

# star BUSINESS

## NBR officials call off shutdown as govt softens stance

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Officials of the National Board of Revenue (NBR) called off their planned shutdown yesterday evening, following a government pledge to transform the board into a "specialised and autonomous agency" rather than dissolving it.

The officials, protesting under the banner of the "NBR Reform Unity Council", had earlier threatened a complete suspension of operations from today unless their four-point demand was met.

In a statement yesterday evening, they welcomed the government's latest commitment, which came after more than a week of demonstrations that paralysed revenue activities across the country.

With the withdrawal of the shutdown, now revenue officials will return to work. In the media statement, the officials mentioned that they would do work outside the scheduled office hours to clear the pending activities accumulated during their demonstration since May 14.

Faced with mounting pressure, the finance ministry yesterday announced that the government would move to establish a specialised

### NBR strike: latest developments

NBR officials withdraw complete shutdown programme	But they will continue non-cooperation with NBR chairman	Finance ministry to make NBR a specialised and separate agency
Revenue ordinance to be amended by July 31, 2025	Ordinance won't be enforced until amendments are finalised	Reform plan to be shaped through talks with NBR, advisory body, and stakeholders

#### STRIKE DISRUPTED



Import activities



Tax-related work



Revenue collection

revenue agency while protecting the interests of officials from the customs, excise, and taxation departments.

The move marks a further shift in the government's stance, coming just days after the ministry first indicated willingness to amend the Revenue Policy and Revenue Management Ordinance.

The protesters, who began their demonstrations on May 14, have been arguing that the ordinance enacted on May 12 would effectively dissolve the NBR and compromise their job security.

Their dissatisfaction had already led to major service disruptions, including customs clearance delays

READ MORE ON B3

# Trust Bank launches co-branded credit card for GP STAR customers

## STAR BUSINESS DESK

Trust Bank PLC has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with leading mobile operator Grameenphone Limited (GP) to launch a co-branded credit card, exclusively tailored for GP STAR customers.

Md Mostafa Mosharrof, head of card division at the bank, and Munia Gani, head of partnerships at the mobile operation, signed the MoU at GP House in the Bashundhara residential area, Dhaka, recently, according to a press release.

This strategic collaboration is aimed at enhancing the customer experience by offering exclusive privileges, including complimentary GP internet bundles, discounts, and additional benefits, to Grameenphone's high-value and loyal STAR customers.

Ahsan Zaman Chowdhury, managing director and CEO of the bank, and Yasir Azman, chief executive officer of the mobile operator, were present at the event.

Other senior officials from both organisations also attended the programme.



Yasir Azman, chief executive officer of Grameenphone Limited; and Ahsan Zaman Chowdhury, managing director and CEO of Trust Bank PLC; pose for group photographs after signing the memorandum of understanding at GP House in Bashundhara residential area, Dhaka recently.

PHOTO: TRUST BANK

# Rangs eMart organises refrigerator carnival



Yamin Sharif Chowdhury, divisional director of Rangs eMart, and Khandaker Salim Saad Shanan, head of marketing at Whirlpool Electronics Bangladesh, pose for photographs holding a banner after a press conference in the capital's Gulshan-2 yesterday.

PHOTO: RANGS eMART

## STAR BUSINESS DESK

Rangs eMart has organised a refrigerator fair titled "Rangs eMart Refrigerator Carnival 2025", which commenced on Saturday in the capital's Gulshan 2.

Whirlpool is participating in the carnival with the aim of enhancing customers' Eid celebrations by offering them the opportunity to purchase their preferred refrigerators.

The carnival will continue until Eid.

Yamin Sharif Chowdhury, divisional director of Rangs eMart, made the remarks during the press conference in Gulshan 2, Dhaka yesterday, according to a press release.

Speaking at the event, Chowdhury commented, "Through this fair, we aim to make the shopping experience more enjoyable for our customers."

"At the same time, they can avail themselves of the best offers and rewards. Our objective is to establish Rangs eMart as the most trusted shopping destination

in the country for purchasing electronic products," he added.

Khandaker Salim Saad Shanan, head of marketing at Whirlpool Electronics Bangladesh, said, "Our refrigerators are equipped with the latest technology to ensure healthy food preservation and long-lasting performance.

Moreover, their advanced energy-saving features offer customers a more efficient and environmentally friendly experience."

He further stated, "To enhance the joy of Eid, we are committed to making the latest refrigerator technologies more accessible to our customers."

Participating companies are offering a variety of promotions, including discounts, bank offers, convenient exchange options, and more.

Additionally, customers will have the opportunity to win refrigerators, air conditioners (ACs), and other attractive prizes by participating in the "Buy and Win Campaign" during the carnival.

