

ILO-IFC programme helps brighten garment sector's image

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Readymade garment factories enlisted under the Better Work Bangladesh (BWB) programme undergo fewer social audits compared to non-BWB units, resulting in significant savings in both time and costs.

Babylon Group, which operates four garment factories, both knit and woven, previously faced an average of a dozen social audits per factory annually.

However, after enrolling in the BWB programme, that number has dropped to seven or eight, said Rubaet Bin Aziz, group general manager for HR, admin and compliance at Babylon Garments Ltd.

This reduction in audits saves about Tk 10 million annually, along with considerable time, he said while speaking to reporters during a media visit to Babylon Garments Ltd in Mirpur yesterday.

Three of Babylon Group's factories have been part of the Better Work programme for the past seven years.

The media visit, organised by BWB, aimed to showcase how effective social

dialogue and grievance mechanisms can foster harmonious worker-employer relations, contributing to stable industrial relations that benefit both the economy and worker well-being.

Better Work is a flagship programme of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC).

It collaborates with governments, employers, workers, and global brands to improve working conditions and competitiveness in the garment industry. The programme was launched in Bangladesh in 2015.

Currently, around 490 factories are enrolled, impacting approximately 1.3 million workers – 51 percent of whom are women, said Syed Fazle Niaz, team leader of the BWB programme.

Nasrin Akter, a senior operator and president of the Babylon Garments Workers Union, said workers bring their demands to the union, which then negotiates with management.

The factory management announced

a 10-day Eid holiday for Eid-ul-Azha on May 12 in line with workers' demands – two weeks before the apparel apex body, the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, advised its members to announce a maximum of 10 days for Eid holidays, she said.

Better Work Bangladesh is a flagship programme of the International Labour Organization and the International Finance Corporation

Rubaet also said they were committed to a fair workplace, supported by a strong governance system that promotes open workplace dialogue.

This system empowers their registered trade union, fostering growth and ownership, he said.

"Over time, it has become a vital bridge between our associates (workers) and leadership (management). When

associates see their ideas – often shared through the trade union – valued and turned into positive change, it builds a real sense of collective ownership.

"Our trade union's impact, especially in tough situations, reflects this empowerment and our belief: when a team takes ownership of its problems, the problem gets solved."

Through BWB's capacity development programmes, their trade union leaders have developed stronger critical thinking, positive debating, and active listening skills, he added.

This has significantly boosted their ability to clearly represent workers' voices, thereby improving communication across all levels at their company.

The BWB programme team leader Niaz said trade unions serve as a vital communication channel through which workers can express their grievances and concerns to employers in a democratic manner.

Thus, trade unions contribute to business sustainability, he added.

Stocks rebound after six-day slump

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Indices of the Dhaka Stock Exchange gained yesterday, recovering from six consecutive days of losses.

The DSEX, the benchmark index of the premier bourse, went up 22.51 points, or 0.48 percent, to close at 4,637.92.

The Shariah-compliant DSES index gained 0.31 percent to end at 1,011.35, while the DS30, which tracks blue-chip stocks, inched up 1.24 percent to 1,729.63. Turnover, a key indicator of market activity, declined 6 percent to Tk 247.42 crore compared to the previous session.

A total of 102,204 trades were executed during the session, with block transactions accounting for Tk 18.69 crore across 22 scrips. Market breadth was positive, with 222 issues advancing, 99 declining, and 77 remaining unchanged.

Among A category shares, 130 advanced, 53 declined, and 35 remained unchanged. In the B category, 47 scrips gained while 18 declined. The N category saw no trading activity.

Other segments mirrored the upward trend, with more advances than declines observed in mutual funds and corporate bonds.

Government securities, however, posted a contrasting performance, with one issue advancing and two declining.

Cancer drugs, insulin to get cheaper

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certain general medicines, more affordable for patients, but also help expand the domestic pharmaceutical market," said Ahmed.

He added that maintaining international quality standards involves significant investment in infrastructure and compliance.

"We hope the government continues to strike a balance between affordability for patients and sustainability for local manufacturers," Ahmed commented.

The government, he said, also has a responsibility to ensure that the price of essential medicines remains within reach for the average patient.

According to finance ministry sources, the Directorate General of Drug Administration (DGDA) recommended the inclusion of 23 new raw materials used in cancer treatment.

