

Statistical system faces capacity challenges

Says Hossain Zillur Rahman, head of taskforce on strengthening BBS

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh's statistical system is facing significant capacity challenges, a heavy reliance on projects, and the risk of political influence, Hossain Zillur Rahman, head of the expert taskforce tasked with strengthening the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), said yesterday.

He made the remarks while speaking at a stakeholder consultation with journalists held at the BBS auditorium in Dhaka.

"Almost 50 percent of posts remain vacant in BBS. Many critical surveys face delays or remain unpublished simply because a 'chief guest' cannot attend the launch event," Rahman said, calling this an absurd bottleneck that undermines data transparency.

Rahman, also the executive chairman of the Power and Participation Research Centre, stressed that BBS must be empowered to independently decide when to release statistical reports without waiting for political schedules.

At the event, he disclosed that the taskforce led by him is working through a three-pronged process: "deep dive" institutional assessments, dialogues with stakeholders,

and intensive listening sessions with BBS staff and professional associations.

According to him, the taskforce identified several challenges.

First, there is a severe shortage of manpower. Nearly half of the posts in BBS remain vacant. "This is a crippling constraint, especially for field-level data collection and analysis," said Rahman.

Second, BBS has become overly dependent on donor-funded projects.

"While projects are useful, this dependency distorts priorities and makes our core statistical work uncertain. We strongly believe that core surveys should be funded from the national budget to ensure sustainability," he said.

Third, there's a significant gap in training facilities. BBS does not have its own training academy.

All training is project-based, Rahman noted, saying this is not a sustainable way to build long-term institutional capacity.

Fourth, there is a rising demand for more rough data at district and even ward levels.

"But our current survey designs often cannot provide this level of detail," he said, adding, "We need to address this gap if we want our statistics to serve real policy and business

needs." Fifth, there's always the risk of political influence.

"Statistics must remain independent and free from political pressure, especially when it comes to sensitive figures like GDP growth or inflation rates," Rahman stressed.

The taskforce is set to prepare specific recommendations by August, including institutional reforms, human resource restructuring, and legal changes to the Statistics Act 2013

"These are the challenges we are confronting. And our aim is not to produce theoretical reports, but practical, realistic recommendations that will truly strengthen the statistical system of Bangladesh," he noted.

He also informed that the taskforce is set to prepare specific recommendations by August, including institutional reforms, human resource restructuring, career progression paths, and legal changes to the Statistics Act 2013 to empower BBS as the

national statistical office.

"We are not producing a theoretical document. We want practical, actionable solutions based on ground realities," Rahman told journalists.

He also mentioned efforts to harmonise BBS data with that of other agencies, explore a single window data platform, and improve communication, including making BBS's website more user-friendly and richer in Bangla content.

Also speaking at the event, Fahmida Khatun, executive director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue and member of the taskforce, said, "Our ultimate goal is to ensure reliable, high-quality, and accessible statistics that meet the demands of Bangladesh's citizens and support informed policymaking."

Atanu Rabbani, professor of the Department of Economics at Dhaka University, called on journalists to share relevant reports or publications—particularly in Bangla—to help the taskforce anchor its recommendations in local realities.

Journalists present on the occasion made a number of suggestions, including releasing a real-time survey report on agriculture, GDP, inflation, etc.

Renata's Rajendrapur factory receives EU certification

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Renata PLC's Rajendrapur general facility has received the European Union Good Manufacturing Practice (EU GMP) certification following a comprehensive audit by European authorities.

The certification allows the company to export capsules and tablets to European countries from this facility, strengthening its position as a leading pharmaceutical manufacturer in South Asia, according to a disclosure on the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) website yesterday.

The Rajendrapur plant is equipped with production lines capable of manufacturing oral solid dosage forms, including capsules, tablets, and softgel capsules.

This capability enables Renata to cater to both domestic and international markets, underscoring the facility's advanced technical and operational standards.

The share price of Renata rose 0.9 percent to close at Tk 490.20 on the DSE yesterday.

NBR misses revenue target

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The new goal is overly ambitious, considering that it is 35 percent higher than what was actually collected last fiscal year.

It is also 4 percent higher than the previous target. The annual growth in tax collection has been hovering at around 11 percent on average for the past five years.

"The target set in the budget is not realistically achievable with the kind of tax measures currently being proposed," said Towfiqul Islam Khan, a senior research fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD).

