within minutes, directly through the bKash app, at any time of day. The app even allows you to save account numbers or enable auto-pay, so bills are cleared on time every month without needing reminders or physical trips.

bKash app makes retail shopping smarter and faster. Whether you're at a major brand outlet or a neighbourhood grocery store, payment can be done through bKash.

Just scan the merchant's QR code, and the payment is completed instantly. For small businesses, this reduces the need to manage large sums of cash. For shoppers, it eliminates the worry of carrying physical money and often brings access to exclusive discounts. Beyond commerce, bKash facilitates donations and service payments that once required long errands or physical forms.

Another powerful feature is the ability to save and

borrow money. Users can open DPS (Deposit Pension Schemes) with partnered banks and financial institutions directly from the bKash app, without needing to visit a branch. These services, once restricted to banked and urban populations, are now available to millions, including garment workers, freelancers, and informal sector earners.

Through "Bank to bKash" or "Card to bKash" features, users can pull funds into their mobile wallet anytime. Likewise, they can send money from their bKash balance to any commercial bank account, giving users control across financial platforms. These features are not thrown in for the sake of variety. Each service on the bKash app addresses a real problem or routine task—whether it's paying school fees on time, avoiding overdue bills, transferring rent money, or saving for a future goal. The real win lies in how seamlessly the features are available in a single, lightweight, mobile-first interface.

Solving small problems with smart tools

What sets the bKash app apart isn't just its range of services, but how it solves small, everyday issues that users face. For instance, if you accidentally try to send money to a number that isn't registered with bKash, the app instantly alerts you and gives you the option to cancel the transaction right away. This simple feature makes many things easy.

Another thoughtful feature is the option to automatically add cash-out charges when sending money. If you're sending money to someone who will withdraw it as cash, you can include that extra fee upfront so the recipient gets the full amount they need. Customer support has also been made easier. Instead of visiting service points or calling hotlines, users can simply start a live chat from the app to resolve issues. It's a huge time-saver and comfortable steps for people who prefer not to wait in line.

Lastly, the in-app search option helps users quickly find services without digging through menus. These features may seem small, but they're built around real behaviour, making the bKash app practical, efficient, and accessible for users of all ages and tech skill levels.

Why is the bKash app part of everyday life?

The real strength of the bKash app lies in its purposeful design. Every feature exists to solve a real-life problem, every update removes friction and every interaction is crafted to build trust. This is why perhaps people now say "bKash me" instead of "send me money." Because it's not just an app—it's part of how Bangladesh works today.

In a landscape where digital fatigue is growing, the bKash app stays relevant because it respects users' time,