These include Fostamatinib, Deucravacitinib, Peficitinib hydrobromide and Rilzabrutinib, among others.

These ingredients are critical in the production of modern cancer drugs, and easing their import is expected to enhance the quality and availability of cancer care across the country.

Muhammad Zahangir Alam, chief financial officer of Square Pharmaceuticals Ltd, said the latest proposal reflects a growing recognition of the pharmaceutical industry's importance in both public health and economic development.

"The inclusion is a sign that the government is aware of the sector's strategic importance, not just as a health safeguard but also as a driver of export growth," he told The Daily Star.

Alam added that some life-saving drugs, including cancer and respiratory medicines, still face high input duties, which affect affordability.

"Such a move would not only ease the cost burden on manufacturers but also make vital medicines more accessible to the public," he said.

Monjurul Alam, CEO of Beacon Medicare Limited, called the initiative a vital step forward in improving cancer care and easing the burden on

patients.

"Cancer treatment is both long-term and extremely expensive. The government should pay closer attention to biologic raw materials, which are now at the core of cancer therapies," he said.

"Present treatments rely heavily on biological drugs, including monoclonal antibodies and immunotherapies," he added. "These are cutting edge but costly medicines. If the government extends tax exemptions to these drugs, it will greatly help patients access the latest treatments."

Muhammad Halimuzzaman, treasurer of the Bangladesh Association of Pharmaceutical Industries, also welcomed the government's decision to include cancer drugs, general medicines, and chronic care treatments in the updated essential drug list.

"These additions will significantly reduce treatment costs as many of these drugs are now exempt from high taxes," he said.

"Patients with long term conditions like cancer, kidney, and vascular diseases, who require regular medication, will benefit the most," said Halimuzzaman.

"As new molecules enter the list, accessibility expands, benefiting both patients and companies," he added, describing the initiative as a clear step in the public interest.

Bank Asia

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and acquisitions of banks, the acquiring bank must retain all employees of the acquired organisation for a minimum period of three years.

Bank Asia is poised to comply with that stipulation, according to the bank's officials.

The sale process began in April last year, the officials added. They also said legal formalities for the actual transfer of assets and liabilities from one bank to the other are pending, while core banking system migration must also be aligned.

The audit and valuation of Bank Alfalah's Bangladesh operations are being conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) Bangladesh, a UK-based multinational tax, audit, and consulting firm.

Bank Asia began its journey

Duty-free threshold

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For accounts with deposits exceeding Tk 5 lakh but not more than Tk 10 lakh, an excise duty of Tk 500 is charged annually.

If it ranges from Tk 10 lakh to Tk 50 lakh, the duty increases to Tk 3,000. For deposits from Tk 50 lakh to Tk 1 crore, the duty is Tk 5,000.

For deposits over Tk 1 crore but below Tk 2 crore, the excise duty stands at Tk 10,000. This rises to Tk 20,000 for accounts holding between Tk 2 crore and Tk 5 crore.

For deposits exceeding Tk 5 crore, the highest slab applies, with an annual excise duty of Tk 50,000.

Surcharge provisions for assets may be revised.

Additionally, the government plans to revise the existing surcharge provisions for assets by linking them to actual tax liabilities rather than inflated or advance assessed amounts to ensure tax justice and transparency.

Currently, any taxpayer with assets exceeding Tk 4 crore is required to pay a surcharge ranging from 10 percent to 35 percent, which is levied on top of basic income tax.

However, the present structure has drawn criticism for penalising individuals based on artificially inflated tax bases – particularly due to the advance income tax (AIT) mechanism at the import stage.

At present, importers are subject to AIT during the clearance of goods. If the deducted AIT ultimately exceeds the taxpayer's actual liability calculated at the year's end, the surcharge is imposed on the higher, pre-adjusted figure.

The proposed amendment primarily targets high-income taxpayers.

in 1999 and is a pioneer in agent banking services in Bangladesh.

If the acquisition of Bank Alfalah's Bangladesh operations is completed, it will be the third such acquisition by Bank Asia during its 26 years in operation.

In 2001, the private commercial bank acquired the operations of the Canada-based Bank of Nova Scotia in Dhaka – the first of its kind in the banking history of Bangladesh, according to Bank Asia's website.

It later took over the Bangladesh operations of Muslim Commercial Bank Ltd, a renowned Pakistani bank.