# Meghna Bank celebrates 12th anniversary

## STAR BUSINESS DESK

Meghna Bank PLC has celebrated its 12th founding anniversary with a commemorative event at its head office in Dhaka recently.

Uzma Chowdhury, chairperson of the bank, inaugurated the celebratory programme, according to a press release issued by the bank.

Mohammad Mamunul Hoque, chairman of the risk management committee of the bank, Md Ali Akther Rezvi, chairman of the audit committee, Habibur Rahman and Nazrul Islam, independent directors, and Kazi Ahsan Khalil, managing director and CEO, among others, were also present.



Uzma Chowdhury, chairperson of Meghna Bank PLC, inaugurates a programme of the bank's 12th founding anniversary at its head office in Dhaka recently.

PHOTO: MEGHNA BANK

# Eastern Bank organises school banking conference in Rangpur

## STAR BUSINESS DESK

Eastern Bank PLC (EBL) organised a "School Banking Conference 2025" as the lead bank at the Rangpur Zilla Parishad Community Centre on Saturday, with the objective of promoting financial inclusion and literacy among students.

The conference brought together around 300 students and teachers from 45 schools, while representatives from approximately 45 banks operating in the district also participated in the event.

Md Rafiqul Islam, executive director of the Bangladesh Bank Rangpur

office, inaugurated the programme as the chief guest, according to a press release issued by the bank.

M Khorshed Anowar, deputy managing director and head of retail and SME banking at EBL, presided over the conference.

Among others, Md Iqbal Mohasin, director of the Financial Inclusion Department of the Bangladesh Bank; Md Emdadul Hoque, director of the Bangladesh Bank Rangpur office; Md Abul Kalam Azad, district education officer (additional charge); and Md Raquib, head of bancassurance and student banking at EBL; were also present.



Md Rafiqul Islam, executive director of the Bangladesh Bank Rangpur office, poses for photographs with participating students and teachers of the "School Banking Conference 2025" organised by Eastern Bank PLC (EBL) as the lead bank at the Rangpur Zilla Parishad Community Centre on Saturday.

PHOTO: EASTERN BANK

# Prime Bank holds training on disability-inclusive banking

## STAR BUSINESS DESK

Prime Bank PLC, in collaboration with Monash University Australia and Team Inclusion Bangladesh, organised a three-day training programme titled "Breaking Attitudinal Barriers: Inclusive Banking for Persons with Disabilities" at Lakeshore Heights in Dhaka recently.

Employees from various departments of Prime Bank actively participated in the initiative, underscoring the importance of inclusive training in fostering a more accessible financial ecosystem.

Participants shared a renewed commitment to inclusive practices with a mindset of progressive learning and development.

Commenting on the programme, M Nazeem A Choudhury, deputy managing director of the bank, stated, "This training will enable our employees at Prime Bank to adopt a more inclusive mindset and approach in their day-to-day work."



Participants are seen at a training programme titled "Breaking Attitudinal Barriers: Inclusive Banking for Persons with Disabilities" organised by Prime Bank PLC in collaboration with Monash University Australia and Team Inclusion Bangladesh at Lakeshore Heights in Dhaka yesterday.

# Nvidia to offer cheaper AI chip for China

## REUTERS, Beijing Taipei

Nvidia will launch a new artificial intelligence chipset for China at a significantly lower price than its recently restricted H20 model and plans to start mass production as early as June, sources familiar with the matter said.

The GPU or graphics processing unit will be part of Nvidia's latest generation Blackwell-architecture AI processors and is expected to be priced between \$6,500 and \$8,000, well below the \$10,000-\$12,000 the H20 sold for, according to two of the sources.

The lower price reflects its weaker specifications and simpler manufacturing requirements.

It will be based on Nvidia's RTX Pro 6000D, a server-class graphics processor and will use conventional GDDR7 memory instead of more advanced high bandwidth memory, the two sources said.

They added it would not use Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co's advanced Chip-on-Wafer-on-Substrate (CoWoS) packaging technology. The new chip's price, specifications and production timing have not previously been reported.

The three sources Reuters spoke to for this article declined to be identified as they were not authorised to speak to media.

An Nvidia spokesperson said the company was still evaluating its "limited" options. "Until we settle on a new product design and receive approval from the US government, we are effectively foreclosed from China's \$50 billion data center market."

TSMC declined to comment.

China remains a huge market for Nvidia, accounting for 13 percent of its sales in the past financial year. It's the third time that Nvidia has had to tailor a GPU for the world's second-largest economy after restrictions from US authorities who are keen to stymie Chinese technological development.