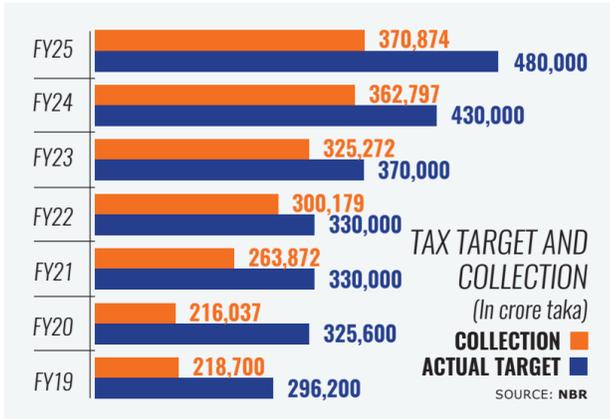
According to him, the only viable way to approach the target is by seriously curbing tax evasion.

In April this year, the CPD unveiled a study estimating that Bangladesh lost around Tk 226,236 crore in tax revenue in FY23 due to evasion and avoidance. Of this, nearly 50 percent was attributed to corporate tax evasion.

Khan said the current fiscal framework mirrors the old pattern from the Awami League era, which was topped last year following a mass uprising.

"It's not realistic either on the income side or on the expenditure side. The revenue mobilisation targets and the spending plans simply don't align," he said.

He urged the government—more specifically, the Ministry of Finance—to acknowledge this mismatch and come up with a revised budget before the end of the fiscal year.



"The expenditure plan, in particular, needs to be adjusted. If not, we end up with arbitrary prioritisation, which leads to inefficient use of resources and weakens value-for-money outcomes," Khan explained.

He further noted that setting an overly ambitious revenue target while drafting a mismatched expenditure plan creates systemic imbalances.

"Towards the end of the year, lower Annual Development Programme (ADP) spending might temporarily save the situation, but that's not sustainable. The system itself is flawed. You can't continue like this indefinitely," he warned.

For instance, in the first 11 months of last fiscal year, the government managed to spend 49 percent of the total allocation, according to data released by the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division of the planning ministry.

Khan also emphasised the need for enhancing automation and comprehensive reforms in revenue administration, which he believes are essential for improving tax collection efficiency.

The NBR has also failed to meet the condition of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), as the multilateral lender set a target for collecting nearly Tk 4.55 lakh crore by the end of FY25.

Govt plans to include private sector in US tariff talks

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However, the names of the delegation members have not yet been made public.

Meanwhile, economists and exporters are warning of serious repercussions for Bangladesh's economy due to the Trump administration's additional 35 percent reciprocal tariff on Bangladeshi goods.

They predict that overall US apparel imports could fall from nearly \$80 billion last year to between \$65 billion and \$70 billion this year, as higher tariffs discourage sourcing from affected countries.

This could spell trouble for Bangladesh, especially its garment exports to the US, which may take a hit as American retailers and brands scale back their imports due to the steeper costs.

In contrast, the country's market competitors like Vietnam, India, and Indonesia have been hit with much lower rates, which may affect Bangladesh's garment share in the American market.

Bangladesh currently holds a

9.2 percent share of the US apparel market, making it the third-largest supplier after China and Vietnam. Last year, the country exported \$8.2 billion worth of garments to the US.

Fazlee Shamim Ehsan, executive president of BKMEA, said the commerce ministry had not yet communicated with them about including private sector representatives in the talks

Shovon Islam, managing director of Sparrow Group, which exports \$350 million worth of garments a year—\$150 million of which goes to the US—said his American buyers are already pressing him to cut prices, even though the final tariff rate is yet to be confirmed.

He said that he had to offer much lower prices to secure an order of one million shirts, as the buyer was considering shifting it to India, where

tariffs are lower.

"Multinational clothing brands are also negotiating prices for goods meant for other markets like India and Japan, even though Bangladesh enjoys duty-free access there," Islam said.

"They think production in India is more cost-effective than in Bangladesh because of the lower tariff imposed on India by the Trump administration," he added. "I am deeply disappointed with the lack of progress demonstrated by the Bangladesh government."

"As a stakeholder and one of the largest exporters to the US market, I feel utterly helpless and frustrated," Islam commented.

Fazlee Shamim Ehsan, executive president of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA), said the commerce ministry had not yet communicated with them about including private sector representatives in the talks.

"Maybe the ministry will contact us later," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Zila Parishad, Pirojpur www.zp.pirojpur.gov.bd

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e-Tender Notice-01/2024-25 (OTM)

Tender is invited in the National e-Gp System Portal (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) for the procurement of following works, details are given below.

Table with 5 columns: Sl No, Package No., Tender ID No, Tender Last selling (Date & Time), Tender Closing & Opening (Date & Time). Lists various tender packages for procurement.

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.

(Sheikh Nurul Alam) Chief Executive officer (Acting) Zila Parishad, Pirojpur. Telifon no +8802478890457 (Office) Email : zppirojpur@lged.gov.bd

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