

Women's share in agent banking remains far below requirement

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The proportion of female agents in Bangladesh's agent banking sector stood at just 9.15 percent as of March this year—well below the Bangladesh Bank's (BB) mandate that women should comprise 50 percent of total agents.

The data were revealed in the central bank's latest Agent Banking report, which notes that the number of female agents increased by 3.4 percent year-on-year, reaching 1,450 by the end of March.

The report states that the growth occurred across both rural and urban areas. However, women still make up less than one-tenth of the total 15,838 agents operating through over 21,000 outlets.

Currently, agent banking services are operated by 31 banks and serve an average of 8,162 people per outlet, the report further states.

The BB data also show that female deposit and loan accounts increased significantly.

During the year, female deposit accounts rose by 11.5 percent, while loan accounts decreased by 0.3 percent.

"This shows a positive trend toward greater financial inclusion for females, especially in

rural areas, while urban areas are quickly catching up. Overall, the data reflect growing financial opportunities for females in both urban and rural areas, with strong progress in rural participation," states the BB report.

According to the BB, there are 11,362 bank branches across the country, with each branch serving an average of 15,102 people from the total population. Of them, just over 46 percent are located in rural areas and nearly 54 percent are in urban areas

Agent banking plays a key role in facilitating financial inclusion by reaching underserved and unbanked people, especially in rural areas, providing an efficient and cost-effective alternative to traditional branch banking.

According to the BB, there are 11,362 bank branches across the country, with each branch serving an average of 15,102 people from the total population. Of them, just over 46 percent are located in rural areas and nearly 54 percent are in urban areas.

On the other hand, 86 percent of the total outlets are located in rural areas, while 14 percent are in urban areas.

The Agent Banking report states that approximately 15 percent of the total number of deposit accounts, at 16.57 lakh in the banking sector, were opened through agent banking outlets, contributing 2.22 percent to the sector's total deposit balances of Tk 19.23 lakh crore at the end of March.

Accordingly, 1.71 percent and 0.61 percent of total bank loan accounts and outstanding loans were respectively provided through agent banking.

As per the report, during the January-March quarter, remittances received from Bangladeshi nationals working abroad amounted to Tk 97,266 crore. Of that, Tk 7,961 crore was received through agent banking.

That indicates 8.19 percent of the total inward remittances during that period were received through agent banking.

The amount of remittances received via agent banking in rural areas was 10.48 times higher than in urban areas. Meanwhile, 4.74 percent of remittances during the quarter were received through mobile financial services.

Govt plans 'fibre optic bank'

FROM PAGE B1

Joint network maintenance under BTCL's experienced operations could reduce operating expenses by up to 30 percent.

Bandwidth cost from private NTTN operators is likely to fall from Tk 18,000 per Gbps to as low as Tk 5,000—a potential 70 percent reduction.

Besides, the letter states that only 25 percent of mobile towers are currently fibre-connected.

With an integrated backbone, this can reach 100 percent, allowing a low-cost, nationwide 5G rollout.

The overlapping paths of BTCL, PGCB, and Railway fibre also provide high redundancy, essential during natural disasters.

The initiative could enable 1 Gbps or higher internet speeds in every union by integrating existing Points of Presence (POPs) from BTCL (1,200 unions), BCC (2,600 unions), PGCB, and Railway.

The proposed national fibre bank would provide reliable, scalable access to telco-grade fibre—essential for services like IoT, telemedicine,

distance education, and smart city development.

As per Taiyeb's letter, the proposed fibre bank will include a GIS-based real-time inventory system, identifying the location, core count, and status of each fibre line.

This will ensure transparency in leasing and allow selective, need-based access—for instance, during emergency government communications.

The letter also proposes an inter-ministerial meeting, involving Bangladesh Railway, PGCB, BTCL, BCC, and other stakeholders, to finalise the integration strategy and operational guidelines.

Companies that will lease fibre from the upcoming national fibre bank will be able to generate revenue from it. The earnings will be distributed among the government-owned companies, the telecom regulator, and the maintenance partners, Taiyeb said.

"For example, if Summit Communications and Fiber@Home are involved in maintenance, they will also receive share of the revenue," he added.

he added.

LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELD

In the letter, Taiyeb criticises the previous Awami League-led government for restricting state fibre owners from servicing telecom demand beyond their grid or track.

Such policies reportedly benefited certain politically connected private firms at the cost of public efficiency, the letter states.

The proposed fibre bank aims to level the playing field and put state-owned fibre assets to commercial and social use, within a regulatory framework that ensures transparency, competition, and affordability.