After the US effectively banned the H20 in April, Nvidia initially considered developing a downgraded version of the H20 for China, sources have said, but that plan didn't work out.



Imran Asif, chief executive officer of Astra Airways Limited, delivers his address at an award-giving ceremony, styled "Business Partners Award 2025", at a hotel in the capital recently.

PHOTO: AIR ASTRA



Prof Thanzama Lusai, chairman of Bandarban Hill District Council (BHDC), inaugurates the training programme organised by United Commercial Bank PLC for agricultural entrepreneurs at the BHDC auditorium in the district recently.

## STAR BUSINESS DESK

United Commercial Bank PLC (UCB) recently convened a daylong capacity-building training session for agricultural entrepreneurs at the Bandarban Hill District Council (BHDC) auditorium.

This initiative forms part of its agro-corporate social responsibility (CSR) programme, entitled "Bhoroshar Notun Janala". The event drew the participation of nearly 170 agricultural entrepreneurs from various upazilas across the district.

Prof Thanzama Lusai, chairman of the BHDC, inaugurated the training programme as the chief guest, according to a press release.

"There exists immense potential within the agricultural sector of the hill regions. With the backing of institutions such as UCB, local farmers can evolve into successful entrepreneurs," remarked Thanzama.

Nabil Mustafizur Rahman, additional managing director of UCB, presided over the session and commented, "Given the region's abundant natural diversity, the time is ripe for investment in technology-driven agriculture and entrepreneurship. UCB remains steadfast in its commitment to support this transformation."



A wide variety of flowers arrive at the wholesale flower market in Shahbagh, Dhaka from different parts of the country. This market caters to the demand for flowers in the capital and surrounding areas. Prices fluctuate based on demand.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## IGW operators seek permission to handle int'l SMS traffic

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

International Gateway (IGW) operators yesterday demanded permission to route both international text messages and incoming calls under the newly proposed licensing policy.

In Bangladesh, IGW operators handle international incoming calls, while international short messaging services (SMSs) are routed through mobile operators.

Asif Rabbani, president of the IGW Operators Forum (IOF), said the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission should issue a directive in this regard, as the current policy has already given the go-ahead to IGWs to route international SMSs.

Additionally, IGW operators should be allowed to migrate to the international

layer under the proposed reform policy," he said at a press conference in Dhaka.

Earlier, mobile operators terminated international calls.

But in 2008, the government introduced an additional layer to combat illegal Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) operations.

Under the International Long Distance Telecommunication Services (ILDTS) policy, a specific network topology was established with a three-year framework for services such as IGWs.

The international gateways would receive calls from foreign telecom operators and then route them to local users through another set of operators called Interconnection Exchanges (ICXs).

In 2014, a group of IGW operators proposed an experimental model called the IGW Operator Switch, giving

them control over a common network switch used for call termination and interconnection.

That same year, the BTRC approved the model without amending the ILDTS policy, thereby violating existing regulations.

The government endorsed the model in 2015, allowing cartel members to dominate the market and enjoy higher revenues. Though the approval was initially experimental, the arrangement continued for years.

After Md Emdad Ul Bari was appointed BTRC chairman in September last year, the commission moved to reform the system.

According to BTRC documents, the IGW Operators Forum had unilaterally amended a commission-approved agreement without authorisation and

violated several directives.

There were also serious concerns about transparency in handling funds collected under the Market Development Expenses (MDES) head.

The IOF collected Tk 631 crore in MDS from IGW operators, of which over 95 percent was routed and spent through a single account under Beximco Computers.

Citing the lack of transparency in managing such a large sum, the BTRC referred the matter to the Anti-Corruption Commission for investigation.

In light of these issues, the commission has revoked approval for the operational agreement between the IOF and IGW operators concerning call exchanges under the government-sanctioned network topology.

## NBR officials call off shutdown

FROM PAGE B1  
at key ports and interruptions in tax-related services nationwide.

In its latest statement, the finance ministry said it would finalise the new institutional framework through consultations with the NBR, the Revenue Reform Advisory Committee, and other stakeholders. Amendments to the ordinance are expected by July 31. Until then, the government will not enforce the law.

The ministry said that it hopes the announcement would calm tensions within the NBR and encourage staff to return to duty and focus on revenue collection.

Customs, VAT, and tax officials had been observing work stoppages for several days, leading to backlog at Chattogram Port, which handles about 90 percent of the country's international trade.

Yesterday, 17 container ships carrying around 500,000 tonnes of goods were waiting at the outer anchorage due to slow clearance. While export processing was exempted

from the work stoppage, customs officers refrained from inspecting imports and issuing clearances between 9:00 am and 5:00 pm in the past two days.