Bank Alfalah is incorporated in Pakistan, with its main capital base coming from Abu Dhabi Investment Funds. Over 51 percent of its equity is held by the Abu Dhabi Royal Family.

Bank Alfalah started operations in Bangladesh in 2005. It currently has seven branches in the country.

69% overwhelmed

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The ground reality: Meals skipped amid soaring costs

The effects of declines in real incomes were also apparent during the survey, which found that 60 percent of respondents were skipping breakfast to save money and time in the morning.

About 17 percent of respondents reported skipping lunch, often because of limited financial resources to purchase nutritious meals during the day.

Similarly, 17 percent skipped afternoon snacks, which are seen as less essential, especially when incomes are stretched thin.

At a tea stall in Kazir Dewri in the port city of Chattogram, rickshaw puller Anwar Hossain explained how he navigates rising costs. A basic meal at a restaurant now costs at least Tk 50 to Tk 60.

"If I want fish or chicken, it's Tk 120 to Tk 150. So, I skip one meal and have tea with bread or biscuits instead," he told The Daily Star, dunking a piece of bread into a steaming cup.

"I used to buy a bun for Tk 5 just a few years ago. Now it's Tk 10 to Tk 12 and it's smaller, too. Before, one bun was enough to fill me up. Now, even two leave me hungry," he added.

He points out that tea, too, has become pricier. What once cost Tk 5 to Tk 7 now sells for Tk 10 to Tk 15.

Rahmat Mia, a security guard at a house in the capital's Mirpur, said he could cover breakfast with just Tk 10 to Tk 12 two to three years ago.

But now that daily expense has risen to more than Tk 20. And it's not enough to satiate his hunger, he lamented.

Kayes Ali, a rickshaw puller in Rangpur district, echoed Anwar and Rahmat's sentiments, reflecting the struggles faced by many low-income people across the country.

Increase subsidies and assistance, expert says

According to the survey, about 200 respondents advocated an increase in subsidies and assistance in the upcoming budget to alleviate the burden on struggling households.

This would ease the financial burden on low-income groups, ensuring that basic nutrition remains accessible.

There was also a call for greater taxation on the wealthy, with 193 respondents supporting measures to ensure a fairer distribution of resources.

KM Emrul Hasan, head of research at the Youth Policy Network, told The Daily Star this survey was conducted to gauge what low-income people expect from the upcoming budget.

He added that VAT on essential items consumed by low-income groups should be reduced in some cases and completely withdrawn in others.

He further said the focus should shift from imposing VAT on essential items to targeting luxury goods, promoting a more equitable and fair economic system for all.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Office of The Divisional Forest Officer
Coastal Forest Division, Patuakhali

<https://forest.patuakhali.gov.bd>

Invitation for Tender

Date: 29/05/2025

Memo. No. 22.01.7800.535.01.001.2025.1450

1	Ministry/Division	Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
2	Agency	Bangladesh Forest Department
3	Procuring Entity Name	Divisional Forest Officer, Coastal Forest Division, Patuakhali
4	Procuring Entity Code	1450203124537
5	Procuring Entity District	Patuakhali
6	Invitation for	Supply of Manpower through Outsourcing
7	Invitation Ref Number	31/Revenue (Outsourcing) of 2024-2025
8	Date	29/05/2025
KEY INFORMATION		
9	Procurement Method	Quality and Cost Based Selection (QCBS): National Competitive Tender (NCT)
FUNDING INFORMATION		
10	Budget and Source of Funds	GoB
PARTICULAR INFORMATION		
11	Tender Package No	Single
12	Tender Package Name	Supply of Manpower through Outsourcing
13	Tender Publication Date	29/05/2025
14	Tender Last Selling Date	22/06/2025 up to 5:00 PM
15	Tender Dropping & Closing Date and Time	23/06/2025, 9:00 AM - 1:00 PM
16	Tender Opening Date and Time	23/06/2025, 3:00 PM
17	Name & Address of the office (s)	Sadar Range Office, Patuakhali, Coastal Forest Division, Patuakhali
NO CONDITIONS APPLY FOR SALE, PURCHASE OR DISTRIBUTION OF TENDER DOCUMENTS		
- Receiving Tender Document		
- Opening Tender Document		
INFORMATION FOR TENDERER		
18	Eligibility of Tenderer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tenderers will be the firms having minimum 03 (three) years general experience of manpower supply through outsourcing Tender