Fahim Mashroor, former president of the Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS), welcomed the move, saying it would benefit users by enabling faster and more affordable internet access.

"Particularly, if this initiative can ensure low-cost internet in remote areas, it will not only benefit consumers but also significantly boost Bangladesh's digital economy," he added.

European Union and the US," they added.

"Market diversification is also needed to sustain export growth," they said.

BB to seek

FROM PAGE B1

However, Washington has now shown renewed interest in cooperating with Bangladesh, the governor added.

BB ASSURES FULL RETURN OF DEPOSITORS' FUNDS

Amid sweeping reforms in the banking sector and talks about the merger of several troubled lenders, Mansur said the central bank is prioritising the protection of small depositors.

"Our goal is to ensure that every single taka is recovered and returned to them," he said. "It might take some time. Those with larger deposits may need to wait a bit longer."

He urged people not to resort to protests. "We are exploring how to merge these banks, inject capital, and protect your interests. Whatever we are doing, we are doing it for the sake of the depositors."

Bangladesh retains 2nd spot

FROM PAGE B1

US secured the ninth position, according to WTO data.

Anwar-Ul-Alam Chowdhury, former president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), said export growth had been good so far.

But growth may turn unsustainable for Bangladesh due to a recent hike in US tariffs from around 16 percent to 35 percent, he said.

"The country's business environment also needs significant improvements to attract new investment and enable existing factories to continue production for higher export earnings," he added.

The supply of energy, such as gas and electricity, needs to be improved so that factories can run at full capacity, which in turn boosts efficiency and enhances competitiveness in the global value chain, Chowdhury said.

"The government should provide more incentives to the garment sector so that it can become more competitive globally," he said.

"Other countries, such as China, India, and Vietnam, have been performing well as their governments support their industries," he added.

Chowdhury also said Bangladesh should appoint strong lobbyists to influence US tariff policy.

Local exporters have been investing in garments made from man-made fibres (MMF) to obtain better prices from international clothing retailers and brands, they said.

"If Bangladesh can export more value-added, high-end garment items, it can obtain better prices alongside a bigger market share," they added.

They noted that the market shares of both Bangladesh and China have been shrinking gradually, while those of Vietnam and India have been increasing in recent years.

The Indian government provides various incentives for exports, while Vietnam has attracted substantial Chinese investment in its garment sector," exporters said.

"This has led to increases in their exports to prime markets such as the

European Union and the US," they added.

"Market diversification is also needed to sustain export growth," they said.

Don't punish us for the misconduct

FROM PAGE B1

"That decision should be left to companies based on their financial health," he said.

He also suggested cutting down IPO processing times, introducing share buy-back options, and easing the exit process for firms leaving the market.

Uzma Chowdhury, a director at Pran RFL Group, said companies have different funding needs, so the stock market should offer a variety of instruments to cater to entrepreneurs of all sizes.

Amisuzzaman Chowdhury, a special assistant to the chief adviser, said the interim government is prioritising the stock market and has taken several steps to develop it, though much remains to be done.

Chowdhury commented that Bangladesh suffers from policy

coordination issues. "The government is trying to address these, but since there is no blueprint for reform, progress is often made through trial and error," he said.

He added that reforms tend to face resistance because they affect vested interests. "Some people lose privileges during reforms, though the broader economy gains. The problem is the losers tend to be better organised, which is what we saw during efforts to reform the National Board of Revenue."

This resistance, the CA's special assistant said, was slowing the reform process.

Mominul Islam, chairman of the Dhaka Stock Exchange, said a government taskforce had already worked on IPO valuations and that, going forward, market participants would determine prices.

He added that efforts were underway to digitise the IPO process and reduce approval time to two months.

Mazeda Khatun, president of the Bangladesh Merchant Bankers Association, presented a paper at the event.

She said stock market listings not only improved productivity and employment but also enhanced transparency and corporate governance.

"These improvements contribute to higher tax revenues," she said, citing the examples of Robi Axiat, BSRM Steels, Walton and Shasha Denims, whose value-added tax (VAT) and tax payments rose from 48 percent to 356 percent after listing.

She urged authorities to modernise legal frameworks in line with international standards.

ACI develops new Boro rice varieties

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

In a first for the country, ACI Seed has developed a new variety of aromatic rice suitable for cultivation in the Boro season.

The seed-focused business unit of ACI PLC has also developed a short-duration, high-yielding Boro rice variety.

ACI received approval for the inbred varieties from the National Seed Board (NSB) under the agriculture ministry last month, the company said in a statement yesterday.