Prior to that, NBR officials observed a daily five-hour strike for five consecutive days till May 19.

The demonstration also hit field offices, delaying services for taxpayers.

"Hearings related to tax disputes are not taking place due to the work abstention," said a senior official at a private company yesterday.

Meanwhile, exporters reported knock-on effects.

Syed M Tanveer, managing director of Pacific Jeans, said delays in clearing imported raw materials were slowing production.

"Several export shipments need to be sent before Eid. Significant losses will occur if they don't reach their destination on time," Tanveer said.

To avoid this, he added, they might be forced to resort to air freight, which could increase costs by 15 to 20 times.

Chattogram Port data

show that in the five days to May 19, about 4,000 twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) of import containers had piled up. Storage at port yards rose to 44,000 TEUs—well above the optimal operational level of 35,000 but still below the maximum capacity of 53,518 TEUs.

Since customs officers resumed work on May 19, the situation has gradually improved.

Muntasir Rubayat, a director of the Bangladesh Shipping Agents Association, said although export documents were being processed, customs officers at port gates were still refusing to sign off on import container exits.

As a result, prime movers transporting containers to inland depots (ICDs) were stuck at the port, creating delays in export movements from ICDs, he added.

Ruhul Amin Sikder, secretary general of the Bangladesh Inland Container Depots Association (BICDA),

fear a acute backlog during the upcoming Eid holidays if deliveries did not resume at full pace.

Chattogram Port data

## Gas crisis

FROM PAGE B1

Although the government is inviting foreign investors, he believes that foreign investment will not come since even local investors are struggling to survive.

Many businessmen are seeking exit plans as they are suffering and cannot find ways to survive, Russell lamented, adding that most mills are running at 50 percent of their capacity due to the crippling gas crisis.

Russell also said he met the energy adviser yesterday but did not get any response about improving gas supply.

Many have no choice but to run their mills by purchasing diesel, which increases costs fourfold. The energy adviser said that he prefers diesel imports rather than liquefied natural gas (LNG) since customers clear the dues promptly.

Russell also said many are not getting gas from supplying companies although they have paid large amounts in deposits.

"We need support at this moment. We have passed through the Covid-19 pandemic and a mass

uprising, and we have been facing a gas crisis and banking crisis. We need support. It would not be right to choke us," he said.

A n n a r - U - A l a m Chowdhury (Parvez), president of the Bangladesh Chamber of Industries (BCI), said a lot of seminars have been held about the energy crisis, but there can be no remedy without increasing the prices.

The government is failing in its commitment to supply gas, but businessmen are sent to jail if they cannot comply with their commitments, he said. Due to the government's failure to supply gas, mills cannot operate at full capacity.

He also said the Chattogram Port is not functioning now because of the protests being staged by National Board of Revenue officials.

Hossain Mahmood, chairman of the Bangladesh Terry Towel & Linen Manufacturers & Exporters Association (BTTMEA), said five to six terry towel mills have already closed down because of the gas crisis.

## Four more companies

FROM PAGE B4

He added that the commission would determine its next course of action after Army

Transmission Company Limited's application is received through the dedicated channel.

Currently, there are six NTTN operators in Bangladesh, with 148,000 kilometres of optical fibre collectively laid out, according to BTRC

documents.

The country's first

Railway 3,800 kilometres, and the Power Grid Company of Bangladesh about 8,500 kilometres.

Additionally, the government has laid around 35,000 kilometres of optical fibre under projects such as Info-Sarker 3 and Connected Bangladesh.

Mobile operators have around 8,200 kilometres of optical fibre infrastructure.

### Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

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Memo No. 35.01.0651.403.07.019.24-2042

Dated: 25.05.2025

### Invitation for e-Tender

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the works mentioned in the table below:

Invitation Reference No.	70/e-GP/BRD/PMP-Road Major/2024-25
Tender ID	1114636
Name of works	Periodic Maintenance Program (PMP) for partial strengthening by Aggregate Base Type-1, DBS Base Course & DBS-Wearing Course from Ch. 00+000 (Bakerongj Bus Stand) to 11+765 (Tin Ghor) of Bakerongj-Padrishipur-Kathaloti-Subidkhali-Barguna Road (R-872) under Barishal Road Division during the year 2024-2025.
Qualification criteria	As stated in Tender Notice & Tender Data Sheet (TDS) of the Tender Document.
Tender document price	Tk. 4,000.00 (four thousand) only.
Tender security amount	Tk. 27,50,000.00 (twenty-seven lakh fifty thousand) only.
Tender document last selling	Date: 25 June 2025, Time: 16:00
Last date and time for tender security submission	Date: 26 June 2025, Time: 11:30
Tender closing date and time	Date: 26 June 2025, Time: 12:15
Tender opening date and time	Date: 26 June 2025, Time: 12:15

- This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted.
- To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required.
- The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered bank branch.
- Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk ([helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd](mailto:helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd)).

*Nazmul Islam*  
25.05.25  
Md. Nazmul Islam  
ID No. 602232  
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## Reforms

FROM PAGE B4

"Our fear is that if we appoint a local expert for reforms, they might be bought off by a vested group. And we won't be able to oversee that. That's why we are insisting on foreign experts," he said.

They also offered a tour service of Chattogram City for just Tk 4,999 per passenger, though the service was later discontinued.

Customs officials say Bangladesh mainly imports two categories of helicopters — military-grade models and commercial ones that vary by weight.

Lighter helicopters, usually under two tonnes, come with a single engine and four seats, while the heavier models have dual engines and can carry up to six passengers, he said.

## Customs duty

FROM PAGE B1

Importers say that they currently must pay 10 percent import duty, 15 percent value-added tax (VAT), 5 percent advance tax, and 5 percent advance income tax for 16- to 40-seat buses.

Japanese buses, known for their technological superiority, are expensive, and the existing tax burden significantly increases their import cost, they added.

Abdul Haque, president of the Bangladesh Reconditioned Vehicles Importers and Dealers Association, told The Daily Star that reducing customs duty on public bus imports is a timely and rational step.

Many buses currently operating in Dhaka and other major cities are in poor condition, with some lacking fitness certification altogether. This poses serious safety risks for passengers, he said.

## Helicopter rides

FROM PAGE B1

Bangla International Airlines, BRB Air, and Beximco Air.

In mid 2023, Chattogram Helicopter and Air Service launched routes between Chattogram-Dhaka and Chattogram-Cox's Bazar.

They also offered a tour service of Chattogram City for just Tk 4,999 per passenger, though the service was later discontinued.

Customs officials say Bangladesh mainly imports two categories of helicopters — military-grade models and commercial ones that vary by weight.

Lighter helicopters, usually under two tonnes, come with a single engine and four seats, while the heavier models have dual engines and can carry up to six passengers, he said.

GD-1283

# Leather exports drop 64% in 10 years as CETP woes linger

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The country's leather exports have plunged by over 64 percent in the past decade, due mainly to the failure to complete the Central Effluent Treatment Plant (CETP) at the Savar Tannery Estate -- a key requirement for obtaining international environmental certifications.

In the fiscal year (FY) 2014, the country exported leather worth \$397 million. By FY2024, that figure had fallen to just \$142.54 million.

Leather exporters described the stalled CETP as the single biggest hurdle to achieving Leather Working Group (LWG) certification, the globally recognised benchmark for environmental compliance in production.

Without LWG certification, Bangladeshi leather remains locked out of premium international markets, said Syed Nasim Manzur, president of the Leathergoods and Footwear Manufacturers & Exporters Association of Bangladesh (LFMEAB).

"Without LWG certification, we are invisible to major global buyers who demand verifiable sustainable sourcing" said the association president at an event organised by the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) in the capital yesterday.

Following years of resistance, tanneries were relocated from Hazaribagh area in Dhaka to the capital's outskirts Savar in 2017.

**Leather exporters described the stalled CETP as the single biggest hurdle to achieving Leather Working Group (LWG) certification, the globally recognised benchmark for environmental compliance in production**

The move was meant to improve environmental standards, but the CETP still remains incomplete and largely non-functional.

Unable to meet the strict compliance demands of leading global brands, Bangladesh consequently sells leather at cut price rates to Chinese intermediaries.

LFMEAB President Manzur urged the government to take immediate action, including appointing an internationally accredited operator for the CETP, offering green financing, and extending the same policy support enjoyed by the readymade garment sector.

That includes bonded warehouse facilities and duty-free imports of machinery. Manzur said that a fully functioning CETP could potentially double leather exports.

As international markets increasingly include sustainability, he called for rapid reforms to establish Bangladesh as

export target by 2030 will require bold reforms, international certification and a modernised value chain," he said.

Md Saiful Islam, chairman of the Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC), said that the Savar CETP can currently treat only 14,000 cubic metres of effluent daily.

It is well below the 32,000 to 35,000 cubic metres required during the peak season after Eid-ul-Azha, the second largest festival for Muslims involving the ritual of sacrificing animals.