"This reflects our deep commitment to innovation, farmer profitability, and national food security," said FH Ansarey, president of ACI Agribusinesses Division.

ACI said the new aromatic rice variety, named ACI dhan2, is the first of its kind developed for cultivation in the Boro season. The new variety is expected to help farmers who are looking to capitalise on the rising demand for fragrant rice.

According to the company, ACI dhan2 has a yield potential of up to 7 tonnes per hectare, significantly surpassing that of its aromatic predecessor, BRRI dhan34.

ACI states that the growth duration of this variety is similar to BRRI dhan28 but has a yield advantage of 1.5 to 2 tonnes per hectare.

ACI said it plans to produce over 150 tonnes of ACI dhan2 and 200 tonnes of ACI dhan3 to sell to farmers in the upcoming Boro season.

ACI dhan2 will be targeted toward small grain aromatic rice markets such as Dinajpur, Rangpur, Naogaon, Jashore, Bogura, and similar regions, while ACI dhan3 will cater to broader Boro-growing areas across the country.

"This not only helps farmers reduce input costs but also promotes safer, more sustainable agricultural practices," said the company.

Ansarey said, "ACI dhan2 opens up high-value markets and export opportunities for farmers who were previously constrained to low-yielding varieties in this segment."

Meanwhile, the short-duration, high-yielding variety named ACI dhan3 contains a blast-resistant gene.

ACI dhan2 has a yield potential of up to 7 tonnes per hectare, significantly surpassing that of its aromatic predecessor, BRRI dhan34

China Inc bets Beijing will keep tight grip on yuan

REUTERS

Chinese businesses and investors are primed for the yuan to stay steady for now and eventually depreciate as US trade tensions drag on, and a string of measures and hints from monetary authorities suggest they may be on the money.

A growing pile of foreign exchange deposits at banks and a rise in currency swaps show Chinese corporates and households are wagering they can exchange their dollars for more yuan if they wait.

That conviction, in the face of the US dollar's broad-based slide against most other currencies, is driven for the most part by central bank's efforts to keep the currency steady and even encourage more investment offshore.

It also shows the People's Bank of China (PBOC) is in a bind. A sudden yuan move in either direction could trigger a wave of selling of billions of dollars by businesses and households, either to catch better yuan levels or to stave off losses.

China's yuan has strengthened 1.5 percent against the flagging dollar since April 2, when US President Donald Trump announced punishing trade tariffs on scores of

countries, leading to market ructions that have eroded confidence in US

economic policymaking and the dollar's haven appeal.

In the same period, currencies such as the Thai baht, South Korea's won and Taiwan dollar have risen between 6 percent and 14 percent.

The yuan has spent most of 2025 in a narrow range between 7.15 and 7.35 to the dollar, its weakest levels in 4-1/2 years in trade-weighted terms.

The export sector, comprising a fifth of economic growth, is grappling with higher US import tariffs of as much as 55 percent going by the latest trade framework agreed between the world's two biggest economies in early June.

China was initially singled out with tariffs exceeding 100 percent and has until August 12 to reach an agreement with the White House to keep Trump from reinstating additional import curbs imposed during tit-for-tat tariff exchanges in April and May.

"Considering the external risks from US trade policies, China needs to maintain a very competitive currency with respect to other markets outside the US," said Eugenia Victorino, head of Asia

strategy at SEB.

US stocks closed lower on Monday, with the Dow, S&P 500 and Nasdaq each shedding just under 1 percent.

The PBOC did not respond to a Reuters request for comments.

Since May, it has managed its daily yuan "guidance" settings to indicate it doesn't desire too much strength in the yuan.

It has also signalled willingness for mainland investors to shift some of their money from low-yielding onshore markets to stocks and bonds in Hong Kong, which some analysts suspect is to generate some selling pressure on the yuan.

Authorities approved a fresh \$3.08 billion quota for domestic institutions (QDII) to invest in overseas assets in June. On Tuesday, the PBOC said the southbound leg of the Bond Connect scheme, which enables institutions on the mainland to access Hong Kong's bond market, will be expanded to brokerages, insurers, mutual funds and wealth managers.

China's central bank also surveyed some financial institutions last week asking them about their views on recent US dollar weakness, sources told Reuters on Monday.

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার

অধিনায়কের কার্যালয়

রাষ্ট্রপিত এ্যাকশন ব্যাটালিয়ন-৭

পতেঙ্গা, চট্টগ্রাম

দরপত্র আহবান বিজ্ঞপ্তি