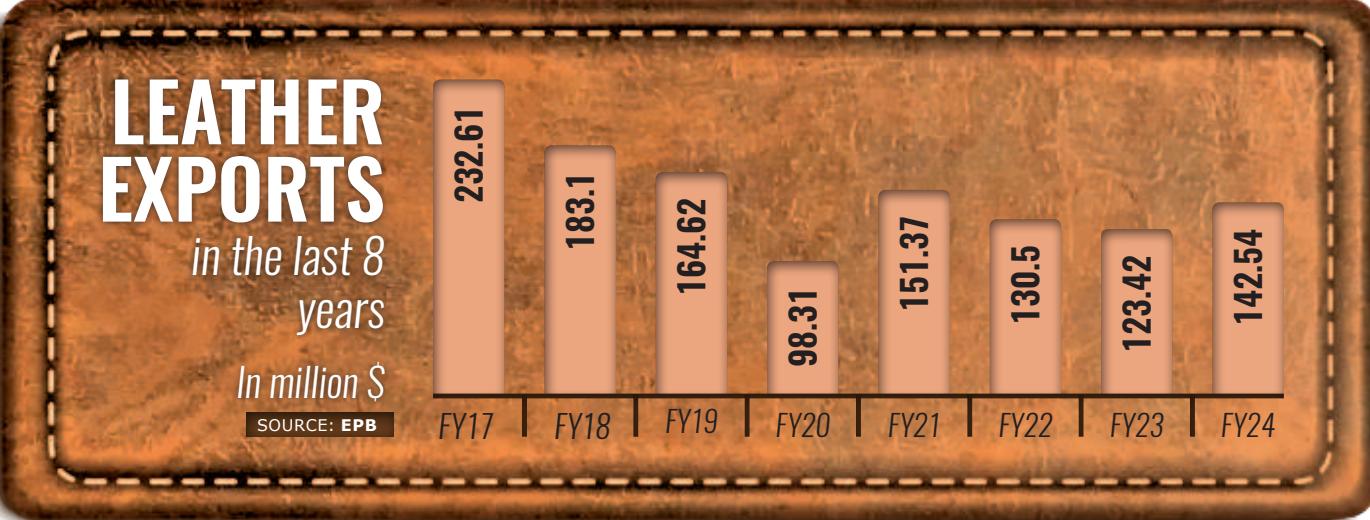
Islam said six individual Effluent Treatment Plants (ETPs) have been

CETP must be addressed without further delay.

Nazneen Kawshar Chowdhury, additional secretary of the WTO wing at the Ministry of Commerce, said the post-LDC era would come with significant challenges, but also with opportunities.

She urged the private sector to prioritise compliance with environmental and labour standards and said the government was open to collaboration in enhancing the CETP's capacity.

Md Ariful Haque, director general of the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (Bida), said the country's



a responsible producer.

"The local leather sector can thrive in the post-LDC era," Manzur added, "but only if we deliver on compliance, starting with a fully operational, LWG-ready CETP."

Speaking at a separate focus group on post-LDC export strategies, Adilur Rahman Khan, adviser to the Ministry of Industries, echoed this urgency.

With Bangladesh set to graduate from least developed country (LDC) status by 2026, the adviser said the country must prepare fast.

Despite earning around \$1.2 billion annually from leather, leather goods and footwear, Bangladesh accesses only a sliver of the \$420 billion global leather market, Khan added.

"Achieving the government's \$12 billion

approved, two of which are nearing completion. Another 8 to 10 are in the pipeline, expected to add an extra 8,000 to 10,000 cubic metres of capacity.

According to the BSCIC chairman, a technical committee has been tasked with upgrading the CETP's capacity to 25,000–26,000 cubic metres, with long-term plans to reach 40,000. This effort is backed by a European Union-supported project.

Md Hafizur Rahman, administrator of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), said the leather sector is struggling to attract foreign investment and buyers because of its lack of certification.

He said it was unclear how quickly these challenges could be resolved, but stressed that the issues surrounding the

economy has the potential to double in size over the next 15 years, but achieving this will require close coordination between public and private sectors.

To support local businesses and spur growth, Haque said Bida is stepping beyond conventional approaches and directly engaging with foreign investors, which he believes will bring promising results.

The event was moderated by DCCI President Taskin Ahmed. It was also addressed by Md Nurul Islam, CEO of the Bangladesh Tanners Association (BTA); Ibtul Wara, managing director of Austan Ltd; Md Nasir Khan, managing director of Jennys Shoes Ltd; Ziaur Rahman, managing director of Bay Group; and M Abu Hurairah, former vice president of DCCI.

## Four more companies seek NTTN licences

MAHMUDUL HASAN

Four new companies have applied to the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) for Nationwide Telecommunication Transmission Network (NTTN) licences, reflecting renewed interest in the transmission business in the country.

According to state guidelines, the licence is primarily for building, maintaining, and managing a nationwide fibre-optic transmission network and sharing infrastructure for telecom operators and internet service providers.

The four applicants are Mango Teleservices Limited, VEON, Bangladesh Computer Council (BCC), and Army Transmission Company Limited, according to official documents.

Earlier, Bangla Phone applied for the licence for a second time on September 30, 2024.

The BTRC has decided to forward the application to the Ministry of Posts, Telecommunications and Information Technology for prior approval—a prerequisite for the BTRC to issue a licence.

**The four applicants are Mango Teleservices Limited, VEON, Bangladesh Computer Council, and Army Transmission Company Limited**

Mango Teleservices currently holds a nationwide internet service provider (ISP) licence.

As per the Regulatory and Licensing Guidelines for ISPs in Bangladesh, a single entity cannot concurrently hold an ISP licence and an NTTN licence.

Based on this regulation, the BTRC has decided not to grant Mango Teleservices an NTTN licence and will issue a formal notification soon.

The current guidelines also prohibit mobile operators and their shareholders from applying for the licence.

This means VEON, the parent company of mobile operator Banglalink, is not supposed to get one.

However, as the government is reviewing these policies based on recommendations from a Network Topology Reform Committee, the BTRC has decided to keep VEON's application on hold pending further government decisions.

In the case of the BCC, the BTRC expressed caution about granting another government-run entity an NTTN licence, since state-owned Bangladesh Telecommunications Company Limited already holds one.

The BTRC will review the matter further before making a decision.

The application from Army Transmission Company Limited was submitted through D-Nothi, the government's digital file management system, rather than the BTRC's License Issuance & Management System portal.

The BTRC will review it once it is formally received through the proper channel.

"There are government companies that already have NTTN licences, so we will further review the BCC application. Since Mango holds an ISP licence, it cannot get an NTTN licence," said BTRC Chairman Maj Gen (retd) Md Emdadul Bari.

READ MORE ON B3

## Reforms to help stock market reach new heights

Says press secretary to chief adviser

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The interim government is undertaking reforms to create broad space for the economy to take off, which would take the share market to a new height, said Shafiqul Alam, press secretary to the chief adviser.

Bangladesh's share market has become a "den of robbers", with one robber's exit ushering in another, for which the chief adviser has laid emphasis on bringing about major reforms in this sector, he said.

Alam made these remarks at an event organised by the Capital Market Journalists' Forum (CMJF), a platform of capital market reporters, at its office in the

capital's Paltan yesterday.

The event, titled "CMJF Talk with Shafiqul Alam", was presided over by CMJF President Golam Samdani Bhuiyan and moderated by General Secretary Abu Ali.

Alam said historically, those who brought about reforms in Bangladesh's share market always prioritised the interests of vested groups.

As a result, it has always provided advantages to the big investors. In contrast, small investors have mostly been victims of manipulation and fraud, he said.

Therefore, those who are now implementing reforms must have no connection to vested groups, while the reforms must be beneficial

for all, said Alam.

He said some groups have manipulated the stock market in a highly organised manner. "However, no government has taken strong action against them," he said.

As per the chief adviser's suggestion, foreign experts would be engaged to give advice on ways to take the share market to international standards within three months, and steps will then be taken accordingly, he said.

"The share market does not involve rocket science such that a foreigner wouldn't understand the scenario in Bangladesh. Globally, there are standard procedures and norms for the stock market," said Alam.

READ MORE ON B3

## 'Little, little screws' one of many hurdles to US-made iPhones

REUTERS, New York/Washington

President Donald Trump's bid to bring manufacturing of Apple's iPhone to the United States faces many legal and economic challenges, experts said on Friday, the least of which are the insertion of "little screws" that would need to be automated.

Trump threatened on Friday to impose a 25 percent tariff on Apple for any iPhones sold, but not made, in the United States, as part of his administration's goal of re-shoring jobs. He told reporters later on Friday that the 25 percent tariff would also apply to Samsung and other smartphone makers. He expects the tariffs to go into effect at the end of June.

"Otherwise it wouldn't be fair" if it did not apply to all imported smartphones, Trump said. "I had a understanding with (Apple CEO) Tim (Cook) that he wouldn't be doing this. He said he's going to India to build plants. I said that's OK to go to India but you're not going to sell into here without tariffs."

Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick told CBS last month that the work of "millions and millions of human beings" screwing in little, little screws to make iPhones "would come to the United States and be automated, creating jobs for skilled trade workers such as mechanics

and electricians.

But he later told CNBC that Cook told him that doing so requires technology not yet available.

"He said, I need to have the robotic arms, right, do it at a scale and a precision that I could bring it here. And the day I see that

available, it's coming here," Lutnick said.

The fastest way for the Trump administration to pressure Apple through tariffs would be to use the same legal mechanism behind punishing tariffs on a broad swath of imports, trade lawyers and professors said.



The new iPhone 16 Pro Max is displayed during a special event at Apple headquarters in Cupertino, California on September 9, 2024.

The law, known as the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, allows the president to take economic action after declaring an emergency that constitutes an unusual and extraordinary threat to the United States.

"There's no clear legal authority that permits company-specific tariffs, but the Trump administration may try to shoehorn it under its emergency power authorities," said Sally Stewart Laing, a partner at Akin Gump in Washington.

Other means of levying company-specific tariffs rely on lengthy investigations, Laing said.

But tariffs on only Apple "would provide a competitive advantage for other important phones, which undermines Trump's goals of bringing manufacturing to the United States," Laing said.

Experts said Trump has viewed IEEPA as a flexible and powerful economic tool because it is not clear that courts have the power to review the president's response to a declared emergency.

"In the administration's view, as long as he enacts the ritual of declaring an emergency and pronouncing it unusual or extraordinary, there is nothing a court can do," said Tim Meyer, an international law professor at Duke University.

## Why we must invest in women

SHAMIMA AKHTER

When I started working in the early 2000s, women in Bangladesh were making significant strides. The media celebrated their entry into traditionally male-dominated fields such as aviation, defence, and engineering, showing a hopeful sign of progress towards gender equality. Even today, women continue to make their mark across sectors, from corporate boardrooms to border patrols. In 2023, Bangladesh was recognised as the leader in gender equality in South Asia by the World Economic Forum. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), women's participation in the workforce increased from 30 percent in 2010 to 42 percent in 2023.

Despite this progress, we are beginning to see setbacks. Barriers such as school dropouts and early marriages threaten to erode these achievements. While 92 percent of girls enrol in school, many do not complete secondary education. After the pandemic, 55 percent of school dropouts were girls, with many being pushed into early marriage. Unicef reports that 41.6 percent of girls marry before the age of 18, the highest rate in South Asia, cutting short their education and confining them to unpaid domestic roles.

The difference between rhetoric and reality is also evident in how we allocate resources for gender issues.

Bangladesh was once a regional leader in introducing gender budget statements across more than 40 ministries. The proportion of the national budget categorised as gender-relevant rose from 25 percent to 34.11 percent. However, the share of GDP allocated to spending that supports gender equality declined from 5.19 percent in 2024 to 4.86 percent in 2025, raising questions about our genuine commitment to this cause.

Moreover, budget allocations often overlook key drivers of women's economic participation, such as skills training, entrepreneurship, and digital access. In 2024, only 15.8 percent of the ICT Division's budget and 2.2 percent of the Ministry of Science and Technology's budget were earmarked for women-focused projects. This underinvestment in women's inclusion in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), a rapidly growing field, risks leaving women behind.

This issue is especially urgent as Bangladesh prepares for a tighter budget in 2026. The Annual Development Programme (ADP) is expected to shrink by Tk 35,000 crore, potentially threatening funding for initiatives that support women's employment and workplace safety.

In this context, we must move beyond symbolic gestures, such as tax breaks for women, towards meaningful investment. Priorities should include childcare, safe transportation, workplace grievance mechanisms, and stronger incentives for businesses to adopt gender equity policies.

Development partners also underscore the urgency. The World Bank links Bangladesh's resilience to increased female workforce participation. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates that closing the gender gap could boost GDP by nearly 40 percent. These are not merely moral imperatives, they are economic necessities.

Targeted investments in women's leadership and STEM participation through scholarships, mentorships, and internships, especially for rural women, are vital. We must also enhance representation in politics, public service, and corporate boards by establishing clear pathways and providing adequate funding.

Additionally, we cannot ignore the informal economy, where many women remain invisible. Gender budgeting must allocate resources to support these women by ensuring access to credit, legal protections, and digital tools.

History is on our side. In the 1990s, Bangladesh improved girls' education through stipends and fee waivers, raising female literacy from 26 percent in 1990 to 75.8 percent in 2023. Over the same period, GDP per capita grew from \$298 to an expected \$2,690 in 2025, surpassing Pakistan. This progress was powered by the very girls we educated.

As we look ahead to the 2026 budget, decisive action is needed. Growth that excludes women is not only unjust but also unsustainable. Let this budget reflect a genuine commitment to gender equality and deliver real impact. The future we envision depends on it.

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